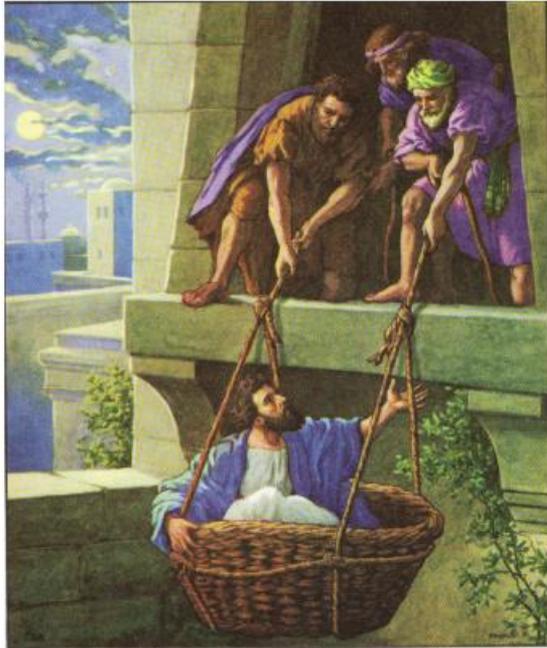


Paul's Apostleship and Epistles



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The Book of **"The Acts of the Apostles"** is rather the book of the acts of St. Peter and St. Paul, the Apostle of the circumcision, and the Apostle of the Gentiles. In the events recorded in that part of it which gives us St. Peter's ministry (that is, Acts 1-12), I judge that we can discern such an order and meaning as prepares us for the Lord's further purposes among the Gentiles by the subsequent ministry of Paul. I would thus briefly notice and interpret these events.

Acts 1 — While waiting, according to the commandment, for the promised power from on high, the disciples, under the leading of St. Peter (constituted chief in the Jewish ministry, Luke 22: 32; John 21: 16), commit it to the Lord to fill up the vacant bishopric of Judas. This was needful, as I shall observe more particularly by-and-by, that the Jewish order of twelve Apostles might stand full and complete; and that this was done with the full intelligence of the mind of God, appears further from this — that the Lord seems at once to undertake what His servants thus commit to Him, for He honours the lot (the Jewish form of discovering the Divine will in such matters, 1 Chr. 24: 5; Num. 26: 55; Joshua 19: 10), and Matthias is numbered with the eleven Apostles; and the Holy Ghost in the next chapter seems to adopt Matthias in his new office, by falling upon him equally with the rest without any rebuke.

Acts 2 - 7 — The number being thus filled up, the Holy Ghost is given according to promise; and Peter again takes the lead, and preaches the risen Jesus to the Jews. The enmity of the Jews, however, sets in, and proceeds through these chapters, increasing gradually, just as it had done before against the Lord. The Apostles, however, like their Lord, go on with their testimony undismayed; great grace is upon all — holy discipline keeps them pure — and with great power the Apostles give testimony to the resurrection. But as the enmity had worked against the Lord till they crucified Him, so now does it work against the Apostles, till they run upon Stephen and stone him. And as the heavens had received the crucified One, so do the heavens open to His fellow-sufferer and witness. And in Him the Church receives a living pledge that the heavenly glory was for her as well as for her Lord, for the world had now rejected both.

Acts 8 — This being so, Jerusalem could no longer receive the sanction of God, for it had fully declared its sin, and for a season must be cast out of His sight. The disciples are therefore now scattered from Jerusalem, and the Jewish order is disturbed: this chapter giving us the acts of one who had not been sent forth, either as from Jerusalem, or by the Apostles at all. Philip goes forth — and at first preaches Christ in Samaria, and is then sent down by the Spirit "to Gaza, which is desert," to bring into the fold a lost sheep that was still straying there, but known to God before the foundation of the world. But immediately afterwards, he is borne by the Spirit to Azotus (the place next to the desert where men and women could be found), that he might proclaim there, and in all other places, the grace

which says, "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life." Thus by his mission to Gaza, and then by his rapture to Azotus, Philip's ministry is made to signify the *sovereignty* and the *universality* of that grace which the Lord was to publish.

Acts 9 — The channels for the life and power that is from the Son of God to flow in among the Gentiles were now fully opened; for the *Jews*, and the *Samaritans*, and the *Proselytes*, had been called. All was ready for the gathering of the firstfruits of the Gentiles. But before this was done, and present judgment upon Israel thus publicly sealed, the Lord gives, in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, a sign of the future conversion of Israel (see 1 Tim. 1: 16). A sample, no doubt it is, of that long-suffering that saves every sinner. But Israel is to be made the great final witness of that longsuffering, and is principally pointed at by this sign; and therefore all that accompanies this great event is a foreshowing of the things that are hereafter to mark and accompany the repentance of Israel. Saul's looking on Him Whom he had pierced — his being shut up three days without sight, and neither eating nor drinking — the removal of this judgment, and his baptism, all shows us the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem looking on Him Whom they pierced and mourning, every family apart, and their wives apart, and then proving the virtues of the cleansing fountain opened for their sin and for their uncleanness. Jerusalem will then be the signal witness of sovereign grace, as Saul now is (Zech. 12, 13) And in further proof of this mystical character of Saul's conversion, we may observe that he tells us himself, that he obtained mercy *because he did it ignorantly in unbelief*; and this is the very ground of final mercy to Israel; as the Lord prayed for them, "Father, forgive them; *for they know not what they do.*" (See also Acts 3: 17)

Acts 10, 11 — A pledge of Israel's future conversion being thus left them, proclamation of present judgment upon them is made by the call from among the Gentiles of a people for God. This is done by the ministry of the Apostle of the circumcision; and most fitly so. For he had received the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and was also the representative of Jerusalem, who is (however faithless, and as such divorced for a while) "the mother of us all.", But Peter's title to this, as representing Jerusalem, being thus allowed, we find a Church of Gentiles gathered at Antioch by other hands, and Barnabas and Saul, rather than Peter, called to the help and comfort of it.

Acts 12 — And now the Lord had only publicly to dismiss Jerusalem for a season. But as He had before pledged Israel's future *conversion*, so does He, as I judge, now pledge to them their future *restoration*. To me, I confess, this chapter has great beauty and meaning, presenting both the sorrows and the deliverance of the remnant in the latter day, and the full ruinous overthrow of their enemies. James is slain with the sword, as hereafter at Jerusalem the complaint will be this, "their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem" (Ps. 79: 2, 3). Peter also,

the hope of the circumcision, is cast into prison, the enemy thus all but prevailing against the Israel of God.

Pledges of Israel's Restoration

But he was to go no further, for Peter is to appear to be the Lord's prisoner, rather than Herod's. He sleeps between his keepers. He lies there "a prisoner of hope." The enemy is strong and mighty, and the remnant have no relief but in God. But that is enough. They make prayer without ceasing for him, till at length this prisoner of the Lord is sent forth out of the pit, as Israel will be in the latter day (Zech. 9, 11, 12). At first he was like one that dreamt, thinking that he saw a vision; and so were his company, saying, "It is his angel." But so will Israel be hereafter. They will sing, "when the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream." But in the sudden joy of their heart, they will have to add, "then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing as Peter, coming to himself, now says, "Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews."

All this is to me sweetly and strikingly significant. But the sign does not end here. In royal apparel, Herod sits upon his throne, having thought it well to be highly displeased, as though vengeance belonged to him. He makes an oration to the people, and they give a shout for him, saying, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man." Thus he takes to himself the glory which was God's, and immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, "and he was eaten with worms, and gave up the ghost." So will the Lawless One magnify himself above all, and sit upon the mount of the congregation on the sides of the north, saying, "I will be like the Most High." He will do "according to his will"; but he shall come to his end, and none shall help him. "So let all Thine enemies perish, O Lord, but let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might."

Thus is final mercy pledged to Israel. Under these signs of their *Conversion* and *Restoration*, and of the overthrow of their enemies, they are now left prisoners of hope. The Lord Himself gives them a sign, and then hides His face from them; goes His way for awhile, and leaves His sanctuary. All this prepares us for a ministry beyond the bounds of Israel; and accordingly, in the opening of the next chapter, we find the word sent forth to the Gentiles, Jerusalem as the source of grace and ministry forgotten, and the name of Jew and Gentile left without distinction.

Such I judge to be the course and meaning of the events that occurred, during the ministry of the circumcision, under the hand of St. Peter, as we have them recorded in these chapters.* What was the nature of the ministry itself? What were the hopes that it spoke of to Israel? and what was the call that it made upon Israel? We shall find, in answer to these inquiries, *that the Apostles spoke of the*

proper national hopes of Israel, calling on them to repent in order that they might attain them, and be blest in the earth. They declare Israel's sin in crucifying the Prince of Life; God's acceptance of this crucified One, and, upon repentance, the remission of Israel's sins, and the fulfilling of Israel's hopes.

*In token of this, our Apostle's Jewish name, "Saul," is made to take the Gentile form, "Paul." This was of the Holy Ghost, Who would have it further known even by this, small as it may appear, that the distinction of Jew and Gentile was to be lost during that dispensation, the testimony to which was now going forth. just as before at Antioch (see Acts 1: 26). When the Church became Gentile, or mixed, having been drawn out from its strict Jewish character, the disciples for the first time were called "Christians"; the Holy Ghost by this making it known, that a body was now preparing for Christ, which was to be anointed in, with, and through Him.

A Testimony to Israel

Thus, in Peter's sermon in the second chapter, his testimony to Israel was this — that the resurrection secured the promises made to David's throne; that the ascension was the source of the given Spirit; that Jesus was to abide in the ascended place till His enemies were made His footstool; and upon all this he calls on Israel to repent. But he says nothing about the Church ascending after her Head, and her consequent heavenly glory. So in the third chapter (after he and John had recognized God's house at Jerusalem), in his preaching, he calls on Israel to repent in order that "the times of refreshing might come from the presence of the Lord," when Jesus should return to them, and all things promised by Moses and the prophets be accomplished. But all this in like manner was a testimony to the hopes of Israel and the earth, and not a testimony to the heavenly glory. It was a publication of the acts and promises of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to the children of the prophets and the children of the covenant. And so in the fifth chapter we have this — "Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins," words very strongly marking the value which the Spirit in St. Peter gave to the resurrection of the Lord, applying it merely to Israel as God's nation.

And as the proper fruit of this preaching and of these hopes, we find the conduct and practice of the saints to have been this — they present beautiful order and grace in the way of settling their earthly possession — they get favour with all the people, as Jesus had in His infancy at Nazareth — they continue daily in the temple, as though they knew not how soon the Lord might return to it — and they heal all disease among the people, as the Lord had done when He walked through the cities and villages of Judea. But beyond all this, perfect as it was in its season, there was something still. The Church had still to take with Jesus her earth-rejected and earth-rejecting character. Citizenship in heaven, death as to the earth, and life

hid with Christ in God; a looking forth towards the things within the veil after the glorious forerunner, were great and new things still to be brought out of the treasury. Neither Peter's testimony, nor the Church's conduct, were such as exhibited them. The glory within the veil first looks through, when Stephen's face shines as the face of an angel. And this was beautiful in its season also; for Stephen was soon to be made the first witness of the heavenly calling. Martyrdom was the needed ground of the full manifestation of this calling. The Apostles might have suffered shame, and stripes, and imprisonment, but there was still space for repentance to Israel, as there had been during the Lord's ministry (though He in like manner suffered shame and rejection), till His last visit to Jerusalem. The cross, however, had closed the earth upon the Lord: and so did the martyrdom of Stephen close it now upon the Church; and awful separation for a while was made between all who are the Lord's and this present evil world.

Thus till this death of a saint after the resurrection, the time had not come for the bringing out of this thing (the heavenly calling of the Church) from the treasury of the Divine counsels. Types, and the other intimations of it had been from the beginning. Our Lord had given the vision of it on the holy mount, but it was dimness in the eyes even of the Apostles. He hinted at "the heavenly things" which the Son of Man alone could speak of (John 3: 12), but they were not perceived. "The little while" of His abiding with the Father, was as strange to the disciples as to the Jews. His ministry of these things was to them proverbs (John 16: 25). And so even the ascension of the Lord was not of itself adequate ground for the manifesting of that glory. For it was needed to the Lord's forming the Jewish Church for godly citizenship on the earth, the Holy Ghost being received through the ascension, "for the rebellious," that is, for Israel, "that the Lord God might dwell among them" — dwell among them *here*. But on the martyrdom of a believer in the Lord thus risen and ascended, the time had fully come for the manifesting of the heavenly calling, for the showing out of this mystery, that Christ was to have a body which was to share with Him in the glory on high into which He had Himself ascended, whose citizenship was not to be in Jerusalem, but in heaven.

"In the regeneration," as the Lord speaks, that is, in the coming kingdom of the Son of Man, there will be again a people that will find their proper place on earth, — the Israel of God. And then the twelve Apostles will be manifested in connection with the twelve tribes, and the saints with the world (see Matt. 19: 28; 1 Cor. 6: 2, 3). All this will be the glory and joy of that happy time, and most beautiful and perfect in its season. The Son of Man seated on His throne of glory — the Apostles judging the twelve tribes — and the saints, the world. The servants will then share in the kingdom of their Lord, having authority with Him and under Him over the cities of His dominion. But this time is now delayed, for the earth has refused it.

Israel has cast the heir of the vineyard out, and killed them that were sent to them (1 Thess. 2: 16). Another testimony was now to go forth, a testimony to the loss of Israel's and the earth's hopes for the present, and to the call of an elect people out of earth into heaven. And Saul the persecutor, that is, Paul the Apostle, was made the special bearer of it.

The Conversion of Paul

And how rich was the grace displayed by the Lord in choosing Saul to be the vessel of this heavenly treasure! At this very time he was in full enmity against God and His Anointed. At his feet the witnesses whose hands had been first upon Stephen, laid down their clothes. But this is the man that is to be made God's chosen vessel and such is the way of the Lord in abounding mercy. Before this, man's fullest enmity had been met by God's fullest love; for the cross was at the same moment the witness of both, as the person of Saul is now. "The soldier's spear," as one has observed, "drew forth the blood and water — sin has drawn forth grace." And now, as we may say, Saul's journey to Damascus was the spear making its way a second time into the side of Christ; for he was now going with commission and slaughter against the flock of God. But it was on this journey that the light from heaven arrested him. The blood of Jesus thus again met the soldier's cruel spear, and Saul is a pattern of all longsuffering.

The sovereign grace that saves the Church was thus displayed in Saul. But the heavenly glory that is reserved for the Church, was also displayed to him, for he sees Jesus in it. And by these things his future ministry is formed.

