

The Christians Pathway

Or, "Upward and Onward"

By John MacDuff, 1858

CHOICE EXCERPTS

INTRODUCTION

Those who are anxious to progress in the divine life, will not neglect the more *private* exercises of piety, without which those of the *sanctuary* will be in a great measure ineffectual. *Prayer* is the believer's vital breath; the *scriptures* are his spiritual food; and it is only as the study of their sacred truths is combined with fervent supplication for every promised grace, that his course will correspond with the beautiful representation, in which the path of the just is compared to the *shining light*—which shines more and more unto the perfect day.

To aid the Christian in his *secret devotions*, is the object of this small volume. The writer humbly trusts that it will especially be of some service to him while engaged in the pleasing and important duty of meditating upon the divine testimonies. It is his sincere prayer that the perusal of these daily portions may be accompanied with a blessing from on high, so that, like the whole of the inspired volume from which they are taken, they might prove "profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

1. The Important Command

"Speak unto the children of Israel—that they go *forward*." Exodus 14:15

To *enter* upon the way of life is one thing; to *advance* therein is quite another thing. It is to be feared that many are satisfied if they have some grounds for hoping that the good work has been *commenced* within them; but such need to be reminded that one of the most conclusive evidences of a change of heart, is an ardent desire after an increased measure of spiritual prosperity. No true Christian can be satisfied with his present attainments; his great concern will be to press *onward* toward the mark for the prize of his high calling in Christ Jesus. If we would realize the true blessedness of a pious life—it is indispensable that we "go forward."

The inhabitants of a certain country, we will suppose, are in a very woeful plight, suffering the greatest distress, and also exposed to the most imminent danger. They are told of another land in which, as soon as they stand upon its shores, they will be safe; and that if they only travel onward—they will meet with the richest treasures, and an abundant supply of all that can minister to their happiness. They set out on their voyage there, and at length they reach it in safety. But, after having just entered upon its borders, and feeling that they are now delivered from the dangers to which they had previously been exposed, they settle down, satisfied with their present lot, and feeling thankful for it. By remaining, however, where they are, instead of pushing their way into the heart of the country, they continue to be strangers in a great measure to its teeming fertility.

So it is with many, in reference to their spiritual interests. They have been brought to see the danger of the *state of nature*, and they have felt deeply concerned about being delivered from it. Another state, that of *grace* and *salvation*, has been set before them in the gospel, which they hope they have reached. But how many, having just reached it, remain towards its outskirts, almost entirely ignorant of what is to be found farther on. They trust that they have passed the gulf of separation which divides the city of destruction from the haven of security and peace; but that is all. Of the fatness of the land on

which they have entered, little or nothing do they know.

How important then is the command, "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." Such, reader, is the word of exhortation we would now address to you. *Go forward*, and the prospect will brighten, the air will become more balmy, and the sky more clear and cloudless every step you take. *Go forward*, and the soil will become increasingly fertile; instead of roaming amid sandy waste-lands and rocky crags, you will find green pastures in which you shall lie down, and still waters beside which you shall be led like the Psalmist of old. *Go forward*, and you will possess a land of wealth unknown, and you shall enjoy therein a goodly heritage indeed!

Whatever progress we have made in the divine life, our duty is still to press onward. To the most advanced believer it can be said, "There remains very much land to be possessed!" Let our motto, then, be, "*Farther, farther yet!*" and may we only regard our past successes, as incentives to renewed exertion!

2. The Promised Presence

"Don't be afraid, for *I am with you*. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my victorious right hand." Isaiah 41:10

The *Divine presence* is the believer's strength in weakness—his support in suffering—his consolation in the hour of death. The blessed assurance, "I am with you," is sufficient to enliven every scene and sweeten every condition. Its realization opens springs of joy in the cheerless waste of this desert world; it dissipates the thickest darkness, soothes the anguish of the keenest affliction, and lightens the heaviest load of poverty and distress.