New Ministries Called Forth

And here I may observe in connection with this, that at the times of calling out new ministries, there have commonly been characteristic exhibitions of Christ. Thus, when Moses was called forth at Horeb, he saw a burning, but yet unconsumed bush, out of the midst of which Jehovah spake to him. And the ministry which he then received was according to this vision, to go and deliver Israel from the affliction of Egypt, in the midst of which God had been with them, preserving them in spite of it all. When he and the people afterwards stood under Sinai, the mountain was altogether in a smoke, so that even Moses himself exceedingly feared and quaked. But all this was so, because there was about to proceed from it, that law which poor fallen man can never answer, and which therefore is but the ministry of death and condemnation to him, though he be such an one as Moses himself. When Moses afterwards drew towards God, standing between Him and the people, he receives (in accordance with the mediate place which he thus occupied) his commission to deliver, as the national mediator, the laws and ordinances of the King. But when in the last place, he goes up to the top of the hill,

far beyond both the region of horrible fire and the mediate place which he occupied as the mediator of the nation, and where all was calm and the presence of the Lord around him, he receives the tokens of grace, the types of Christ, the Saviour and Priest, and is from thence made to minister to Israel, "the shadows of good things to come." In all these we see much that was expressive of the ministry about to be appointed.

So afterwards, though in a more limited way. When Joshua was about to receive a commission to compass Jericho with men of war, the Lord appears to him as a man of war with a sword drawn in His hand.

When Isaiah was called to go forth as the prophet of judgment against Israel, the Lord was seen in His temple in such terrible majesty, that the very posts of the door moved at His voice, and the house was filled with smoke (Isaiah 6)

When our Lord stood in the land of Israel the minister of the circumcision, according to this place and character, He appoints twelve to go forth to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But after the resurrection, when He stood on the earth in a larger character, all power in heaven and earth being then His, He commissions His Apostles accordingly, — "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." And so now, — ascended into heaven, and having there received the Church to Himself, He appears to Saul from that glory; and in him appoints a ministry formed upon the principle of this manifestation. Heaven was the birth-place of Paul's Apostleship; and according to this, he was sent forth to gather out and raise up a people from earth to heaven.

Thus, from the place from whence his call into office came, we at the beginning might be prepared for something new and heavenly. But his Apostleship was out of due time, as well as out of due place (1 Cor. 15: 8). It not only did not come from Jerusalem, but it arose after the Apostleship there had been perfected. Judas' forfeited bishopric had been filled up by Matthias, and thus the body of twelve, as ordered by the Lord at the beginning, was again complete; and Paul's Apostleship is thus a thing born "out of due time."

But though in this respect, "out of due time," yet not so in every respect. The times and seasons which the Lord has taken for the unfolding of His counsels are, doubtless, all due and rightly ordered; and having "the mind of Christ" (the present inheritance, through grace, of every spiritual man), we may seek to know this; remembering first of all, Whose counsels we are searching into, and how it becomes us to walk before Him with unshod feet. May He keep us, brethren, thus treading His course, and may the haste of inquirers never take us out of the place and attitude of worshippers. Let us remember, that it is in His temple we must inquire (Ps. 27: 4).

Successive Stages in Revelation

As then, to these times and seasons, I observe that our Lord marks successive stages in the Divine procedure with Israel, when He says, "the law and the prophets prophesied until *John*." Here He notices three ministries, the law, the prophets, and John. But these extended only down to our Lord's own ministry, and therefore now, in the further progress of the Divine counsels, we can to these add others.

The Law — This dispensation put Israel under a covenant which exacted obedience as the condition upon which they were to continue in the land, and in the blessings which Jehovah had given them. But we know that they broke it.

The Prophets — After offence and trespass had come in, prophets were raised up; among other services, to warn and encourage Israel to return to Him, from Whom they and their fathers had revolted, that they might recover their place and blessing under the covenant. But Israel, we know, refused their words, stoning some, and killing some.

John — The Baptist is then raised up, not as one of the prophets merely, to call Israel back to the old covenant, and to the obedience which it required, but to be the herald of a kingdom that was then at the doors, the forerunner of One Who was coming with the sure blessing of His own presence. He summoned the people to be in readiness for Messiah. But John they beheaded.

The Lord — Thus introduced by John to Israel, the Lord accordingly comes forth, and offers the kingdom in His own person to them, and Israel is summoned to own it and worship Him. But we know that the Heir of the vineyard was cast out by the husbandmen. "His own received Him not." The builders disallowed the stone. They crucified the Prince of Life; but God raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places.

The Twelve Apostles — They had accompanied with our Lord all the time that He had gone in and out among them, from the baptism of John to the day that He was taken up from them and they were now called forth (being endued with the Holy Ghost) to be witnesses to Israel of the resurrection. And these witnesses tell Israel that the times of refreshing, the times of accomplishing all promised good to them, waited only for their repentance; for that Jesus was now exalted to be a Prince and Saviour to them. And now the final trial of Israel was come. What could be done more than had now been done? Trespass against the Son of Man had been forgiven, at least, the way of escape from the judgment which it called for had now been thrown open to Israel by the testimony of the Holy Ghost in the Apostles; but what could provide relief, if this testimony were now despised? (See Matt. 12: 32) But the Holy Ghost is resisted, the testimony of the twelve is despised by the martyrdom of Stephen, and the Lord's dealings with Israel and the earth are therefore necessarily closed for a season.

The Apostleship of Paul

The Apostle of the Gentiles then comes forth, fraught with further treasures of Divine wisdom, revealing purposes that had been till now (while God was dealing with Israel and the earth) hid in God. He comes forth with this testimony — that Christ and the Church were one; that heaven was their common inheritance: and the gospel committed to him, was the gospel, as he expresses it, of "Christ in us the hope of glory." This gospel he had now to preach among the Gentiles (Gal. 1: 16; Col. 1: 28).

We are thus enabled to see the fulness of the times in which the mysteries of God have been revealed. It must be so we know, for God is God. But through His abounding towards us in all wisdom and prudence, He gives us grace to see something of this that we may adore Him, and love Him, and long for the day when we shall see Him face to face, and know as we are known. For all these His ways are beautiful in their season. Israel was the favoured earthly people, and it was due to them to try whether or not the fountain would be opened in Jerusalem, from whence to water the earth. But this debt of Israel had now been paid by the ministry of the Lord, closed in by that of the twelve; and Stephen's speech in Acts 7, is God's conviction of Israel's rejection of all the ways which His love had taken with them. They had silenced, as He there charges them, the early voice of God in Joseph — they had refused Moses the deliverer — they had persecuted the prophets — slain John and others, who had showed before of the coming of the just One — been the betrayers and murderers of that just One Himself, and, finally, were then in His person resisting, to the end resisting, as they had ever done, the Holy Ghost. The Lord therefore had only to forsake His sanctuary, and with it the earth, and the martyr sees the Lord in heaven under such a form as gives clear notice that the saints were now to have their citizenship in heaven, and their home in the glory there, and not on the earth.

This martyrdom of Stephen was thus a crisis or time of judgment, the final one with Israel; and a new witness to God is therefore called out. There had been already such times in the history of Israel. Shiloh had been the scene of the first crisis. The ark that was there was taken into the enemy's land — the priest and his sons died ingloriously; Ichabod was the character of the system then, and Samuel was called out as Jehovah's new witness — the help of Israel, the raiser of the stone Ebenezer. Jerusalem was afterwards the scene of another crisis. The house of David had filled up its sin; the king and the people with all their treasures were taken down to Babylon, and the city laid in heaps; and Jesus (for the interval as to this purpose need not be estimated) is called forth, God's new witness — the sure mercy and hope of Israel. But He was refused, and in judgment turned His back upon Jerusalem, saying, "Behold your house is left unto you desolate." That was a season of judgment also — judgment of Israel for the rejection of the Son of Man;

and another witness is then called out — the twelve Apostles, who testify, as I have been observing, in the Holy Ghost, to the resurrection of the rejected Lord, and that repentance and remission of sins were provided in Him for Israel. But they also are rejected and cast out. Then comes the final crisis. — Stephen is their representative, and he convicts Israel of full resistance of the Holy Ghost; and then a new and heavenly witness is called forth. Such witness is the Church, and of the Church, and of the Church's special calling and glory, Paul is made in an eminent sense the minister.

The Son Revealed in Saints

"It pleased God to reveal His Son in me," says he. This is the ground of the Church's special dignity, and the Gospel which Paul preached. It was not the Gospel of Messiah, the Hope of Israel, nor the Gospel of the once crucified One, now exalted "to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins"; but it was the Gospel of *the Son of God revealed in him*. The Son had been revealed to the disciples by the Father before (Matt. 16: 17); but now He is revealed *in* Paul. He had the Spirit of adoption. The Holy Ghost in him was the Spirit of the Son. And anointed with this oil of gladness, he had to go forth and spread the savour of it everywhere. And upon the Son thus revealed within, hangs everything that is peculiar, as I have observed, to the calling and glory of the Church. Thus we read, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together" (Rom. 8: 16, 17). And again, we read, "that we are predestinated to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ," that is, as Paul here speaks of himself, to *have the Son revealed in us*. And this being the predestinated condition of the Church, there comes forth, as in the train of this, all the Church's holy prerogatives — acceptance in the Beloved, with forgiveness of sins through His blood — entrance into the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, so as to have made known to us the mystery of the will of God — future inheritance in and with Him, in Whom all things in heaven and earth are to be gathered — and the present seal and earnest of this inheritance in the Holy Ghost. This bright roll of privileges is inscribed by the Apostle thus "spiritual blessings in the heavenlies"; and so they are, blessings through the Spirit flowing from and linking us with Him Who is the Lord in the heavens (Eph. 1: 4-12).

All this follows upon the *Son being revealed in us*, by which the Church puts on Christ, so as to be one with Him in every stage of His wondrous way; dead, quickened, raised, and seated in heaven in Him (Eph. 2: 6).

Paul's Stewardship

Of this mystery, Paul was especially the steward. The Lord had hinted at it in the parable of the Vine and the branches. He had spoken of it as that which the presence of the Comforter was to effect, saying, "At that day ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you." He spoke of it also to His disciples through Mary Magdalene after the resurrection, saying, "I ascend unto My Father and your Father, unto My God and your God"; thus telling them that they were to be one with Him in love and joy before the throne, all through this present dispensation. But this mystery did not fully come forth till Paul is sent to declare it, It is a calling of exceeding riches of grace, but nothing less could meet the mind of God towards His elect; for He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified, were to be "all of one" (Heb. 2: 11). Thus stood the covenant of love before the world was. A mediator such as Moses, whose best service was to keep Jehovah and the people asunder (see Deut. 5: 5), could not answer the purpose of this marvellous love of our God. But in the Son the elect are accepted; and while His work and merit are all their title to anything, they have everything by their oneness with the Mediator Himself (John 17: 26). Nothing less than this could fulfil the desire of our heavenly Father's heart towards us. The partition wall, whether between God and sinners, or between Jew and Gentile, is broken down; and we sinners stand together on its ruins, triumphing over them in Christ, our heavenly Father rejoicing over them also. This is the marvellous workmanship of the love of God, and the forming and completing of this union of Christ and the Church, is the husbandry which God is now tending. He is not, as once He was, caring for a land of wheat, and oil, and pomegranates, that His people might eat without scarceness of the increase of the field (Deut. 11: 12); but He is the Husbandman of the Vine and the branches. He is training the Church in union with the Son of His love until all come in the knowledge of Him to a perfect man. It is this union which makes us of the same family with the Lord Jesus, and entitles us to hear of Him as "*The First-born*" (Rom. 8: 29). It is this union which gives us the same glory with the Lord Jesus, and entitles us to look after Him as "*the Forerunner*" (Heb. 6: 20). It is this which gives character to that life which we now have, and to that glory in which we shall be manifested, when He Who is our life shall appear.

Life, Love and Glory

Our life and glory are thus both of a new character. The *life is* a new life. The man in Christ is a new creature; he is a dead and risen man. His powers and affections have acquired a new character. His intelligence is *spiritual understanding*, or "the mind of Christ." His love is "*love in the Spirit.*" The power in him is "*glorious power,*" the power of Christ's resurrection. And so he knows no man after the flesh, but all things are become new to him. It is not enough that human affections

or natural tastes would sanction anything; for being after the Spirit, he "minds the things of the Spirit." He serves in "newness of spirit," and the name of the Lord Jesus is the sanction of what he does either "in word or deed." He has been translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, and there he walks, going forth in assurance and liberty to do service from morning till evening, living by faith on Him Who loved him and gave Himself for him.

The *glory* is also a new glory. It is something above all that was seen in previous ages. Excellent things have been spoken of Adam and of Israel; but not equal to what is told us of the Church. Christ is to present the Church to Himself, as God presented Eve to Adam, to be the companion of his dominion and glory. The saints are to be conformed to the image of the Son. It is "the joy of the Lord" that is prepared for the saints, a share with Christ in the authority of the kingdom, in that which He has received from the Father. They are not so much brought into the glory, as made glorious themselves; as we read, "The glory which shall be revealed in us"; and again, "glorified together," that is, "together with Christ"; "fashioned like unto His glorious body." The place of the Son is the scene of their glory. They are not to stand on the footstool, but to sit on the throne. Israel may have the blessings of the earth, but the Church is to know the upper or heavenly glory. And it is *life* and *glory* that makes us what we are. The life makes us sons, the glory makes us *heirs*, and our sonship and inheritance are everything.

Paul's Gospel

It was the Gospel of this life and glory that Paul was specially called out to minister. Peter and the others forwarded it we know; but Paul was the distinguished steward of it. And Peter and the others did not forward this Gospel as being the twelve at Jerusalem. As the twelve, they had borne their testimony to Israel, and been rejected like their Lord, and now had become witnesses to the heavenly calling of the Church. The vision which instructed Peter in the fact that God had sanctified the Gentiles might also have told him that God had made heaven, and not earth, the place of their calling, and the scene of their hopes. The vessel with its contents was let down from heaven, and then taken up again into heaven. This was, by a symbol, a revelation of the mystery hid from ages. It denoted that the Church had been of old written in heaven and hid there with God, but now for a little season was manifested here, and in the end was to be hid in heaven again, having her glory and inheritance there. This was signified by the descending and ascending sheet, and such, I judge, is the character of the mystery hid from ages and generations. And according to this, Peter, under the Holy Ghost, speaks to the saints of their inheritance "reserved in heaven"; and exhorts them to wait with girded loins, as strangers and pilgrims on the earth. He presents the Church as

having consciously come to the end of all things here, and looking, like Israel in the night of the passover, towards Canaan, having done with this Egypt-world.*

*In Peter, we have many allusions to Jewish circumstances. And the Spirit in him who was the Apostle of the circumcision, would naturally have suggested this. But I will refer to only one instance of this. (see Acts 2: 9, 10) The latter verse has Hosea 2: 23, in mind. But the different connection in which the truth there stated stands in the mind of the prophet, and in the mind of the Apostle, is very striking.

Israel is to be made the people of God in the latter day, as the prophet teaches us; but he further teaches us, that when that takes place, Israel shall be sown unto God in the earth, that is, God will *bless Israel with earthly blessing*. But the Gentiles have now been made the people of God, as the Apostle teaches us; but he further teaches us, that there is no such blessing as this for them; but that, on the contrary, they should reckon themselves as *strangers and pilgrims on the earth*. How strikingly does the Spirit thus, in these two witnesses, contrast the call and blessing of Israel with the call and blessing of the Church, showing us that the Church has no place on the earth, but that being a stranger there, she is to look for a heavenly country, a citizenship in heaven; but that as soon as Israel is again acknowledged of the Lord, the Lord will hear the heavens, and the heavens the earth, and the earth the corn, and the wine, and the oil, and they Jezreel (Hosea 2: 23; 1. Peter 2: 10).

But Paul was apprehended in a special manner for this ministry. A dispensation of the Gospel was committed to him, and woe to him if he did not preach it (1 Cor. 9: 16, 17). Though, as he speaks, it were even against his will, yet he must preach it. The Son was revealed in him for this very purpose, that he might preach Him among the heathen (Gal. 1: 16). For when the Lord converted his soul, He sent him out with this Gospel, "Rise, and stand upon thy feet, for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee."

Paul's Ministry

I do indeed judge that it is very profitable to the saints that they discern rightly, that Paul's ministry was thus one stage in the Divine process of telling out the purposes of God. That he holds a distinguished place in the Church, the feeling of every saint will at once and without effort bear witness; for there is no name more kept in the recollections of the saints than that of our Apostle, save the name of Him Who in the hearts of His people has no fellow.

And his office being thus from heaven, he refuses to confer with flesh and blood — refuses to go up to Jerusalem to them that were Apostles before him. He was not to get himself sanctioned there or by them. Before this, the twelve at Jerusalem had all authority. But the Apostles at Jerusalem are nothing to Paul or his ministry.

They had not cast the lot over him, nor are they now to send him forth; but it is the Holy Ghost Who says, "Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." And having thus received grace and Apostleship from the Lord, in the glory, and being now sent forth by the Holy Ghost, in full consistency with all this, he and Barnabas receive recommendation to the grace of God, from the unconsecrated hands of some unnamed brethren at Antioch. All this was a grievous breach upon that order that was to establish the earth in righteousness, beginning at Jerusalem.

Not only was Paul's Apostleship and mission thus independent of Jerusalem, and of the twelve; but the gospel which he preached (the nature of which we have before considered), he did not learn either there or from them. He received it not from man, neither was he taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. He goes up, most truly, from Antioch, with Barnabas, to Jerusalem, to confer with the Apostles about circumcision; but before he does so, he withstood some, though they had come from James, and rebuked Peter before them all. And these things were ordered in the provident wisdom of the Spirit; just as our Lord's rebukes of His mother; the Spirit of God, foreseeing the boasts in the flesh which would arise from both these sources, from Mary and from Peter; and thus has given the wayfaring man these tokens of his heavenward path. He circulates the decree upon the question of circumcision, for present peace. But when counselling the Gentile Churches afterwards on one of the subjects which this decree determines, viz., *eating meats offered to idols*, he does so on the ground merely of brotherly love. He never refers to this decree (1 Cor. 8) He was taught his gospel entirely by revelation (Gal. 1: 12), for at his conversion it had been so promised to him (Acts 26: 16). And accordingly it was from the Lord Himself that he received his knowledge of the death, burial, resurrection (1 Cor. 15: 3), and his knowledge also of the last supper and its meaning (1 Cor. 11: 23); though these things lay within the common acquaintance of those who had companied with the Lord, and he might have received them from them. But, no; he must be taught them all by revelation. The Lord appeared to him in those things of which he was to be a minister and witness. The Lord was jealous that Paul should not confer with flesh and blood — should not be a debtor to any but to Himself for his gospel. For as the dispensation was to allow of no confidence in the flesh, neither was Paul's Apostleship. All that might have been gain in the flesh, was to be counted loss. Confidence with those who had seen and heard, eaten and drunk with Jesus, might have been gain; but all this was set aside. Paul would thankfully be refreshed in spirit by the mutual faith of himself and the humblest disciple. Nay, he would have such acknowledged; all such in whose belly the Spirit had opened the river of God for the refreshing of the saints (Rom. 1: 12, 1 Cor. 16: 18). But he could accept no man's person. The previous pillars of the Church could not be used to support his

ministry. The Jewish order was gone. Of old, Jehovah we know, had respect to that order. It was according to the number of the children of Israel, that at the first He divided the nations (Deut. 32: 8). Afterwards He distributed the land of Canaan according to this number also, that is, among the *twelve* tribes (Joshua 13 - 19) So David in his day, under the guiding of Jehovah, had respect to the same number, when he settled the ministries of the temple, and the officers of the palace at Jerusalem (1 Chr. 23 - 27) And in like manner, the Lord provided for the healing and teaching of Israel, appointed *twelve* Apostles, still having respect to the Jewish order. And this order of twelve Apostles was preserved, as we have seen, under the hand of Peter afterwards; for he was the guardian of the Jewish order, and pastor of the Jewish Church. But Paul's Apostleship is at once an invasion upon all this. It has no respect whatever to Jewish, earthly, or fleshly order. It interferes with it. It is a writing under the hand of the Spirit of God for the revoking of that order. And this was, as was natural, a great trial to the Jewish Christians. They could not easily understand this undue Apostleship, and we find that he was considerate of them under this trial. And, indeed, those who stand with him in the assertion of the sovereignty of the Spirit, and in the rejection of all fleshly authority, should with him likewise be considerate of the difficulties which many now experience from the Jewish feelings and rules of judgment, in which they have been educated. But still, Paul was an Apostle, let them hear, or let them forbear.

And not only was it a trial to Jewish believers, but there were found evil men moved of Satan, who made their use of this state of things. We find it to have been so at Corinth. In Galatia it was not this. In his epistle to the Churches there, he does not speak of his Apostleship, because it had been slandered among them; but because it was the Divine sanction of that gospel which he had preached, and from which they had departed. But at Corinth his Apostleship had been questioned, and by what witnesses would he have it approved? why, by his pureness, his knowledge, his armour of righteousness (2 Cor. 7) How does he seek to be received? why, because he had corrupted no man, he had defrauded no man (2 Cor. 7) How does he vindicate and establish his ministry? Read his proofs in such words as these — "Am I not an Apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are ye not my work in the Lord? If I am not an Apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you, for the seal of mine Apostleship are ye in the Lord." And again, "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." Does he not by all this commit the proof of his Apostleship to the manifest presence of the Spirit with him? His children in the faith were the seal of his office (1 Cor. 9: 2); the epistle that ought to commend it to the acceptance of all men. The signs of an Apostle had been wrought by him (2 Cor. 12: 12). And must it not have been so? What office or ministry could now be warranted without the presence and exercise

of the gifts received for men? Could the purpose of the ascension be evaded or annulled? Could fleshly authority and order be allowed in despite of the revelation now given, that the ascended Head was the dispenser and Lord of all those ministries that were for "the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ"?

Christ, the Head of the Church

When the Lord ascended, on His way up, He was a conqueror in triumph, leading captivity captive. But when He reached His heavenly seat, He became a crowned priest,* and sent down coronation gifts to His Church, by the ministry of which He is either forming or strengthening the union between Himself and the members here, and their union among themselves. These ministries thus act like the joints and bands in the human body; and all other ministries the Apostle sets aside as "rudiments of the world," fitted to those who are alive in the world, but most unsuited to those who are — as the Church is — dead and risen with Christ (see Eph. 4: 16; Col. 2: 19-23).

*The "glory and honour" that form our Lord's present crown were typified by Aaron's garments, which were said to be to him for "glory and beauty" (Ex. 28: 2). And the very same words are used in the Septuagint, for "glory and beauty," as our translators have rendered, "glory and honour" in Heb. 2: 7; so that the Lord's present crown is a priest's crown or mitre, and not a king's. He has not put on His royal crown yet.

Gifts to the Church

We are therefore not true to the ascension of our Head, if we do not look for His ascension-gifts in those who minister in His name. They constitute the hand-writing of the Lord in the Church's genealogies. The Jews were careful to put from the priesthood those whose genealogy could not be proved. They refused to register them (Ezra 2: 62; Neh. 7: 63). And this too in a day when all was feebleness in Israel. No cloudy pillar had led them on their way home from Babylon — no arm of the Lord had gloriously made a passage for them through the deserts — no rain of angel's food from heaven, nor ark of the covenant was with them. All this, and more than this, was gone. But did they plead their feebleness, and do nothing? Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, do what they can. They cannot recover everything, but they do what they can: and among other services, they read the genealogies, and do not allow the holy things to be eaten by unproved claimants of the priesthood. And ours, dear brethren, is a day of feebleness like theirs. Much of the former strength and beauty is gone, and we cannot recover everything. But it is not therefore to be a day of allowed evil; nor are we, in the spirit of slumber, to fold the arms, and say, "There is no hope." We should do what we can, and among

other services, we can study the genealogies, when anyone seeks their register: and thus they run, "A bishop must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach, not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre" (1 Tim. 3)

Thus run the genealogies of the bishops of the flock of God; thus has the Spirit of the ascended Head of the Church written in His Word.

The Holy Spirit's Presence

The time for glorying only in the Lord, and in that authority, and in that only, which had been formed by the Holy Ghost had now fully come, and therefore the fact that the Lord had given Paul authority in the Church, was shown by witnesses to the presence of the Spirit with him. The signs of an Apostle were wrought by him. His authority stood approved by this, that he could "do nothing against the truth, but for the truth"; and because the power used by him was used "to edification, and not to destruction" (2 Cor. 13: 5-10). He claims no authority, save what was thus verified by the presence of the Spirit with him, and used by him for the furtherance of the truth, and the profit of the Church. For the Holy Ghost had been publicly avouched to be sovereign in the Church, as the Son had been proclaimed Head to the Church. The gifts of the Spirit may be among us in various measures of strength; but the Holy Ghost in us is the title of all present *worship* and *service*. Whatever *worship* is now to be had in the temples of God, it is to be in the Spirit; for "we are the circumcision which worship God in the Spirit." And the Apostle, speaking of worship, says, "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord (that is, no man can call Jesus, Lord, or say, 'Lord Jesus'), but by the Holy Ghost" (1 Cor. 12: 3) So whatever *service* is now to be rendered in the Church is with this limitation, "according to the ability which God giveth"; it is by this rule, "the manifestation of the Spirit." Paul might lay hands on Timothy, and Titus might appoint elders; but the presence of the Spirit was in measure according to the authority and service. Timothy was left in Ephesus; but the charge entrusted to him there, was according to the gifts bestowed upon him (1 Tim. 1: 18; 1 Tim. 4: 14; 2 Tim. 1: 6). To assume any ministry beyond this measure, is to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think (Rom. 12: 3). And as every individual saint has title through the indwelling Spirit to "prove all things" (with this condition doubtless, that he "hold fast that which is good"); so the congregations of the saints, or the temples of God, as spiritual, are to judge also (1 Cor. 14: 29); and if the resources of the flesh, the name, the human advantages, or earthly distinctions of men be gloried in and trusted, the temple is defiled. And the temple of God at Corinth was thus defiled (1 Cor. 3: 16-23). Some had rested in Paul, some in Cephas, some in Apollos. But this was carnal. This was walking as men, and not in the presence and sufficiency of the

Spirit, Whose temple they were. They became untrue to the Spirit Who dwelt in them.

Responsibility in Ministry

And here let me say, that it is not so much *right* to minister which the New Testament speaks of, as *obligation*. If any man have the gift, he is *debtor* to exercise it, and to wait on his ministry. The habit of looking on ministry as a right, rather than as an obligation, has given the Church its worldly aspect. The "great house" has forgotten that *service on earth is glory*. But our Apostle did not forget it, and he never affected anything that might have its influence in the world, upon the world's principles. He was one whom the world would pass by. He laboured with his own hands, followed his trade, and made tents, just at the time when, in the authority of the Spirit, he shook his raiment upon the unbelieving Jews. He was among the meanest of his company (mean in the world's judgment) gathering sticks for the fire, when, in the power of Christ, he shook the viper from his hand. Beloved, this is unlike all that which corrupted Christendom has sanctioned in her ministers, as their due and suitable dignities! But Paul was in his own esteem (and would have others esteem him by that rule also), just what the Lord had made him. He would not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ had not wrought by him (Rom. 15: 18). He measured himself only by that line which the Lord had distributed to him (2 Cor. 10) What folly does he count all boasting in the flesh. He was compelled for a little moment thus to be a fool before the Church at Corinth; but with what zeal, with what revenge, with what clearing of himself, does he leave off this "folly," as he calls it? (2 Cor. 11) Would that the same mind were in us all, the same zeal for the Lord, the same revenge upon the flesh, which is fit, like the offal of a sacrifice, only for the burning outside the camp.

To me, brethren, I confess, these principles are very clear from the New Testament. The Lord knows that naturally, I would rather have all continued and settled in the flesh, that we might the more securely hold on our quiet and even way. But I pray for more faith, for more living and powerful apprehension of this truth, that the earth and its inhabitants are to be dissolved, and that Christ alone is to bear up its pillars. We need the faith that would root us out of that earth in which the cross of the Son of God was once planted, and in which the course of this world, continuing the same as it was then, has fixed that cross only more firmly. We want that faith that would call us to arise and depart from it, and go forth to meet the Bridegroom.

Paul, a Representative Man

But I would now hasten to a close, having extended my paper further than I would have chosen, and take a few short notices of our Apostle in his *Person, ministry,*

and *conduct*; for in these he will be found to illustrate many features of the dispensation, as his Apostleship was the general sign of it.

In his *Person* we see much of the dispensation reflected. He could call himself the *chief of sinners*, when he would magnify the *grace* of the dispensation, and show that it could reach over all the aboundings of sin. But he could also call himself *blameless as touching the righteousness which is in the law*, when he would make known the character of the *righteousness* of the dispensation, and show how it sets aside all other as loss and dung (1 Tim. 1: 15; Phil. 3: 8). These things are wondrous, and yet perfect. Saul of Tarsus is taken up by the Spirit, in order to present in him the *grace* and the *righteousness* that are now brought to us. Strange, that we should find the first place in the first rank of sinners occupied by him who was thus touching the law blameless. But so it was. A fair, bright, and full sample of the workmanship of the dispensation is given to us in him who was made the representative minister of it. The *grace* of God and the *righteousness* of God are displayed in his person.

So in his person we see the "thorn in flesh." And let this particularly be what it may, it was in the judgment of the world a blot. The comeliness that a world could estimate was tarnished by this. In the Spirit, he had wondrous revelations, and the secret of God was blessedly with him; but before men there was a stain upon him. But all this is in character with the dispensation. The saints, exalted in Christ, before men are to be humbled. The world is not to know them. The dispensation admits of no confidence in the flesh. In it God has set the flesh aside as profitless. The right eye is gone, and the right hand is gone; things after the external appearance are not to be looked after; there is to be no measuring or comparing of things by any such rule. And according to this, Paul had a temptation in the flesh. There was put upon him something that tempted the scorn of men. As when Jacob became Israel, he halted across the plain of Peniel. The flesh was marred, when before God he got a new and honourable name. But the shrinking of his thigh was in the same love as his victory over the Divine stranger. And so the thorn in Paul's flesh, was in the same love as his rapture into paradise. Hezekiah, in the day when he was exalted, had been left alone, that God might prove him (2 Chr. 32: 31). But the Lord was gracious to Paul, and would not leave him alone, but put a thorn in his flesh. And if he had stood in the full intelligence of the Spirit, he would not have prayed for its removal; for he had soon to recall his prayer, and to glory rather in his infirmities. Thus there is none perfect, dear brethren, but the Master Himself. Favoured and honoured as Paul and others may have been, there is none perfect but the Lord. This is comfort to our souls. God rests well pleased in Him for ever, but in Him only. He never had a desire to recall, never a prayer to summon back from the Father's ear. "He was heard." But Paul had to learn that he had mistaken the rule of blessing and of glory; he had to learn, as every saint has, that when he

was weak, then he was strong. And thus with the thorn in his flesh, but the power of Christ resting on him, he shows forth the saints in this dispensation.