One of the last promises which the Savior gave to His disciples was, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." He had just given them the great commission to go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature—an enterprise difficult and dangerous in the extreme. The whole world frowned upon them; they had to encounter the combined prejudices of the Jew and Greek, of the savage and civilized. But it soon became evident that greater was He who was with them, than all those who were against them. Through Him who had spoiled principalities and triumphed over them, they waxed valiant in fight, and went forth conquering and to conquer. O what a spirit did they manifest, and what wonders did they perform! All opposition they trampled under their feet. All secular power and policy they defeated. All the wit, and learning, and eloquence which stood in their way, was baffled by them. In persecutions, and reproaches, and necessities, they took pleasure. To forsake and forfeit all they had, they regarded as *gain*. To be in constant labor and travail was their ease. To incur disgrace was their highest glory. Prisons were converted by them into palaces in which they sang, even in the dead of night, the high praises of their God and Savior. And whence this superiority to suffering? whence this moral elevation above all the ills of life? whence this triumphing in tribulation, and rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God? It was derived from the presence of their adorable Lord and Master! Having Him by their side they were strangers to fear, and they went forth, unarmed, unpatronized—to upset the kingdom of darkness, and subdue the world to the obedience of Christ!

And to all His people now, especially when they have any arduous duties to discharge, the same promise is given. When entering upon any responsible undertaking, the believer, deeply conscious of his own incompetency, is often filled with trembling. But listen, Christian, to what the voice from the excellent glory proclaims—"Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with

My victorious right hand." Should you not then "thank God, and take courage!"

3. Divine Recognition

"I have set the Lord always before me: because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." Psalm 16:8

It is a very solemn and emphatic statement which is made by the apostle Paul, when he says in one of his epistles—"Having no hope, and without God in the world." This is the state not merely of those in Pagan lands, whose understanding is darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the blindness of their hearts—but of all the unregenerate, without any exception of rank or character. There is a dreadful spirit of atheism pervading the minds of the great mass of mankind. Follow them wherever they go, and the conviction is forced upon every impartial observer, that this is their true condition. Upon all their feelings and sentiments, all their purposes and pursuits, all their dealings in public, and all their social fellowship in private, may be inscribed, "*Without God in the world.*" They have no sense of the divine presence; no realizing impression of Him, in whom they live, and move, and have their being. They live as if they were indeed the inhabitants of a forsaken and fatherless world; as if it were the result of mere *accident*, and that whatever transpires, whether in the history of nations or individuals, had no other cause than that of *blind, unaccountable chance*. Were the wretched dogma of the atheist demonstrated to be true, they could hardly exclude all sense of Deity more completely from their minds than is done by them at present.

With the pious Psalmist it was quite the reverse. He realized the presence of God continually; he felt that He was ever near, encompassing his path and his lying down, and besetting him behind and before. He endured, like Moses, as seeing Him who is invisible. If he looked up to the heavens, he saw Him there; if he

surveyed the earth, he found Him there; if he retired into the secrecies of his own bosom, he felt Him there. God was emphatically in all his thoughts. And those thoughts were not a source of pain to him—but of the highest and purest pleasure. They were the congenial atmosphere of his spiritual being. They were the moral element which his soul inhaled, and by which he was invigorated, refreshed, and comforted.

Reader, do you know what it is to have a habitual sense of the presence of God? Is the desire of your soul to His name, and to the remembrance of Him? Is it your grief that you are living so far from Him; that you do think so little of Him; and that you have no more to do with Him? O, be anxious to possess an abiding consciousness of the great truth—that the eye of God is ever upon you! "You, God, see me," was the solemn—yet sweet and supporting conviction of Hagar; and may you realize the same devout feeling. Wherever you are, and whatever you are doing—set the Lord always before you. Having Him at your right hand, whatever difficulties and dangers may surround your path—you shall not be moved.

4. The Voice from Heaven

"Say to the righteous, that it shall be well with him."
Isaiah 3:10.

The human family is divided into a great variety of social and artificial distinctions. The various grades of which society is at present composed are, doubtless, necessary; it is evident that they are of divine appointment, and flow from the circumstances and relations in which mankind are now placed. But, in the sight of God—there are but two classes, into which the multifarious elements of universal humanity can be resolved. There are only the righteous and the wicked; those who serve God, and those who serve Him not. Concerning one of these classes the voice from heaven proclaims that it shall be well with them; while above the other it pronounces a solemn woe,

and they are assured that recompense shall be given to them.

That it shall be well with the righteous appears from many considerations. He is reconciled to God, and has peace with Him, through our Lord Jesus Christ. In their natural state—all men are God's enemies; the carnal mind is enmity against God; with such, therefore, it must bode dreadful. What makes the condition of a wicked man to be so fearful, is the solemn fact that *God is against him!* And what makes that of the righteous to be so blessed, is that *God is for him!* "If God is for us, who can be against us." All the divine attributes are arrayed against the impenitent sinner—but when he becomes a saint, they all join to take his part. Such being the case, having the eternal Jehovah in all his boundless perfections on his side, it cannot be otherwise than well with him.