In his *Ministry*, we see something of the dispensation also. "The foolishness of God," and "the weakness of God" (that is, the testimony to Christ crucified, which the world judges "mean and slight"), were now dispensed, and according to this was Paul's ministry. It was weak and foolish in the judgment of the Greeks of this world. He came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom. His preaching was not with enticing words, but he was among the saints in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling (1 Cor. 2)

But further, extended as his preaching was over the world, it set forth the *comprehensiveness* of the grace of God in this dispensation. In principle the sound of this grace was to go to the ends of the earth; and so St. Paul speaks of his ministry as stretching itself on the right hand and on the left, from Jerusalem round about unto Illyricum. He had received "Apostleship for the obedience of faith among all nations," and he felt himself debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise. He spake to the Jews, and to the devout persons, to the common people as many as he met with, and then with the philosophers (Acts 17) His purpose was to compass the whole earth. And thus he speaks continually to the Churches of passing from place to place, by Corinth into Macedonia, returning from thence to Corinth again, and so being brought into Judea. And again, he speaks of going to Rome, as he takes his journey into Spain. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, and the Spirit that was in this Apostle of God, therefore thus reached the ends of the world. He was calling on men everywhere to repent, as did the dispensation. And when he could no longer go about with the gospel, being the prisoner of Jesus Christ for the Gentiles, "he received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God ' and teaching those things which concerned the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 28: 30). All this was expressive of the comprehensiveness of the grace that was now calling in "bad and good, that the wedding might be furnished with guests." In the Jewish times, the ordinances of God were all at Jerusalem. It was there that men ought to worship. The priest abode in the temple, for the dispensation was one that refused converse with men, but in righteousness kept the flock of God folded in the land of Judea. But now the dispensation is one of grace, going forth in the activities of love, to gather home the lost sheep that have gone astray upon the mountains; and preaching is therefore the great ordinance of God now. Preaching is the new appointment of God, something that is beyond the mere services of a secluded temple; and of this new ordinance Paul was made the most distinguished minister. Then in his *Conduct*, I may say, that in a very general way it was made to exhibit the dispensation. In his conduct, as he says, there was "a manifestation of the truth." And this is what faith always in measure does. Faith in a living form reflects

the truth dispensed. The *conduct* of faith, as one has observed, is always according to the principle of God's present dealings. As John says, "If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." And as St. Peter says, — "not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise, *blessing*; *knowing* that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a *blessing*" (1 Peter 3: 9). That *is*, *blessing* being bestowed on *us*, *blessing* is required of us. And so in Paul's conduct, we trace the great principles of God's present dealing with the Church. The Son of God emptied Himself of the glory that He had before the world was; and while on earth ever refused Himself. With title to call for legions of angels, He was dumb as a sheep before His shearers; being free as the Son, He submitted to the exactions of others (Matt. 17: 27). So Paul, though free from all, made himself the servant of all, becoming all things to all men for their good (1 Cor. 11: 1; 2 Cor. 11: 29). And mark his words to the Ephesian elders, when he takes leave not only of them but of his ministry, ready to go into prison or unto death, for his Master — Jesus (Acts 20: 17-35). Mark what he there declares his conduct in his ministry had been, and how he testifies of himself that "he had showed them all things"; thus telling them that he had been made to take the honoured place of reflecting the actings of God in the gospel, letting the Churches see in him the blessedness of dealing in grace, which is (as we to our salvation know) the way of the Son of God in the gospel. "I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak," and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, "It is more blessed to give, than to receive." This was a holy testimony which the Spirit enabled him to bear. And in a certain sense I would say, that he even surpassed the gospel; not the *spirit* of it (that was impossible), but the *mere conditions* of it. The Lord had ordained that they which preach the gospel, should live of the gospel; but he had not used this his power in the gospel (1 Cor. 9: 12). He might have been burdensome to the disciples as an Apostle of Christ, but he was desirous to impart to them, not the gospel of God only, but his own soul, because they were dear to him (1 Thess. 2: 9). But what does this reflect but the unmeasured and untiring love of God, which has visited us in the Gospel? So effectually had he learnt Christ — so blessedly was he, through grace, enabled to exhibit the dispensation — and beside, so fully was he a pattern of that conversation to which the dispensation calls us, that he could say, "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so, as ye have us for an ensample; for our conversation is in heaven." He lived on earth as a citizen of the heavenly city, and was (as the Spirit allowed him strikingly to express it) "unto God a sweet savour of Christ."

But however honoured he might thus have been as the Apostle of the Gentiles, and in his Apostleship, person, ministry, and conduct, the witness of the dispensation; yet he was not sent, as he tells us, to baptize, but to preach the Gospel. For there was not to be any gathering point on earth. If any such had been,

this Apostle would have known it. Christ was the centre of all renewed souls, and He was in heaven. The Lord was not now setting up one visible point, as He had once done at Jerusalem. The dispensation was heavenly: its source of power and its place of gathering was the upper sanctuary. It was "a citizenship in heaven" that was now enrolling; for not yet was it to be said *of Zion* — "this and that man was born in her." All that in every place called on the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ were now recorded on high, as in the Lamb's book.

The Rapture into Heaven

Such was our Apostle; and far more might be added of the same character; but I will not further speak of them. I would now notice only one other thing that was peculiar to him also; I mean, his rapture into Paradise. In this he stands also as the *representative* of the dispensation, inasmuch as it was as "a man in Christ," that he was favoured with this rapture. In it he knows himself only as such, and therefore this paradise is the portion of all such. I judge it assuredly to have been *the place of the spirit of the saint while absent from the body*, and to which the pardoned thief went on the day of his crucifixion. Paul was actually* caught up to it for a season, but no other man has ever had the same joy. He calls it "paradise" — "the third heaven," the place of abundant visions and revelations. Whether in or out of the body, he knew not, but there he was. He has not been allowed to tell us much about it, and Scripture is generally silent on the nature of it. But there he was, and in this rapture of our Apostle, as by the teaching of Scripture, it is witnessed to us, that it is better to depart and be with Christ, and that the place of the delivered spirit is a place of abundant revelation, and a paradise of visions of Christ.

*Ezekiel had been caught away to Jerusalem and other places, as a prophet to Israel, that he might in the visions of God, understand and declare the Divine counsels. And so St. John was taken away to various scenes, as prophet to the Church, that he might testify in like manner of the Divine purposes. *But these were only raptures in the Spirit*. Philip had been *actually*, and not merely in Spirit, caught away to Azotus from the desert of Gaza, that as an evangelist, he might pursue his ministry among the habitation of men. So Paul *is actually* caught up into paradise, but this was not as a prophet, nor as an evangelist, nor as an Apostle, but "as a man in Christ," that all "in Christ" might know their portion in that blessing and honour which awaits them after this life, and which was so great that our Apostle, returning to the flesh and to the earth, was in danger of being exalted by it above measure.

The actual being of such a place was opened fully to the faith of the Church (though it might have been apprehended before), when the Head of the Church said — "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit." And again was it verified to our faith when Stephen, "a man in Christ," said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." But

still this is not the Church's perfection. The Spirit given to us of God, is but the earnest of the house "eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5) The throne of the Son of Man is the inheritance of the saints, and the glory for which the Church waits. But that place of glory is not yet prepared, as the place of the spirit of them that depart in the Lord is. There may have been visions of it, as on the holy mount, but it rests still only on vision; it is the hope still long deferred. Christ waits at the right hand for it, and the Spirit and the Bride say, Come. The whole creation groaneth for it. But it still tarryes. However, beloved, the word is, wait for it — it will surely come, and will not tarry.

Many whom I love much in the Lord, may not judge with me in these things. And surely I know that we know not but in part, and therefore can but prophesy in part. But we may be helpers of each other's joy, and so has the Lord appointed it. Nevertheless, let us take heed, brethren, that we be not taught the fear of God by the commandment of men. Let us take heed of obedience in the flesh; but watch that we do what we do in the power of communion with the Lord. And in whatever of enlarged knowledge we are instructed through others, let us have grace to try it all by a conscience exercised before our God, and inquire after truth as in His presence. Be it so with Thy saints, blessed Lord, more and more! Amen.

Paul's General Epistles

In the Acts we read the labours of an *Evangelist* in the Epistles, the instructions of a *Teacher*, addressed to those who have already been brought in by the evangelist.

I say this, as being the characteristic difference of the two writings; and very suitably, therefore, the *Acts* of the Apostles comes before, or takes precedence of, the *Epistles* of the Apostles.

But then again, the epistles have their own distinction, each one of them. And in a general way, it is easy to perceive this, and as far as St. Paul's epistles to different churches go, this I would now do, though very briefly.

In that to the *Romans* we get a full and orderly writing upon the gospel, that most precious mystery or counsel and way of God, by which He has provided for wretched, self-ruined sinners, displaying His own glory, securing holiness, and excluding boasting, while putting the sinner who believes in Jesus into the highest and dearest relationship to Himself. This is done in Romans 1 - 8. Then, in Romans 9 - 11, we have a wondrous volume on prophetic or dispensational truths; and then, to the end, moral exhortations to the saints, addressing them personally and relatively very largely.

Very suitably does this first of the epistles thus fulfil the office of a *teacher*. To the quickened ones already brought in, the Spirit, by Paul in this epistle, teaches the way of God more perfectly. This is the Epistle to the Romans.

In the **Epistles to the *Corinthians***, which follow, we are introduced to corruptions in the saints, and to the reproofs, rebukes, and corrections of the Spirit in the apostle.

The Corinthians were a scholastic, *reasoning* people, more Sadducean than Pharisaic (if I may thus speak of Gentiles in the language of the Jews) in the tendencies of their mind. They were tempted to take advantage of the gifts they enjoyed; by them to exalt themselves, rather than to minister to the edification of their brethren. They had got into a sad state of moral relaxation and speculative discussion of doctrines, rapidly tending to ruin; and had been beguiled by some one who had advantages in the flesh, in his worldly circumstances and conditions, and who was withdrawing their regards away from St. Paul to himself.

This state of things may be discovered in the two epistles to them. And the meeting of this state of things, and the answering of certain questions which they had sent to him (in the curiosity, it would almost seem, of a Corinthian intellect), form the materials of these epistles.

But corruption works variously. The man of God has to look forth from many a watch-tower, if he would know, as he ought to do, all the approaches of the enemy.

Therefore, in ***Galatia*** we see a very different form of corruption from that which we have thus seen at Corinth. There was no Judaizing at Corinth — none of the leaven of the Pharisee, as I hinted, but much of that of the Sadducee; yea, and of Herod too, which is worldliness. But among the brethren in Galatia, on the other hand, it was the leaven of the Pharisee that was working, and working powerfully.

The religion of ordinances had been revived among them. The law, in some of its subtle forms, was returned to. A fair show in the flesh was sought. Having begun in the Spirit, they would now be made perfect in the flesh. They were observing days, and months, and times, and years — the rudiments of the world, the elements of the legal economy; and the apostle is afraid of them. He has to labour again for them, that Christ may afresh be everything to them, "formed in them"; and that they may escape from the fascinations and entanglements of a carnal, worldly sanctuary.

In **the Epistle to the *Ephesians*** we have another condition of things, quite another. It is not a state of things of comparative ignorance which needed orderly instruction, as we got in the Romans; nor is it a state of moral relaxation, as is contemplated in the Epistle to the Corinthians; nor a state of doctrinal error approaching dereliction of Christ, as in Galatia. All is right, and calm, and undistracted at Ephesus, as far as the epistle assumes, and, consequently, the apostle is free to unfold further and higher truths to the saints there. And this he does. He opens the prerogatives of our calling in Christ, unfolding the mystery of

the Church, and addressing the saints as to their duties, and services, and virtue according to that calling, and their relationship one to another in it.

In this Epistle, therefore, we rather see the *prophet*, the one who, under the Holy Ghost, discloses the deep things of God, and takes this place and measure amid the gifts; as we read, "And he gave some apostles, and some *prophets*, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." It was surely all *inspiration*, but it takes, in this epistle, the form of a prophet.

In the **Epistle to the *Philippians*** we get the *pastor* in Paul. There was a very loving personal link between him and them. Personally, I believe, the Philippians were the nearest to him of any, as John had been to the Lord. Above all others, they had communicated with him, from first to last, during his preaching abroad, and now in his bonds. His heart was very tenderly affected towards them. But he had reason to fear that some breaches had begun amongst them, some personal jealousies, and reserves, and distances (alas, too common to this day!); and he writes to them a pastoral letter with this apprehension *on* his heart. But, because of his intimacy with them, and the closeness of their fellowship; because of the love that he had to them, and the grace that was in them, he writes to them with marked tenderness and consideration. In no epistle is there *such* fervent expression of personal attachment.

And being pastoral rather than instructive, there is no order of doctrinal thought in this epistle. It is written after a freer method.

In the ***Colossians***, who come next, we see a people who had been, like the Galatians (in measure, at least), ensnared by Judaizing principles. But with them this was not in so gross a form as with the Galatians. These principles had been withdrawing the saints in Galatia from that simple faith in the Lord Jesus, which as *sinner*s we must have in Him; these same principles were withdrawing the saints at Colosse from using Christ, and going on with Christ in such ways as *saint*s are to do. The apostle, therefore, very seasonably, instructs them in the fulness of Christ; warning them (as was needed), but likewise teaching them their perfection in Him, that they wanted nothing but what they could get in Him; and that, having begun with Him, they ought to go on with Him; being rooted in Him, so ought they to be built up in Him.

This is the pastor and the teacher together (under full inspiration of the Holy Ghost), both warning and instructing. What variety! Surely these Epistles to the Romans, the Corinthians, the Galatians, the Ephesians, the Philippians, and the Colossians, let us learn how various the need of saints may be, how deep the subtleties of their enemy, and how many the watch-towers the Spirit has

graciously erected for our use, that we may mount them, and get on vantage ground in the face of the approaches of our adversary! And they further let us learn, that if the Spirit of God be as an evangelist in the Acts, He variously imparts Himself, or fills His vessels in the Epistles, as a Prophet, a Teacher, or a Pastor, according to the necessities of the saints.

We have still, however, the **Epistles to the Thessalonians** to consider. They stand the last in the series or succession of these general Epistles of St. Paul, or his Epistles to churches, and they have their own character, like each of the others.

In the people to whom they are addressed, we see an eminent, distinguished faith — a faith which had been tested by sufferings for the truth's sake beyond any. Accordingly, they are very encouraging. The apostle, characteristically, is an *exhorter* as I may call him, and in these Epistles (as Rom. 12 speaks) "waits on exhortation." He encourages the suffering Church of the Thessalonians by speaking very much to them of the coming of the Lord, which is the due, appropriate comfort of those who suffer with Him and for His sake in this evil, revolted world. There is, accordingly, no doctrinal method in these two Epistles. They are written chiefly in the spirit of sympathy, according to the grace of one who was exhorting or encouraging a tried and suffering people. But they convey instruction on this great truth of the coming of the Lord beyond what the Thessalonians had already reached; instruction, too, most fitted to carry on the comforting, sympathizing ministry of an exhorter, such as the apostle is in these Epistles.

He has, however, in the midst of all this, to erect a new watchtower. He has to warn his honoured Thessalonians against allowing "the blessed hope" (the coming of the Lord) to be corrupted or abused among them. For true it is, and no uncommon thing, that the very best things, as well as the very best people (I speak as a man), are still in danger. There were no companies of saints more fresh and promising, and abundant in blessedness, than those in Galatia. They would have plucked out their eyes for Paul. But when he wrote to them, he had to rebuke them sharply, and to tell them to their face that he stood in doubt of them. So, there is no truth more precious for the saint than that which the Thessalonians held, the prospect of the Lord's coming, and the soul's longing for it. But even that was in danger, lest the flesh should take advantage of it and corrupt it, and the saints who held it and loved it become idle, and careless as to present duty and honest, needed industry. So that here, again I say, we have another watch-tower erected, and another warning voice raised in the midst of corruptions by the Shepherd of Israel, Who never slumbers nor sleeps, but eyes His flock night and day.

I have thus taken upon me to look rather rapidly at St. Paul's general Epistles: I mean his Epistles to congregations or churches of saints, and not to individuals, as Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Each of them, I may say again upon this review of them, serves a distinct purpose; but the man of God wants them all, living, as he is to do, by every word that has proceeded out of the mouth of God.

The personality of the writer of these Epistles is apparent in each of them, the attitude of his soul, as I, may speak, formed no doubt by the condition of the Church he was addressing. He is *occupying the chair of a Master*, while writing to the Romans. He is the *aggrieved Spiritual Father*, as he addresses himself to the Corinthians. He is the *heated, and zealous, and indignant Reprover*, as he writes to the Galatians, rescuing and defending a prized and precious treasure, which he saw was in danger from them who should have kept and guarded it. He is on high, *seated in a world of Glories*, gazing at it and thinking of the love that brought him there, while he writes to the Ephesians. He is the *Earnest-hearted Lover* of the Philippians, fearful of the least thing that threatened to soil or disturb so loved a people. He is the *Anxious Watchman* in the midst of the Colossians. And he is the *deeply-interested, Sympathizing Counsellor and Comforter*, as he is writing his letters to the Thessalonians.

The style and spirit that would suit these different characters, or these different attitudes of soul, may be discovered in the apostle as he thus writes. And all this surely tells us that, through the Spirit, he was *alive* to his subject, as well as *master* of it — not a mere penman, but a living one. And this casts me upon the recollection of the words of another which I have greatly enjoyed before now. Speaking of the different scribes, from Moses to John, employed by the Spirit of God for the writing of the Scriptures, he says, "We are far from being unmindful of these human features throughout impressed on the sacred writings. It is with profound gratitude and ever-increasing admiration that we regard this living, actual, dramatic, philanthropic, character which shines with so much power and beauty throughout the Book of God. We have the uncultivated and sublime simplicity of John — the affecting, elliptical, soul-stirring, and argumentative energy of Paul — the fervour and solemnity of Peter — the poetic grandeur of Isaiah — the lyre of David — the ingenious and majestic narratives of Moses — the sententious and royal wisdom of Solomon. Yes, it is all this. It was Peter, Isaiah, Matthew, John, or Moses, but it was God. It is God Who speaks to us; but cast in earthly mould, it is also man. It is man, but it is God also. How greatly does this abounding humanity, and all this personality with which the divinity of Scripture is invested, charm us, reminding us that the Saviour of our souls, Whose touching voice they are, Himself bears a human heart on the throne of God, although seated on high where angels serve and for ever adore Him." And he adds, "Such ought to be the Word of God; like Emmanuel; full of grace and truth; at once in the bosom

of God, and in the heart of man; powerful and sympathizing; celestial and human; exalted yet humble; imposing and familiar; God and man."

I much enjoy this, I own. But I will now add only one other thing, at the close of this short word on Paul's Epistles to the churches.

It is after the pattern of Divine grace from the very beginning, to wait in patience upon man. These epistles are a fuller witness of this. The Spirit of God is waiting on the churches found, as they were, in different forms of error and danger, and seeking to recover, correct, and restore them: just as the hand of God was doing in the earlier days of Israel, as we see in the Book of Judges, and again (with the house of David) in 2 Chronicles; and also, as the Lord Jesus Himself had been doing with His generation in the Gospel by St. Matthew, waiting in patient ministry on the worship of the Lord. And thus it is in these epistles. Evil and error are in the churches; but the Spirit by the apostle admonishes, rebukes, instructs, if haply He may restore. The digging and the dunging again goes on. But there is measure even in the patience of God. Righteousness demands this; and so, in the Second Epistle to Timothy, we may see the house, the great house (in some sense the house of God), a ruined and disowned thing. But "the counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations." The vessel is marred on the wheel in the hand of the Potter; but the Potter, in His sovereign right over the clay, makes another vessel as it hath pleased Him.

Note. — Let me add, lest I should be misunderstood, that when I speak of the apostle being in one epistle as a teacher, in another as a pastor, in another as a prophet, and the like. I merely mean that the inspiration, which filled and guided him in every thought and word, gave him that character on each occasion as was suited to it. He wrote, not as a gifted one merely, but as *inspired*. That I surely know and own.

Romans

At the very opening of this Epistle we are told that what God seeks of the sinner is "the obedience of faith." We might religiously judge that love and its services would be more acceptable to Him. But it is neither conformity with *law* nor the rendering of *love* that God looks for from us as lost sinners, but "the obedience of faith." And when we think of it, this is the only form of obedience that a sinner can render and God accept. He is honoured as a Saviour by our faith, and this gets Him richer glory than any honour we might have rendered by conformity to His statutes as a *Lawgiver*, for it owns and honours Him as He is revealed in the grace of the Gospel, and in obeying Him thus we honour Himself. The early chapters of our Epistle speak to us on this great subject, they deal with faith as it is first awakened in a sinner. And as chapter 1: 5 goes on to tell, this obedience of faith which the sinner receiving the Gospel renders to God, is "for His Name," which surely

intimates how His glory is concerned in it, and that it is the most welcome honour that His Name can receive from a ruined sinner who is being led through that reconciliation which is proclaimed in the Gospel back to Himself. And we further learn from these opening words of our Epistle (verse 17) that this faith so exercised possesses itself of the highest dignity that a creature is capable of, that is, "the righteousness of God." The creature can stand in no dignity more marvellous than this.

It is in this connection that we further learn, in Romans 3: 22-26, that the Object upon which faith thus lays hold to obtain this Divine righteousness is "Jesus" and His "blood." A crucified Saviour is ever the object that faith apprehends, and to Whom it clings. We further learn that "the righteousness of God," in which this believing sinner stands, is found "by faith of Jesus Christ," and is "unto all and upon all them that believe." It is very blessed to know this. If God gets His highest glory from a sinner's faith, that sinner gets from God the highest dignity which it is possible for man to possess. It makes him what he is. It sets him in his due form and personality before God. And faith in the blood of Christ apprehends it. Under the eye of faith, God has set forth a propitiation — a mercy-seat. Faith standing there learns that God is just and yet a justifier. His throne is maintained in righteousness by the blood that is sprinkled there. The death of the Son of God has given to that throne all that it demanded, it has accomplished reconciliation in the way of maintaining righteousness while answering for sin. And thus the blessed God in the Gospel of His grace proclaims that a full satisfaction has been found to meet all His just demands on the sinner. Righteousness had called for judgment upon sin, but grace provides the sinner with a shelter in the blood-stained mercy-seat. And faith uses it. It accepts God's gift. The believing sinner pleads His answer and is saved. And thus it is that faith becomes the first link between God and the soul.

This doctrine exposes and humbles us, for it tells how incurably and irrecoverably bad we are in ourselves and under the law. It "excludes boasting," for while it assures us that we are made "the righteousness of God," that we have the place of "children," with present peace and grace and joy, with possession of the love of God in its measureless fulness, it leaves no room for a sinner to boast, for all is of grace. Thus while it *confers* upon us it also *denies* us. These are some of the great facts taught us in **Romans 1 - 5**. All this displays and glorifies God, while it discerns the moral glories of this precious doctrine of faith. The Gospel presents God in the fulness of His combined grace and righteousness to His entire creation in the highest forms of moral glory. It reveals Him as the doer of all the work and the inheritor of all the glory. And it puts Him thus alike before Jews and Gentiles. For in answer to the question "Is He the God of the Jews only!" the word is, Nay, but of the Gentiles also." This truth of justification by faith is never dealt with as a mere

scholastic proposition. It is the religion of a convicted sinner's personal immediate confidence in God, enjoyed on a title which God Himself has written out for him.

In **Romans 3 - 4** the death of Christ is set forth as accomplishing reconciliation while maintaining righteousness in answering for sin, and the sinner laying hold on this is justified. Romans 5 sets him in peace before God, giving access to a present state of grace and providing a sure hope of glory. It renders a reason why he is able to glory in tribulations on the way; it introduces him to the perfect love of God, and tells of his interest in the present life of Christ beyond death, and it reveals God Himself as the source of his joy.

Romans 6 - 8 tells of the believing sinner's deliverance from sin as master, from the law as husband, and from the *flesh* as the law of his being. In our unregenerate state sin was our master and we his willing bondmen. But death dissolved the bond and set the captive free. For "he that is dead is freed (justified) from sin." The old master has no more claim. We are no longer his servants. This is the wondrous teaching of Romans 6. And in Romans 7 the believer, as one dead and risen with Christ, is freed from the law as husband. For the law addresses itself to those who are alive in the flesh, but the believer having died with Christ is discharged from its claims and is now acted upon by the virtues of Him to Whom in resurrection he is now united. In Romans 8 he is seen "in Christ," where there is no condemnation; freed from the law of sin and death, no longer "in the flesh," but in Christ, with the Spirit of God dwelling in him, living in triumph, "more than conqueror" through Him in Whom he now stands before God. Thus in this Epistle we have the moral glory of the Gospel of God set forth and proved, with its blessed results to faith evidenced in the present condition of all believing sinners.

It is the purpose of this great Epistle, at least in its doctrinal parts, to set forth the excellencies of God's *grace* and of that *faith* in a sinner which apprehends and enjoys the blessings which grace brings.

In **Romans 1 - 8** we see the Divine counsel and way of God set forth, in which ruined sinners are brought back to God and set in peace before Him in closest relationship to Himself all in grace. And the language at the close of this section of the Epistle is a triumph of the conscience in virtue of the *riches of God's grace* and the work of Christ.

In **Romans 9 - 11**, where we are instructed in the counsels and wisdom of God in His dispensational actings, the delighted and instructed understanding of the saints triumph over the *riches of God's wisdom and knowledge*. Thus, whether it be the secret of peace which the blood of Christ has purchased and the relationship which grace bestows, or the glory which grace sets before him, all is of God and all of boundless grace.

1 Corinthians

The saints at Corinth, though richly endowed with knowledge, and though the gifts of the Spirit were exercised abundantly among them, had become "carnal." They were indulging their human mind and tastes. One liked the natural boldness of a certain class of teachers, another admired the softer eloquence of others; they had allowed their natural minds to direct their thoughts and to use their tongues. One was saying, "I am of Paul; another, I am of Apollos." All this was "walking as men" and glorying in the flesh. The apostle accordingly exposes the unprofitableness of the flesh and its worthlessness by several witnesses. First, by the *Scripture*, which says of all its wisdom, "Where is the wise, where is the scribe?" Second, by the *Cross of Christ*, which when apprehended aright shows the end of the flesh. Third, by the *Gospel*, which he had preached among them, which showed that the wisdom of the flesh had been proved "foolishness with God." Fourth, by the materials of *which* God had formed the *Church* at Corinth — "not many wise, not many noble," of the earth had been called. All this these Grecians, with their natural love of learning, had forgotten. The apostle as a preacher had not come among them after this manner. He had not gratified their fleshly tastes either in the matter or the manner of his ministry among them. His message had been "Christ crucified," which is the end of the flesh. His ministry was not in fleshly wisdom, but in the power of the Spirit of God. For this reason men — the princes of the world, — men in their highest refinement and civilisation, had not received the message. All their "glorying in the flesh" was therefore inconsistent with all that they had heard from him as their "father in Christ." They were indulging the spirit of kings in the earth, while he who had begotten them through the Gospel was an outcast, and encountering the opposition of those who had the mind in which they were glorying. In all this they had proved that they were indulging their natural tastes and were "walking as men." They needed to be rebuked and restored to a renewed energy of spiritual life from which they had slipped away. They had become morally relaxed also. If the intellectual part of their nature had been indulged, so their moral sense had been relaxed, as chapter 5 informs us. They were resting at ease while sin was in their camp. Achan was there, but no Joshua had wept. They were allowing evil with no Phinehas to act for God in purifying the congregation. All this was evil: it betrayed a low spiritual state and lack of zeal for God's honour among them. In 1 Cor. 6 they manifest how little they were exercising their functions in the Lord and their faculties in the Spirit, in the judgment of their brethren, though in prospect they were called to judge men and angels. In 1 Cor. 7 they had proposed questions which savoured of an inquisitive and intellectual rather than a spiritual people, which the apostle answers in a manner which tells how little they were conducting themselves as a heavenly people living above the level of the world. He reminds them that "the time is

short," and that "the fashion of the, world passeth away." In 1 Cor. 8 - 10 the apostle charges them with a lack of consideration of others, acting in their own right as people speak, and not according to the principles of grace. They were indulging themselves in what their *knowledge* allowed, without being sufficiently concerned of the claims of love. This was further evidence of a relaxed condition of soul. Knowledge rather than love formed their ways, and this is always a witness of selfish ease and fleshly indulgence, so contrary to the energy of a life in the Spirit. And so in the midst of a solemn exhortation of this subject (1 Cor. 9 - 10) he uses the words, "Wherefore let him that *thinketh*. he standeth, take heed lest he fall." He calls them to renewed watchfulness and energy in the race, by reminding them that though all run, one receiveth the prize," and charges them to "so run" that they may "obtain" and not be "disapproved" through failure in self-discipline. In chapter 1 Cor. 11 the apostle deals with their way of observing the Lord's Supper. Here again they had become relaxed and self-indulgent, walking according to nature, not waiting for each other, but each eating his own supper, one being hungry another drunken; failing to consider what was due unto the Lord. 1 Cor. 12 - 14 tell how, as a Grecian and intellectual people, another matter had become a snare into which they had fallen. Spiritual gifts had become valued according to their measure of attractiveness rather than for their value for edification. They had been using them for a mere display of power and an occasion of rivalry, thus allowing the enemy to pervert their use. "Tongues" were exercised without regard to their real value for godly edifying. All this was evil, it savoured of the flesh, not of the Spirit. In 1 Cor. 15 they are charged with making the mystery of Resurrection a matter for speculative philosophy. Relaxation of soul and indulgence of liberty of the carnal mind evidence themselves in all this, and call forth the rebuke of the apostle and his arousing exhortation to "awake to righteousness" and return to the better knowledge of God, leaving those evil communications which were corrupting them.