It shall be well with the righteous, not merely in life—but in death. It is appointed, by the irrevocable decree of heaven—that all men must die. There is no discharge in that war, no release from that mortal struggle. *Wealth* has no bribe which death will receive; *wisdom* has no art by which it can be avoided; *power* has no defense, and even *religion* has no security from its stroke. *Beauty* has no charm to its eye; the voice of *eloquence* is lost to its ear. Here the mightiest conqueror is vanquished, and the proudest of monarchs finds himself a slave. *From its ruthless grasp*—no age, no condition can escape. Those who are in the bloom and freshness of youth cannot, for "man, at his best estate, is altogether vanity." The great and prosperous cannot, for "the rich man also died and was buried." The wicked cannot; he is *driven, yes, dragged* away in his wickedness; the most fearful of all deaths is his—that of dying in his sins. Neither can the righteous escape; he must go the way of all the earth, and become a tenant of the silent grave.

But, at that solemn season, it shall be well with him. When the last sands of the numbered hour will be

running out; when his earthly friends will be compelled to leave him; when the cold dews of death will be standing in large drops upon his pallid brow; when every nerve and vein may be racked and wrenched in fearful agonies by *the irresistible power of the grim tyrant*; even then it shall be well with him. The dying strife will soon be over, and through death's gloomy portals, he will enter upon that blessed state where all is peace and assurance forever.

O, my soul, seriously ask yourself the question, what is my spiritual state and character? Am I one of the righteous, who is reconciled to God by the death of His Son, and who seek to walk before him in all well-pleasing? Do I know of the blessedness of the man whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sins are covered?

"If sin be pardoned, I'm secure,
Death has no sting beside;
The law gives sin its damning power,
But Christ, my ransom, died!"

Very soon will the solemn summons be issued; even now the Judge stands at the door; and when the midnight cry is heard, "Behold the bridegroom comes, go out to meet him!" shall I be found among those who are ready to enter into the marriage supper of the Lamb? Of one thing let us be well assured—that it is only as we are clothed in that righteousness which is unto all and upon all those who believe; that it is only as we are covered with the wedding garment—that spotless, stainless, seamless robe, which alone can hide our spiritual deformity—that we shall be acknowledged as those who are worthy to have an inheritance among them that are sanctified.

"Blessed Jesus! this is my petition and this is my request, that I may be found in You, not having my own righteousness, which at best is only filthy rags. Make me righteous through Your righteousness, and lovely through Your loveliness. Being found by You in peace, without spot and blameless, I shall be able to

lift up my head amid the groans of dissolving nature, and, leaving a weltering world on fire, I shall mount aloft, shouting with all your saints—*Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.*"

5. The Mystical Union

"Which is *Christ in you*, the hope of glory." Colossians 1:27

The believer's present and everlasting well-being, is secured in virtue of his union with the Lord Jesus. If Christ is in him—no evil can befall him; he can welcome the greatest sorrows and sufferings; he can triumph in tribulations, and rejoice in anticipation of the glory to be revealed. If Christ is in him—he can say to *Satan*, "Do your utmost; exert all your hellish rage; I fear you not!" If Christ is in him, he can say to *death*, "Come, you messenger of my Father's love; your stroke I cannot escape—but your sting being extracted, I am not dismayed!" If Christ is in him—all will be well, in sickness and in health, in prosperity and in adversity, in time and throughout eternity.

"My beloved is mine—and I am his," is the language of the Christian in the book of Canticles. How great is the blessedness involved, in such an assurance! My beloved is mine—mine in the dignity of His person—in the suitability of His offices—in the immensity of His love—in the efficacy of His atonement—in the riches of His abounding grace! His *righteousness* is mine to justify me, His *Spirit* is mine to sanctify me, His *power* is mine to defend me, His *wisdom* is mine to guide me, and His *heaven* is mine to receive me!

And what does Christ say to the believer in return? In the language of the king of Israel to the king of Syria, he says, "I am yours—and all that I have. I have boundless and unsearchable *riches*—and those riches are for you! I have *happiness* to bestow, such as the

mind in its largest grasp has never been able to conceive—and that happiness is for you! I have crowns and scepters at my disposal—and all those dignities are for you! Yes, to him who overcomes, I will grant to sit with me on *My* throne, even as I also overcame, and have sat down with my Father on His throne."