In 1 Cor. 16 he calls them to "quit themselves like men" and act in the energy and graciousness of a better mind according to the law of love. And if Grecian superciliousness tempt them to despise Timothy because of his youth and lack of classic teaching, such as they naturally valued, they are warned not to despise him, for he had higher credentials as one who had been diligent in "the work of the Lord" after the apostle's own example. With marked approval he names the "house of Stephanas," whose members had "addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints" in true energy, — a bright exception to the general relaxed condition of the saints at Corinth.

The Epistle as a whole is most valuable, not only in giving us guidance in conditions that may still arise among saints, but as generally showing how jealous the Spirit is that we walk on in spiritual diligence, not according to the flesh or after the way of

the world, but as sanctified ones in Christ, in the confession of His Name as Saviour and Lord.

2 Corinthians

In the midst of the fears and warnings of the Spirit concerning the Churches, we may observe that He is alarmed for them on several and different grounds, as expressed in different epistles and by different apostles.

1. He specially warns them respecting Judaizing, i.e., religiousness, or the observance of rites and ordinances. This fear is expressed in the letters to Galatia, Colosse, and Philippi.

2. He fears for them respecting the working of an infidel mind, the mind which, corrupted by reasoning, denies mysteries. See 1 John 4: 1; 2 Peter 3: 3, 4.

3. He fears for them also on the ground of abusing grace, or licentiousness, the practical denial of godliness while boasting in grace and liberty. This is seen in 2 Peter 2 and in Jude.

4. He fears also worldliness.

It is this last feature of fear filling the mind of the Spirit about the saints or Churches, and shaping apostolic ministry, which has just struck me in connection with 2 Corinthians.

This is a distinct character of fear. It is not an apprehension of religiousness, or infidelity, or licentiousness corrupting the Churches; it is formally distinct from each of these. The Grecian style may have exposed the Corinthians specially to a simple *worldly* attraction, to the pretensions of a man of refinement and station and independence, who had much in the flesh; that is, from nature and from circumstances, that were attractive and showy. This was worldliness.

The fear about Corinth was not respecting religious or Judaizing influence. Neither was it (at least in the second Epistle) from the working of an infidel mind, or from the sports of an unclean and lustful nature, but "the god of this world" was feared by the apostle.

A certain man appears to have gained attention, who had much more both from nature and from circumstances than the apostle; and the saints at Corinth were moved by this. He was, I believe, as modern language speaks, a gentleman. He had a fine person and an independent fortune. He had many advantages of that kind; and the Corinthians were under that evil influence — to some extent they had been beguiled. They were looking on things after the outward appearance. They were suffering a man vaunting of himself, and lording it over them, and taking occasion by some low and worldly advantages he possessed from nature and from circumstances to be somebody.

Such a bad condition the apostle has to contend with. Affection and confidence toward himself had been withdrawn in measure, because he had no such advantages to boast. And surely he was fully purposed not to affect such things at all. It is true, he would be *independent* as well as the other, but it should arise from *his working with his own hand*, not from *advantages of fortune*, as we say. And though he had certain things of which he might boast in the flesh, he would glory rather in his infirmities. He would be "weak in Christ," i.e., in fellowship with Him Who was "crucified in weakness," that all his strength might be spiritual, or resurrection-strength.

The natural advantages which this man had he used, taking to himself the importance and value which attach to such things in the world. And some of the saints were corrupted. But against such association he protests in 2 Cor. 6, "Be ye not unequally yoked," he says. And the manner of this man he exposes more fully, setting his own way forth as contrary to it, in 2 Cor. 10 - 12.

And in doing this, in offering himself as a practical witness of a way different from this man of the world, we may notice these particulars:

1. The apostle refuses to know himself, or to be known by the saints, save according to his *measure in the Spirit*, and not as he was by nature or in the flesh.
2. He glories only in either his *infirmities* or in *such dignities as separated him from all worldly estimation*, as his rapture into paradise; for the world would not understand such honour.

Such an one does the apostle present himself in contradiction of the man who gloried in the flesh. We may know how hard it is to follow him in such a path, in a willingness to be weak that we may be strong; in his decision to know Christ in the weakness of His cross, so that whatever strength he knew might be as of resurrection. (2 Cor. 13: 4)

I dare say some were tempted to undervalue the office or apostleship of Paul, because he had not the advantage in the flesh of other apostles. He had not companied with the Lord in the days of His flesh; and in his own flesh he had a thorn. This may further have exposed him to observation by those who judged after the flesh. But the apostle was willing that his ministry or office should remain *unrecommended by anything the world could appreciate*. He valued only that power of God, that power in the Spirit which accompanied his ministry, and which was fitted to tell on hearts and consciences, power which linked him with the Lord in life or resurrection.*

*These features in Paul's ministry show how the flesh is now excluded, and all its advantages, from the divine Idea of ministry.

Every symptom of weakness in man's account gathered round the blessed Lord in the day of His crucifixion: desertion and denial by those who should have stood

with Him, the enmity of man in every form in which it could have expressed itself, the forsaking of God, all the malice and purpose of Satan. This was the full exhibition of all that was weak, miserable, and despised in the world's account. None were for Jesus, all was against Him, and even *nature* seemed to join. But Paul was willing that his ministry should be in moral sympathy with His.

Generally, as to this Epistle, I would say, it might distribute itself as follows: —

2 Cor. 1 - 2: 13. In this portion the apostle speaks of his trials in the Gospel, and answers objections made to him because of his not having visited Corinth a second time.

2 Cor. 2: 14 — vii. 4. This is a parenthesis. The apostle presents his ministry in several characteristics of it.

2 Cor. 7: 5 - 16. Here the apostle resumes and pursues the point from which he had departed at 2 Cor. 2: 13. He expresses his joy in the Corinthians, and in the grace that was in them.

2 Cor. 8, 9. This is quite incidental.

2 Cor. 10 - 13. The great and leading purpose of the Epistle occupies these chapters. The apostle contemplates the way of a certain injurious teacher who had acquired influence at Corinth, and he intimates the fruit of that influence; largely, also, exhibiting his own way as a teacher in contradiction of him who was then corrupting the saints.

This may be read as a general analysis of the Epistle, I believe.

I might observe, that the apostle's commendation of the Corinthians in 2 Cor. 7, previous to his large and fervent rebuke of them in 2 Cor. 10 - 13, may remind us of the way of the Spirit in His addresses to the seven Churches in the Revelation; for in each of them there is a beginning with a commendation, and then (when called for) an enlarging in the way of rebuke and condemnation.

Galatians

I believe that we might shortly describe this Epistle as thus — the "Scriptures" by the ministry of Paul now, as once by the voice of Sarah, casting the bondwoman and her son out of the house of Abraham.

The apostle, in order to this, first proves his warrant. And this he does to perfection in Gal. 1, 2 — showing that he received his Gospel, purely and immediately, from God Himself, in a way that admitted of no human admixture whatever; and that, under the full conscious authority of a Gospel so received, he had already met the bondwoman and her ways in the person of the Apostle Peter at Antioch, and withstood her — thus making proof of his present ministry on a small scale, so to speak; or, like Samson slaying the lion on his way to this Philistine den in Galatia, when he was to meet a host of them.

And beside this, he makes the experience of their own souls, and the voices of Scripture touching Abraham and the law, his further witnesses. He makes them, as it were seal his authority to do this great work in the name of the Lord. (Gal. 3) And further, he shows that the time was now fully come, when the Lord had ripened all His dispensational actings up to this very point of casting out the bondwoman and her son. (Gal. 4: 1-7.) Nothing could be more perfect than a warrant thus delivered, thus verified, thus sealed, and thus countenanced, if I may so speak, by God's own acts. The apostle, therefore, with full ease, and conscious authority, finds himself in company with Sarah in Genesis 21. As she then knew her right, without leave from her husband or apology to anyone, summarily to demand the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael from the house, so does Paul here. He shows what the modern or mystic Hagar is — that it is the religiousness of mere nature, or a system of observances and ordinances, either imposed or revived by man in the churches of the saints — that formality of days, and months, and times, and years, which genders the spirit of bondage, and hinders the formation of Christ in the soul, and that spirit of liberty which He ever brings with Him. And the expulsion of this Hagar, this bondwoman, from the house of Abraham, or the churches of the saints, he demands with as full, unsparing decision as ever Sarah demanded the casting out of Hagar the Egyptian and her mocking child. (Gal. 4: 8; Gal. 5: 12)

But, if I may so speak, the energy of the apostle even exceeds that of Sarah. And this is but right. It is right that, as we advance in the unfolded ways and thoughts of God, and get from the time of Gen. 21 to the time of Gal. 5, we should find the energies and demands of the Spirit still more wide and more intense also. We often see this. It was written of old, "Thou shalt not forswear thyself"; but it is written at a later period, "Swear not at all."* So here, the demands of Paul are somewhat larger and more intense than those of Sarah had been. She was satisfied with the dismissal of Hagar and the child, but Paul calls together with that for the removal out of the house of all that belonged to them. He will do what he can to get every vestige of their former residence there effaced. He would fain obliterate every remembrance of them — the very customs they once observed there, their habits and modes of living, and the spirit and tempers which they were nourishing and practising, all these he would have to be gone, as well as themselves. He would even purify the place of the very air their breath and presence had diffused. Not merely the religiousness of the flesh would he peremptorily expel the house, the miserable and beggarly elements which kept the soul in bondage, but the works of the flesh also, its moral ways, its boastings and energies. Yea, and its conceits and high-mindedness too — its despite of a poor overtaken soul, through the vain thought of its own security. Against all this, and more than this, he lifts up his more-than-Sarah voice, knowing no stint to the demand, that the bondwoman, with all that belongs to her, as well as her child, shall be turned out of the churches

of the saints, or the modern mystic house of Abraham. And even in addition to this, he would have that house learn and practise the very opposite and contradictory habits — the ways of the Spirit and not of the flesh, the things that become the new creature in Christ, and not what was found inseparable from the flesh. (Gal. 5:13; Gal. 6:10.)

*Just as we all know from abundance of cases, the dispensational purposes of God are gradually disclosed more and more perfectly, so the holy demands of the Spirit are more and more fervent and intense. (See an instance of the first of these in Psalm 8 and 1 Cor. 15)

He then gives us another witness of the importance he attached to all this truth, writing this epistle with his own hand. (See Rom. 16: 22.) For the defence of it demands more vigour than its publication. (Verse 11)

He, in the next place, exposes the moral or the interested purposes of those who were leading them back to circumcision or religiousness, and is bold to present himself as one that knew the power of the opposite principle (see Gal. 1: 4; Gal. 6: 14), with all authority, too, as from God, speaking peace to all who clung to that principle. (Verses 12-17.)

And he closes by a suited valediction. For it is their spirit he commends to the grace of the Lord. (Verse 18.)

Such I judge to be the principal details of this Epistle. And, generally, I may say, there is a tone of peculiar decision and fervency in it. The apostle felt as though the citadel itself were in danger. A standard-bearer at Antioch had already well-nigh fainted. He had come, as it were, fresh from that sight, and he must grasp the banner of the Gospel with fresh vigour because of it, and to step into the breach like a man.

It was a moment of deep interest, and he cannot but be alive to it. And though we are not in commission exactly as he was, entrusted with the truth of the dispensation in a special way (1 Cor, 9: 17), yet we are, as in the train of this great ambassador, to be of one mind with him, and give place by subjection, no, not for an hour, if the mine have been laid again that threatens the citadel.

Ephesians

The mystery of the Church is specially disclosed in the Epistle to the Ephesians. It is there spoken of under two titles, which are exclusively its own. It is "the body of Christ," and "the bride of Christ."

One has strikingly said, "It is not in the heavens above, nor in the earth beneath, nor in angels themselves, bright witnesses as they are of creative power, that the character and ways of God will be manifested in the ages to come: it is in the new, redeemed creation in Christ, in the Church and by the Church, that God's manifold

wisdom will be made known. In the Church, brightest emanation of the Divine mind, masterpiece of God's handiwork, every perfection of light and glory and beauty shall be displayed; otherwise she would be unworthy of her high destiny as the Bride. The depths and heights of the grace and love and power of God will never be known to the heavenly hosts, till they behold the Church, chosen from Adam's ruined and apostate race, not only brought into the closest and sweetest intimacy of sonship to God, but exalted to the highest dignity in heaven, a partaker of the ineffable glory of her risen Head."

Surely these words are good for the use of edifying. But further. In unfolding grace and glory in this Epistle to the Ephesians (which Epistle I would now consider somewhat particularly), we may observe that there is a peculiar accumulation of language, as I may express it, as though the Writer (the Spirit) were conscious of what a theme of peculiar weight and dignity he was treating. We read of "the glory of grace," of "the riches of grace," of "the exceeding riches of grace," of "the praise of His glory," and of "the praise of the glory of His grace." This is the style in which the magnificent secrets of this Epistle are brought out to view. The casket is according to the treasure.

And the sight given of the ascended Lord is in the same style presented to us. It has been observed by another, that St Mark tells us, that our Lord was carried up *into* heaven. The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that He was *carried up through* the heavens. But this Epistle tells us, that He ascended up *far above all heavens*. (Mark 16: 19; Heb. 4: 14; Eph. 4: 10) What a varied, wondrous account of Him! But the Ephesian account is the most magnificent — for it gives the Son of Man the very place which is given to God Himself in Deuteronomy 10: 14.

And this accumulation of language, of which I have spoken, is preserved in the second chapter, where the Spirit comes to look at the objects of this high calling, and not, as before, at the character of the calling itself. He takes knowledge of us sinners in two conditions, *dead* and *alienated*; dead as in ourselves, alienated as from God — and then He sees us translated into the opposite conditions of *life* and *nearness*. But He accumulates language, in treating of these things, as He had done before. Terms are multiplied, descriptions are repeated elaborately, that all these conditions in which we are presented, and each of them separately, may be apprehended with great emphasis by our souls. The death-estate in which we lay by nature was awfully complete; the life-estate into which we are now brought, is thoroughly, eternally perfect. Our condition of distance from God, in which grace found us, is described to have been such that nothing could pass beyond it — our present condition of nearness to Him is such as the Son Himself alone could have enjoyed, so to say, before us.

But further. The characteristic of the Church's blessing is this — that they are *in Christ*. Earlier saints, as we have seen, will be heavenly in their destiny; but the Church's calling is heavenly, *in and with Christ*.

The word "in" abounds there in a remarkable manner — and it is always "in Christ." In the course of the wondrous disclosures there made, we learn that having been quickened together *with Him*, we are now *seated in heavenly places in Him*.

Being thus ascended, we are also taught that, there on high, we are *blest with all blessings* in Him.

And again — we are *accepted* in Him, *the Beloved* — made the objects of personal love, as well as blessed with all spiritual blessings.

And again — in Him God has abounded towards *us in all wisdom and knowledge*, making known to us His thoughts and good pleasure touching ages to come; giving us the place of friends.

Thus is it with us *now*. But this same Scripture looks forward and backward, and shows us the interest we had "in Christ" before the world was, and what we are to have "in Him" when the world has run its course. Ere the world was, we learn that we were "chosen" in Him, and "predestinated" unto the adoption of children. And when the world shall be over, and dispensations have finished the display of themselves, and closed their wondrous story, we learn that we shall be "heirs" in Him and with Him of that great new system, "the world to come," in which all things shall be gathered together under Him as their Head.

This is a great theme indeed — our eternal portion in Christ, our standing in Him, with the counsels that purposed it ere the world was, the high condition and prerogatives in which it now puts us, and the portion which it will convey to us in the ages to come. And all this excellent estate is ours, simply because we now believe or trust in Him.

But that which had been thus "chosen in Christ" from before the foundation of the world, was "hid in God" till revealed by the Spirit to New Testament prophets. And the revelation of it completed the Word of God. (Col. 1: 25.) It was the closing, crowning disclosure, made specially through St. Paul the Apostle of the Gentiles. The Church is called into the highest place of dignity, and the revelation of it is in the last, the latest place in the communications of God. Yes. The *Church* has been revealed the *last*. The Gentile Apostleship has brought it forth. Though chosen in Christ before the world, and hid in God for ages and from ages, it now stands revealed, the crown of all His purposes, as it is the last of all His communications.

In this Epistle to the Ephesians, the sinner has been already rescued by the blood of Jesus. Sins are forgiven — and the saints, thus beyond judgment, are summoned to listen, till the high calling of the Church in Christ Jesus under the exceeding

riches of the grace of God, like the salvation of God at the Red Sea, discloses itself in their hearing. They have but to listen. If they talk of responsibility, this is it; to listen, to accept, to be happy and thankful, because all this is what it is, and the God of all grace is to them what He is. And the Apostle, who teaches them these rich and marvellous secrets, only prays for them, that as they listen, they may have hearts to understand.

His prayers for them, whether in the first or third chapter, give us other samples of that accumulation of language, of which I have already spoken, and which is so expressive of the consciousness of having to deal with themes and thoughts of very peculiar weight and dignity.

As we get in on the fourth chapter, we come into company with something wonderful in its way, like that which we have seen already.

The captivity of man under the hand of the old Serpent, in Genesis 3, was complete. Satan's lie was accepted, man became a sinner, separate from God, and lost: Eden was forfeited, the ground put under a curse, the man and the woman under penalties, and Satan as a liar and a wanderer went about on the face of the earth.

This earliest story of man's captivity is glanced at in Ephesians 4 — as by contrast. The Captor himself with all his host are now made captives (a captive multitude), and by man's Deliverer led in triumph, or made a show of openly, as another kindred Scripture speaks. (Col. 2) But this Deliverer has proved Himself not only mighty after this manner, but glorious. He fills all things. 'He has both descended and ascended — has been in the lower parts of the earth, the grave, the very stronghold of the Captor; and is now far above all heavens. ., And such an One, this Deliverer, mighty and glorious, has taken it upon Him to write the history or secure the fortunes of Satan's old captive. And it is wonderful, as we further read in this chapter. Having wrought the deliverance in the lower parts of the earth, He has now in the highest places, far above all heavens, received gifts for the former victims of the Serpent; and has dispensed them; and through them has endowed them with the richest portions and highest dignities, These endowments have brought the ancient captive of the great enemy to perfection; made him, in a divine, spiritual sense, independent.; given him security against the wiles of the deceiver; and set his resources *within himself*, through the Holy Ghost given to him. (See verses 8-16)

It may surprise us at first to find such a thing as this — the ruins of man in Genesis 3 thus confronted by the recovery of man in Ephesians 4 — the gain and triumph of the old Serpent there, answered and annulled by his shame and overthrow here. But so it is. And surprise may cease, when we remember that the Epistle to the Ephesians, as we have seen, is the most marvellous exhibition of the results of redemption, which Scripture presents to us. We may, therefore, expect to find

Genesis 3 confronted in such an Epistle. It is the special writing on the Church which is "the Body of Christ" and "the Bride of Christ" — the first of these titles telling us that she is set in *the very highest Place of honour*; the second of them telling us that she is set also *in the dearest and most intimate Place of Personal affection and relationship*. She is made, moreover, to the creation of God, to principalities and powers in heavenly places, the great witness, the only adequate witness, of grace, glory, and wisdom; of the exceeding riches of grace, of the praise of glory, and of the manifold resources and secrets of wisdom. She is this — and the revelation of her, again we may remember, has completed or filled out and up to its full measure, the Word of God.

It has been observed by another, that the calling of God of old was either of *individuals*, that they might walk with God; or of a *nation* (as that of Israel), that they might observe the statutes and do the laws of God their King. But now, the calling of God is into a *body*. But though this is so, the individuality of the saint is still contemplated; and the Epistle to the Ephesians keeps this in view, addressing us emphatically in our personal individual places, in chapter 5.

This is suited, seasonable truth, at the close of this wondrous Epistle. And surely we ought to know our personal standing, our own individual perfection, ere we occupy ourselves with the calling of the Church or the Body. Accordingly, in another place, the Apostle lets the saints know, that he would speak of such wisdom, the wisdom of these Divine mysteries, only among them that were perfect. (1 Cor. 2: 6.) And so here, in Ephesians we are individually chosen, predestinated, forgiven, accepted, instructed, sealed (according to Eph. 1); and then, we are prayed for, that we may have that spirit of wisdom and revelation which capacitates us to learn our Church-calling, the strength that is leading us, and the glory that we are to reach: "The Church corporately is composed of individual believers; and while viewed in its corporate character, it has relations to Christ which the believer individually has not — for no believer is the Body of Christ or the Bride of Christ — yet, it is in the affections and conscience of the individual believer, that the relations of the Church to Christ are to be recognized and have their effect."

Surely this is so. Individual saints are first perfected, under the given Spirit, and then the Body is edified — as we have in Ephesians 4: 12. The precepts, which we find from Ephesians 4: 17 to Ephesians 6: 9, address us individually; but the Church-state is assumed or contemplated here and there throughout.

And here, let me say, as to precepts, that the calling itself, the grace in which we stand, might direct us, without precepts. This thought is sanctioned by such passages as Titus 2: 11, 12; and 2 Peter 3: 11, 14. The saints in Genesis act without law or precept. Their calling suggested their duties. "How can I do this great wickedness," said one of them, "and sin against God"? The grace in which New

Testament saints stand might do the same. Still they are called to listen to precepts — as here in this portion of the Epistle to the Ephesians. But the precepts strikingly honour the doctrines. They commonly either refer to, or tacitly assume, the doctrines; and thus, as I may say, they present themselves as so many expressions of the moral virtue which lies hid in the doctrine.

And further. They let us know that holiness must have a dispensational character. It is not simply moral virtue, such as conscience would suggest: it is not legal righteousness, such as the law might demand: nor is it what John Baptist would have prescribed. It is *Christian*. The holiness, or the due character, of a saint, is to derive itself out of the Christian calling. It finds its springs and sanctions in Christian truth. It measures itself by that Word which now addresses itself to us, and which delineates our dispensational place and peculiarity. It is the sanctification of the *truth*, the washing of water by *the Word*, that is looked for. It is this which gives definite character to the morals which God accepts, and which the Spirit works. And this is what is very much neglected or passed by, but which, to be in the light as God is in the light, must be heeded,

But there is still another thing in this Epistle. There is conflict or wrestling. We see the walk of a saint in Eph. 5, his *fight* in Eph. 6. His walk lies through the chequered paths of life, the circumstances and relations which make up human history. His fight is with "the wiles of the devil," or with "spiritual wickedness in heavenly places."

These wicked spirits come forth from heavenly places — and they come with lies and deceivableness of infinite variety. 2 Chr. 18 is a direct witness of this. There, a spirit is seen to come forth from heaven with a lie in his mouth; or with a lie which he puts into the mouth of Ahab's false prophets. And that lie leads Ahab to the fatal battle of Ramoth-gilead,

The Serpent, at the beginning, entered the garden as a liar, and with one of his "wiles" ruined the man. (Gen. 3) Satan, with another of them, tempted David to number the people, and led him to a terrible day of retribution. (1 Chr. 21) This same character of a deceiver is recognized in Rev. 12: 9; Rev. 20: 8. And signs and lying wonders and all deceivableness of unrighteousness are spoken of as the working of Satan in 2 Thess. 2: 9-10.

Thus we have wicked spirits in heavenly places exercising "wiles" here in the midst of us.

These wiles, these lies of "the rulers of the darkness of this world," may be multitudinous, such as, infidel suggestions, perversions of truth, devotional human superstitions, confounding of things which dispensationally differ, false calculations touching the world's progress, and the like. How solemn the thought! But how well to be told of these wiles, and thus to be put in preparation for them.

Distinct instances of these wiles are again noticed in 2 Cor. 2: 11; 2 Cor. 11: 3; 2 Tim. 2: 26.

It is with these wiles we have to wrestle. In other characters (as when he is a liar or a persecutor) we may have to fall under the enemy. For our fight is not with flesh and blood, as was that of a Joshua or a David. God sent them forth to such conflict, having put armour upon them that was suited to meet flesh and blood. But it is in no wise so now. Not one piece of our armour would do for the battle at Ai, or for the day of the valley of Elah. Our enemies are not the Amorites or the Philistines. It is armour fitted to meet the corrupter of the truth, him who ceaseth not to pervert the right ways of the Lord. (Acts 13: 10) It is, the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit.*

*Satan is an *accuser of the Brethren in heaven* (Job 1; Rev. 12) On earth he is an *accuser of God* (Gen. 2), and a *persecutor of saints* (Job 2; Rev. 12) But the Apostle here speaks only of his wiles or deceivings.

The whole age through which we are passing is regarded as "a war," with occasional fights or "evil days" — and therefore the Apostle says to us, "That ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

These "wiles," too, may become "fiery darts." That is: these lies and deceivings which at all times are abroad, may now and again, in some shape or another, be levelled directly and personally at ourselves.

And it is striking to observe what this one Epistle teaches us about these evil principalities and powers. It tells us, that they are *Christ's captives*, the *saint's enemies*, with whom he has to wrestle, and *the rulers of the world's darkness*. (Eph. 4: 8; Eph. 6: 11, 12.)*

*It has been observed by another, that Ephesus is exhibited very specially as having been the scene of those wicked spirits that practise their lies and deceivings. (See Acts 19: 19)

But here I might add (though our Epistle does not suggest it), that the present ruler of the darkness of this world is doomed to take a solemn journey by-and-by. He is to be cast out of heaven where he now is, and act on the earth only. He is then, in season, to be taken from the earth, and put into the bottomless pit. He is then, as taken out of the pit, to be given over to the lake of fire, or his eternal doom. (See Luke 10: 18; Rev. 12, 20)

And this, I may further add, is the very contrary or opposite journey of that of the Lord. The Lord came from the grave as a Conqueror. He had been "death of death and hell's destruction." He returned to the earth, tarrying there for forty days, giving pledges and promises touching His future kingdom here. And then, He ascended to the highest heavens, receiving all power, and sending down the Holy

Ghost to dwell in His saints, and prepare them for Himself in the day of exceeding glory, when He shall be displayed as filling all things — according to this same Epistle.

Here we end, save the very conclusion, which has, however, a character in it that I must notice.

The Apostle speaks of himself as "an ambassador in bonds." What another witness was he, then, at that moment, of the character of the world which he had just recognized as under the rule of the powers of darkness? God's ambassador was put in prison by the world into which He had sent him! Does one nation treat the representative of another in this way? Is not the person of an ambassador sacred?

But man's prisoner is God's freeman; and in the care of thoughtful love, from his prison-house he will send messages of sympathy and comfort and encouragement to his loved brethren hundreds of miles away from him beyond the seas.

Philippians

The Epistle to the Philippians partakes very much of a pastoral character. The link between the Church at Philippi and the apostle was close and tender. He had been with them at the beginning of their spiritual history (Acts 16), and they had continued to communicate with him when he was far distant from them (Phil. 4: 15). They were rich in this peculiar grace and the apostle finds joy in alluding to it, even while he has to warn them against certain symptoms of disunion which he learned were appearing in their midst (Phil. 4: 1-3). He deals with this evil in a manner which expresses his confidence that there was grace among them to overcome it, and this imparts to his way of dealing with it a deeply tender and affectionate tone. And this surely ought to instruct us, that when we see much of the grace of Christ in any fellow-saint we should give him due credit for this, and administer whatever correction or rebuke we believe to be needful in the light of it.

There is no strict order of doctrinal teaching in this Epistle, yet much that is of great value to the saints in displaying the energies of the life of which they were already possessors in Christ (Phil. 1), in setting before them the perfect pattern of that life in the example of the Lord while here among men (Phil. 2), the progress and goal of one in whom that life was acting in full strength and energy (Phil. 3), and the finding in Christ all that the heart seeks of peace and power (Phil. 4), in a world where everything tends to harass the soul.

The saints are here seen in the midst of a "crooked and perverse nation," taking their journey in company with the God of all grace, Who supplies their every need. There are adversaries, and death itself may end their course, but all is well. To live is Christ and to die is gain. The journey may be long or short, but the end is

blessed. "Salvation" throughout the Epistle is the full and final deliverance from all evil with a triumphant entrance to that glory into which Christ has already entered. The lowly mind and gracious affections which characterize those whose eyes are upon the perfect example of the humiliation, surrender and subjection witnessed in the Lord are beautifully set forth in Timotheus and Epaphroditus in Phil. 2. The energy that comes from a contemplation of Christ in glory enabling the saint to count all here as dross is seen in Phil. 3.

The resurrection to which Paul looked forward was a resurrection after the manner of the Lord's own. It had qualities peculiar to itself surely. It was a resurrection *from* the dead, victorious over death. He had the power of it in Himself or by virtue of what He was. He was the First-fruits of a harvest which in due time would follow after its kind. His people, unlike Him Who by this title of First-fruits pledges to them a share in His triumph, have no virtue of it in themselves as He had: it is conferred upon them in infinite grace, they share in its triumph because they "are Christ's." Yet blessed it surely is to know that theirs will be resurrection *from* or out of the dead as was that of their Lord — a victorious resurrection. This was the apostle's goal, and toward it he pressed on. His eye was on the distant joys, and for them he cast all aside, reaching forth toward them. And heavenly too is the citizenship of the saint. His inheritance is there in the place to which his call had been when he was laid hold of by the Lord in glory. His hope also is there. He looks for the Saviour, Who is the Object of his heart, Who will accomplish by His hand that for which He had in grace been forming the heart of His saint and servant to seek after — to be like and with Himself for ever.

Colossians

The saints at Colosse had begun well, and their progress had been good, but they were in danger of being led aside by the entrance of Judaizing doctrines and Gentile philosophies from the living Lord and the walk that results from the soul's occupation with Him. The apostle unfolds to them in rich and varied forms the fulness and sufficiency of Christ which is the Divine corrective of such evil. In this Epistle the apostle tells that the special ministry given to him was to "fulfil the Word of God" (Col. 1: 26). To "fill out" the revelation of God. To him it was given to reveal by his ministry the highest of the heavenly mysteries. The revelation of God shines brighter as the progress of the dispensations proceed. Here Christ is seen as Head and Fulness of His body the Church, composed of an out-calling from Jews and Gentiles, to become fellow-members of Christ and fellow-heirs of glory. These had been bosom secrets of God from the beginning, the deepest of all His counsels of grace, but they are now told out. This consummation gave special character to Paul's ministry. He was a minister of the Gospel and also of the Church (Col. 1: 23-25), and this is God's last and highest revelation, the richest in all the counsels of

His grace. As Eve was the last of all God's wondrous handiwork in the first creation, so the woman here, the complement of the man (Eph. 1: 23), is the crown of all His work in grace, as the Bride of Rev. 21 will be in glory. And this variegated grace in all its riches is now manifested before principalities and powers in heavenly places, who hear in silent wonder the story of that grace that this outcalling of the Church is now rehearsing.