The Christian's exaltation and bliss is a matter of no doubtful disputation. And what makes it so certain? It is the blessed truth that the union which subsists between him and the Great Head—is an indissoluble union! All other connections, however close and endearing, can be broken. That union of husband and wife, and soul and body—has no power to resist the assault of the great destroyer. But hear what the voice from heaven proclaims: "Blessed are the dead who *die in* the Lord!" Not merely did they *live* in Him—but they *die* in Him; the union remains undisturbed!

When writing to a friend, it is a common custom to close with the words "Yours until death," for all earthly ties must then be severed. But death, which breaks every other bond, only strengthens the one of which we are speaking. Death, which quenches every other love, kindles that of the believer for Jesus—into a purer and intenser flame! Death, which snatches every other object from our grasp, brings us to the full enjoyment of Him, who is the fountain of life, the great center and source of all being and of all blessedness.

Christian, rejoice in your union with Jesus! The *changes of time* cannot touch it; the *storms of life* cannot injure it; the *sword of persecution* cannot sever it; the *damps of death* cannot affect it; the *malice of hell* cannot move it. It is a union which will last forever. It follows, therefore, that you, if a partaker of it—will be *rich* forever, *safe* forever, *dignified* forever, and *blessed* forever!

6. Serving the Lord

"Lord, what will you have me to do?" Acts 9:6.

To prove the sincerity of our love to the Lord Jesus is something vitally important. Such as we are, as regards our feelings towards Him—that we are as to our acceptance at the high court of heaven. Without love to Christ, we cannot be the friends of Christ; and if we are not His friends, we are enemies to Him by wicked works, and the day is coming when it will be said in a voice louder than ten thousand thunders, "Those my enemies, who would not have Me *reign* over them—bring them here, and slay them before me!"

It is by obedience to His commands, and a spirit of consecration to His service—that we are to show that we are His true friends and followers. "If you love me—keep my commandments." In reference to *all* His commands, we should seek to possess a spirit of cheerful, unreserved, and universal compliance. When He calls, our language should be, "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears!" Should He bid us depart, even to earth's remotest bounds, this should be our instant reply, "Here am I; send me!" Were He even to demand our lives as an offering; if He required our heart's blood to be poured as a libation at His feet; we should strive to say, with His servant of old, "Yes, and if I am offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice!" Such, doubtless, will true love to Christ ever be in its tendency; and, *sustained by all-sufficient grace*, such it will be, if necessary, in actual operation. It will make us to be martyrs in spirit, if we are not called upon to be martyrs in real fact.

In general, however, the Savior's requirements are not difficult to be complied with; and without being either missionaries or martyrs, we may promote His cause, and glorify His adorable name. We can serve the Lord Christ without moving in an extensive sphere, or occupying any prominent and public position. What we need is a spirit that will lead us to devote ourselves to His service, according to the

opportunities we enjoy. All can do something, even the poorest and youngest. It often happens that the power and influence of many are very great, when they appear to have little, or none at all. "That child," said Pericles, pointing to his boy at play, "rules the world; and," he added, "I will tell you how: he rules his mother; his mother rules me; I rule the Athenians; the Athenians rule Greece; and Greece rules the world." Such was the power, for good or for evil, which that little one possessed. Yes, the feeblest and most insignificant can do something, more in general—far more than they themselves imagine.

But, whatever be the measure of our ability, it is certain that the Savior deserves the utmost of our services. When we think of what He has done for us, and what we have done for Him—shame and confusion of face should be felt even by the most active and devoted. How appropriate is the enquiry, and how worthy of being seriously pondered,

"And is this all that you can do,
For Him who did so much for you?"

Who can think of the sacrifices Christ made, of the sufferings He endured, and of the cruel death which He died—without consecrating talents, opportunities, wealth, influence, all the faculties of our souls, and all the members of our bodies, to the service of Him who displayed love so amazing, so divine; love which originated the whole interposition of mercy on our behalf; love which still glows in His breast, uncooled by distance, and undiminished by the matchless splendors which now surround Him; love, concerning which, when imagination is wearied, and all language is utterly exhausted, we can only say that it is—as *ancient* as eternity, as *boundless* as eternity, as *endless* as eternity.

"Eternity, too short to speak His praise,
Or fathom this profound of love to man!"

7. The Patriarch's Piety

"Enoch walked with God; and he was not; for God took him." Genesis 5:24

The general strain of the chapter in which these words are found, is calculated to fill the mind with mournful reflections. It contains a record of the antediluvian patriarchs; and although the period of their earthly existence was greatly protracted, we are here shown that they were a *mortal* race after all. The concluding statement in reference to each is, "*And he died.*" They were, doubtless, men of note in their respective generations; but whatever the sphere in which they moved, and the stirring scenes through which they passed—yet all that is said of them is, that they lived so many years, begat sons and daughters, and then died. Their biography is closed in succession with the same brief epitaph, "*And he died.*" All their love and hatred, all their doings and sufferings, terminated there.

But while the mind is oppressed with emotions of sadness in perusing these annals of the early inhabitants of the world, we feel no little relief when we reach *Enoch*, of whom something truly refreshing is recorded. All is melancholy and monotonous in the previous accounts; but when the inspired historian comes down to him, for the first time, the dry uniformity of the narrative is broken, and a flood of glory is poured upon his memory, which has made it precious to the church of God in all ages.

"Enoch walked with God!" What a beautiful representation! Seldom have words so brief, embodied anything so important and comprehensive. The sacred writer might have enlarged upon the diversified particulars of the patriarch's conduct. As a devoted biographer he might have told us of his various excellencies, whereby he shone so brilliantly in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. He might have told us of his abhorrence of all that was evil, and how his righteous soul was vexed from day to day with the filthy lives of the ungodly. He might

have told us how he soared above the world with all its vanities and pomps, and how he carried into all the engagements of life, a spirit which seemed to breathe only of heaven. He might have told us how his own will was swallowed up in the divine will, and how entire was his consecration to the divine glory. In accurate detail, and in imposing array—he might thus have delineated the various features which characterized his memorable career. But, at whatever length he might have enlarged, could he in reality have said more than is contained in the simple record before us? All the other particulars are clearly embraced in *this one, comprehensive, emphatic, and most instructive statement.*

By the course of life, which this eminent saint pursued, he honored God; and, according to His accustomed method, God, in return, honored him. He took him to Himself, not through the ordinary course of death—but by a supernatural and glorious translation. And you, reader, if your present course is that of walking humbly with your God, shall not go unrewarded. He will receive you to His own bosom, although not in the same manner; and you shall be numbered with Enoch and all the saints, in everlasting glory! Let then the daily breathing of your soul be—

"O, for a closer walk with God,
A light to shine upon the road,
A calm and heavenly frame;
That leads me to the Lamb."

8. The Comfort of Love

"The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us." Romans 5:5.

The *various graces* which dignify and adorn the Christian's character, are only so many modifications of his *love to God*. What is *repentance*—but love giving vent to its emotions in tears of godly sorrow. What is *faith*—but love receiving the testimony that

God has given concerning His Son, and resting implicitly upon it for life and salvation. What is *zeal*—but the fire of love, the Christian being led, under the influence of redeeming love— to live no longer to himself—but to Him who died for him, and rose again. What is *holiness*—but love assimilating the whole character to the likeness of Him who is its great object. What is *resignation*—but love receiving the cup of sorrow from a Father's hand, and saying in gentle accents, "May Your will be done." And so with all the other fruits of the Spirit; we behold in them a living embodiment of this crowning grace of love to God—and a practical manifestation of its diversified operations.

This love exists in very different degrees in the hearts of true Christians. In some it is full of life and vigor; while it is in a low and languishing condition in others. As regards the latter, how important is it, that their love should be kindled afresh; for, if the preceding representations be correct, where love decays, it will affect the spiritual life in all its branches.

It is true that an apparent weakening of the mere feeling, or sensible enjoyment of love, is no decisive evidence of its actual decline. There is a distinction to be observed between the *passion* of love and the *principle* of love; and it is quite possible for the one to be strong and deep, while the other seems to be somewhat faint and feeble. In proof of this, a familiar illustration may be employed. Let us think of an affectionate father, who has to labor hard to gain a livelihood for his family. After he has finished his daily duties he returns home to his humble dwelling; his children gather around him, and their innocent prattle, and the many winning ways in which they court his smiles, call forth his tenderest affection. On the following morning he goes forth to his work, and bears cheerfully the heat and burden of the day; and why? It is that he might have something to supply the needs of his wife and little ones. Now it is very probable that he did not feel his love operate during the labors of the day in so sensible a manner, as he did the evening before. Having had many things to

do, he may have passed several hours without once thinking of them. But this is no proof that he does not then love them; the fact that for their sakes he willingly undergoes so much toil, evinces quite the contrary. And were he, even in the midst of his exertions, to hear of any injury being done to them, he would instantly feel emotions as strong, if not stronger, than ever!