Col. 1. The glories of Christ shine in all their fulness here. He is pre-eminent everywhere. His Headship and fulness stand prominent, and to these the saints who compose this body, the Church, are especially directed.

Col. 2 tells how the power of the Cross has met everything, that the saint is as one dead, and is thus delivered out of that sphere in which sin and the flesh had their dominion. They are not therefore to (by subjecting themselves to ordinances) make themselves as men still living in the world (verse 20). The "increase of God," which is the source of their nourishment (verse 19), is heavenly and not of earth's philosophies; it is spiritual, not of carnal ordinances and Christ is in them the hope of glory.

Col. 3 tells of a people raised with Christ, Who is Head and character of a new creation. As such they are to seek things above, and their conduct is to be according to their calling, which provides the power for such a path. The precepts of this chapter bear their witness to their heavenly calling and character of the saints, for they express the moral virtue that is in the doctrine, so that they glorify it. The boldness that is to mark the way of the saints is to be according to the heavenly position: it is to be boldness suited to the dispensation. In former times it would have been defilement for a Jew to eat with a Gentile, now all are one in Christ, and the one Spirit from Whom all fruit is derived pervades all.

Col. 4. Earthly relations as well as the springs of moral conduct are all to be purified and governed, by these heavenly truths dwelling and operating in the saints. The servant renders his service to the Lord and the master finds his pattern and example in his "Master in heaven." All this is in honour of the doctrine of the Epistle, and in the hands of the Spirit are the expression of its moral virtue.

1 and 2 Thessalonians

The apostle's first entrance to Thessalonica is recorded in Acts 17, where, as the result of his Gospel ministry, a people are found gathered as a Church in the assurance of God's salvation, and to the hope of the return of His Son from heaven (1 Thess. 1: 9). In the midst of many trials and persecutions they were serving the living and true God, to Whom they had turned from idols, and the report of their faith had gone forth through all that region. But having been forced suddenly away from this newly-planted Church by the enmity and opposition of the Jews, he manifests a special concern for them, and as a true pastor his heart is much moved

toward them. Timothy had been sent to comfort them concerning their faith (1 Thess. 3: 2), and to strengthen them against the wiles of the tempter who was seeking to alarm and seduce them from the truth. With little to help and much to test them, they seem to have fallen under the power of two misapprehensions of the truth as taught by the apostle, one concerning their brethren who had fallen asleep, and the other concerning themselves who were alive. The former is especially dealt with in the first Epistle, the latter in the second. The return of Timothy to the apostle, brought the intelligence of their fears regarding those who had fallen asleep, that they might miss the joys awaiting those who would be found alive and waiting at the coming of the Son from heaven. To remove this anxiety and to impart a fuller revelation on the subject, the apostle writes to inform them that all the saints, whether sleeping or alive, would share the triumph of that day, and be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air (2 Thess. 4: 13-18), and to be with Him where He is.

The Second Epistle was drawn from him to remove another anxiety which had arisen among them touching the living saints, either from an imperfect, understanding of his first Epistle or from false suggestions or misrepresentations made by others. They feared that the saints living on earth when the "day of the Lord" was present would be involved in its judgments which the Scriptures inform us will characterise that period. To this the second Epistle makes reply by telling them that the day of the Lord could not come until the "man of sin" is revealed and the full apostasy from the truth is manifested (2 Thess. 2: 1-10). The distinction between the coming of the Son of God to the air with a shout for His people, to bring all, dead and living, of this heavenly household to His Father's house, and His return with them "in flaming fire" (2 Thess. 1: 7), as Son of Man and Minister of God's righteous wrath upon the world of the ungodly. These are the main subjects of these precious Epistles, with much to quicken faith and sustain hope while God's long-suffering lingers and the Gospel goes forth, bringing into the garner its sheaves for the heavenly harvest, with solemn warnings to saints as to watchfulness and walk, while the already working leaven of the coming apostasy is all around them.

The Pastoral Epistles

The Epistles to Timothy and Titus, while written to individual servants of Christ, have a special value to us of these times, in setting forth the character and principles of true service in the Church of God. For whatever changes time has wrought, the counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations. The Spirit here gives His counsels to furnish those who serve in God's house, into which disorders and dangers were, even at this early time, advancing. Here are truths to preserve those whose feet are in the path, and to correct and

recover such as have departed from it. There are errors and evils, but the Spirit by the apostle here admonishes and rebukes in order that He may restore, while He watches in patience. But if His instructions and admonitions are unheeded, the Lord may deal in chastisement as well as rebuke (Rev. 3: 19) with those who are still the objects of His love.

1 Timothy

In 1 Tim. 1 the apostle is very earnest in magnifying the grace of God. Salvation is said to be all of this. He writes of God as Saviour and Christ Jesus our hope. The honours of each of the Persons of the Godhead he knew well how to maintain in their due place. Here it is God revealing Himself as Saviour, and this revelation of God is here associated with the blessing of the creature. The soul that receives His salvation as made known in the Gospel is blessed, but where refused that soul is unblessed: it is "without God" (Eph. 2: 12), and will be judged as one who knows Him not (2 Thess. 1: 9).

In verses 8-10 the apostle turns to the law and its use. It is not for salvation: its place is not in the Church, but outside in the world, there doing its appointed work. And the saint who is within, looks out from the place of security upon the evil and sees the law at work among those who are named as acting in contrariety to the Gospel of the blessed God. The apostle — thus declares the law to be "good" and doing a needed work in its own sphere, but when he turns to the Gospel his heart bums, and his spirit breaks forth over it as "the glorious Gospel of the blessed" — or as it is in the original "the happy God." It is as Giver that God is presented in the Gospel, and it gladdens His heart to give, for it was of the mind and heart of God that the Lord Jesus spake when He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

In verses 12-16, he magnifies the mercy that met him in his guilt as an ignorant and insolent sinner, — as in Phil. 3 he had disclaimed all trust in his own righteousness and in the fleshly advantages he had acquired, — his salvation being all of grace and his righteousness in Christ alone. In verse 17, he looks into the distant future and seems to catch a glimpse of the inbringing of his own nation — of whose conversion his own was the pattern — and as he sees them brought in, his spirit breaks forth in a beautiful doxology, "Now unto the *King* Eternal," — not now only "God our Saviour," but as King on His rightful throne reigning. It is good for the soul to follow on in such a blessed path, beginning with grace and ending in glory.

1 Tim. 2. The way into the house having been made clear in chapter 1, the ordering of that house and the occupations of those who are in it follow here, for it is after we reach the inside that we breathe its atmosphere and learn our responsibilities to others who are there. First, it is acceptable as well as comely with "God our Saviour" to pray for "all men," for it is the will of God that all should be saved. And

there is one Mediator — not for the Jew alone, but for all — "between God and men," whose ransom avails for all. Then the woman is set forth as a figure of the Church in her subjection to Christ as Lord, learning in all subjection and ordering herself becomingly in this position.

1 Tim. 3 gives the character and order of all service in this house of God, for where the habitation of God is, all must be according to His mind, for even redeemed man is not left to determine his ways as a worshipper or a servant. All is provided for by the Owner of the house. Willingness in worship is always right and acceptable to God, but wilfulness He will not suffer (Lev. 10: 1, 2; 1 Cor. 11: 28-32). The last verse of this chapter sets forth the "mystery of godliness," God manifest in the flesh, — in His mission to our earth to form a link with a redeemed and called people whom He might draw up after Him to His glory. "justified in spirit" tells of that which belonged to Christ alone. He was personally pure and spotless, but we can only be justified by His blood (Rom. 5: 9). "Seen of angels." What a sight for them to look on and learn (1 Peter 1: 12), but they could but gaze. We are the subjects of His redeeming work, and our interests are bound up with it and with Him, as now "received up into glory."

1 Tim. 4 - 6. Here, grave departures from the faith in its purity, and from godliness in its integrity and simplicity, are foreseen and provided for. In some it is by giving heed to "seducing spirits" (1 Tim. 1) who seek to corrupt the truth, and in others by the perverse teachings of men of corrupt minds who are destitute of the truth altogether (1 Tim. 6: 5). Amid these pravities, the saint is called to walk in purity, keeping that which he has from God (the doctrine which is according to godliness), living unspotted and unrebukable, in view of the appearing of the Lord (1 Tim. 6: 14), Who will fully estimate the worth of such service and reward it accordingly.

2 Timothy

In the time of the active labours of the apostle, "the mystery of iniquity" (2 Thess. 2: 7), and the leaven of evil doctrine which had been introduced (Gal. 5: 9) secretly at an early period, were already manifesting to his anointed eye the varied forms of corruption which were to spread themselves abroad. It is to instruct and guard Timothy in the midst of these, that his second Epistle is written. He deals especially with the features of "the last days" (2 Tim. 3: 1), and warns Timothy as if he were already in the midst of them. This has a special value to all who walk amid the fully-developed corruptions now spread throughout Christendom. The opening words are very affecting, full of personal affection. Timothy was his true child in the Gospel. He had been his faithful co-worker too, as a son with a father (Phil. 2: 19-22), and was now standing as a witness for God and the truth amid abounding corruptions. The heart of the apostle goes forth in great warmth toward his "dearly beloved son." He had not allowed his personal sorrow, nor the disappointments

which had come from the Churches whose welfare he carried as a care upon his heart daily, to shut itself up. No indeed. His affection was as great and earnest as before, and if he cannot spend it over those who in earlier years had claimed it, he will let it flow toward this true labourer for God.

There may have been the temptation with Timothy to despond, to regard all as hopeless. It is a common temptation in a day of relaxation. But Timothy is not to yield to this. He has a gift from God, and he is to stir it up for use, doing what service he can in the midst of existing conditions. He had the example of the apostle and the full expression of his confidence in that faith of which he was the steward, and of the Lord's testimony he was not to be ashamed come what may.

In 2 Tim. 2 he proceeds to encourage and arm him for his service and conflict. He had already read to him in 2 Tim. 1 his title to confidence in the power that would preserve him and bring all to final victory in the day of His power and glory, even as at His resurrection He had abolished death and brought life and immortality to light. Here in 2 Tim. 2: 1, he is to be "strong in grace" and at the same time to accustom himself to "endure hardship" as a soldier on service, and to go on labouring in patience and in hope, not expecting to see the full fruitage until the day of harvest, remembering that the Lord as David's Seed received His reward in resurrection, a truth which the teaching of Hymenaeus and Philetus denied. For if "the resurrection was past already," then the "form of godliness" might well be the religion of a corrupt church which had embraced the world. It was a time of religious corruption and of man's infidelity and independency, casting off all fear of God and reverence of His Word to do his own will and walk in his own path. In the midst of these conditions, it remained for Timothy to "study," to show himself as one approved of God, "rightly dividing the Word of truth." He was to hold fast to the doctrine which he had learned and to make full use of the Holy Scriptures which he had known since his childhood and proved in his salvation, and which were sufficient to furnish him in all his service. It only remained for the apostle, now at the end of his course, with the crown full in view, awaiting martyrdom, to give his last counsels with due solemnity and set his hope on view of the coming day of recompense before God's servant and steward with a fine closing testimony to the Lord's faithfulness which had continued toward him to the end.

Titus

In this brief Epistle, the order and ministries of the house of God, with the moral characteristics becoming all who belong to it, are set in due place. This outward form was derived from the Holy Ghost, whose presence was also its power. It is a happy thing when form and *power* are thus found together, and when the in-working of the Spirit in the Church gives it its outward form ordered by the "truth which is according to godliness" as the apostle here speaks. When these things

become separated, the outward *form* will in the eyes of some be held in honour with little of the power which ought to accompany it. The "spirit of love and of power and of a sound mind" will preserve from this. And yet the doors of this house of God are to be jealously guarded, its avenues kept clean, and its order and ministries regulated according to the will of Him Who dwells therein. If any of the guests in this house of the Lord act contrary to the law or holiness of the house, they must be dealt with, for all must be according to the mind of the Lord of the house. Each servant is to know his own proper service under the distribution or gift he has received, and use all for the edification and help of fellow members of the household.

Hebrews

In this Epistle, the Spirit opens the heavens and shows us Christ ascended and seated on the right hand of the throne of God. It is the great witness of God's acceptance of Christ. It sets forth this fact, establishing it — as it were in the mouth of many great and august witnesses. Other and earlier testimonies had been borne to this in the rent veil at the moment of His death and in His resurrection from the tomb and the gift of the Holy Ghost, which followed in their seasons. Here the Spirit gives His crowning testimony to His acceptance in heaven in such characters as answer our necessities. He displaces as it were one after another to show the superiority of Christ and to display the varied glories that He bears as glorified there.

In **Hebrews 1 and 2** the Spirit displaces prophets and angels to let in Christ. In **Hebrews 3 and 4** He displaces Moses and Joshua, and in **Hebrews 5 and 6** Aaron. In **Hebrews 8 and 9** the old covenant and the former sanctuary, with its services are set aside, to bring in His sacrifice and its abiding value for His people. And having thus introduced Him, the Spirit fixes our gaze upon Him there for ever, for He has no successor.

In **Hebrews 1** He is seen seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high as the Purger of our sins, and as the Heir of all, and His inheritance is seen as already standing in the power of redemption, shared by Him with His joint-heirs who are, as Hebrews 2: 10 assures us, being led on by Him to His glory in which they are to share. As Redeemer, He had charged Himself with their burdens, and now He leads them on, charging Himself with their blessings, having respect to them in all their ways, until they are brought to the sharing of the inheritance as joint heirs with Himself, to sit with Him in the sovereignty of all things in the world to come as chapter 2: 10 speaks. And His people have already been "made meet" (Col. 1: 12) to share that inheritance by Himself as their "Sanctifier" (Heb. 2: 11). In all His glories they are seen with Him, from first to last. They are henceforth seen as joint-heirs with Him in every character and glory that He bears.

In **Hebrews 3** he is shown as the Apostle speaking to us from God, of whom Moses was the type (Deut. 34: 10). He was distinguished from all other prophets by God speaking to him face to face, and having access to all His house as a servant. But the "Son" is in fullest and deepest intimacy with all His counsels, and has the most perfect fellowship with Him in all His works and ways in heavenly and earthly things. He is the owner of an abiding house, the giver of an eternal rest, and a High Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. He is in the sanctuary above to transact the business of His people for ever, for His priesthood is established in the power of an endless life.

His sacrifice (**Heb. 9 - 10**) is seen to be of eternal value, and being so, it brings perfection to the worshippers and sets them for ever in the presence of God. In Hebrews 12 He is received and seated in heaven as the Author and Finisher of faith. Thus one after another is superseded by Christ, and having introduced Him the Spirit closes His delightful task by leaving Him before us, fixing our gaze upon Him as One to continue before our souls for ever, — "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today, and for ever."