Now so it may be, with the child of God. There are times when he does not *feel* his love operating in so lively a manner as formerly; he has not that *glow* and *fervor* which he experienced at other seasons; but even then his love may have suffered no diminution. The *passion* may be less excited—but the *principle* may continue in all its vitality.

These remarks are not designed for the cold and carnal professor of religion—but for the encouragement of the feeble-minded, who are apt to suspect the genuineness of their piety, simply because their feelings are not always as animated as they would desire.

At the same time, there is such a thing as real *declension in the Christian's love*, and in all his other graces. The charge brought against the Ephesian believers is one, it is to be feared, that can be brought against many who bear the name of Christ in the present day—"Nevertheless I have something against you, because you have left your first love." They had not openly turned their backs upon God and His cause; they had not, it may be, neglected His ordinances, or profaned His courts by any outward improprieties; but His love in their hearts had greatly cooled, and they were now very declined from what they once were.

Reader, has the love of God been shed abroad in your heart? And if you have some grounds for concluding that such has been the case—it is most important for you to ascertain whether it is now in a *flourishing*, or *decaying* state. Be this your frequent, fervent prayer, "Lord, increase my love; may I be more firmly rooted

and grounded therein from day to day; and thus prepare me for that blessed world where all Your people not merely *see* You as You are—but where they *love* You as they ought!"

9. The Present Help

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble." Psalm 46:1

While God has promised never to forsake His people—He has especially manifested Himself to them in seasons of *distress*. The sacred volume is full of instances confirmatory of this encouraging truth. Take the case of Paul, when he was summoned to stand before Nero. That emperor, it is well known, was a cruel, bloody monster, and his palace was looked upon by the people just as they would have looked upon a leopard's den. Before him, however, the apostle was ordered to appear, and he had to appear alone. He must have had many friends in the imperial city; but, if "a friend in need is a friend indeed," their friendship, when brought to the test, was found sadly lacking. They probably gathered around him when there was no special danger to be apprehended; but now they thought it prudent not to identify themselves publicly with him and his cause. They were friends, unfortunately, of the swallow brood, who retire in the winter and return in the spring—a race which is yet by no means extinct. They were of that class whose appropriate emblem is the shadow on the sundial. When the sky is clear the shadow is there; but in the cloudy and dark day it disappears. But, if they proved faithless, there was One who continued true. He did not desert His faithful servant in the trying hour; and enjoying His presence, neither the ravening wolf on the throne, nor the thirsty bloodhounds around him, made the apostle for a single instant to falter or fear. "At my first answer no man stood with me—but all forsook me: I pray God it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, and I was

delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom."

In the experience also of the Old Testament saints we have innumerable examples of an equally striking nature. From such we may select the case of *David* on the occasion of the unnatural rebellion of Absalom. It was with him, then, in all respects, a most trying time. His own *son* had risen up against him; his chief *counselor* betrayed him; the hearts of thousands of his people were seduced away from him. See him, not as when in the freshness and vigor of his early days, he encountered the lion and the bear; not as when he stood undismayed, although single and alone, before the uncircumcised Philistine, who had defied the armies of the living God: but behold him—old and grey-headed, the fire of his youth damped by the infirmities of advanced years. Under such circumstances, after being driven from his own palace, view him ascending the steps of Olivet, with his head uncovered and his feet bare, weeping bitterly as he goes along. There he is—an exile in his own kingdom, wandering from place to place in imminent peril of his life. But, although troubled on every side, and deeply perplexed—yet he was not in despair. His enemies spoke against him, saying, "God has forsaken him; persecute and take him, for there is none to deliver him!" But it was not so; he had *an Almighty helper* at hand, and hence he could say, "I am as a wonder unto many; but you are my strong refuge." In his distress he called upon the name the Lord, who heard the voice of his supplication, and thus proved Himself to be a *present help in time of need*.

Reader, make Him your only trust; in all your troubles—repair to Him! Cast your every burden, whether light or heavy—upon Him. His name is a strong tower; the righteous man runs there—and is safe. And if you will make the Most High your habitation, and take shelter beneath the shadow of His wings, you will be safe—safe now, and safe forever!

10. Spiritual Declension

"Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God." Revelation 3:2

The personal piety of many, there is great reason to fear—is in a very feeble and languishing condition. It has lost much of its hold upon their hearts and consciences—as an elevating, purifying, and satisfying reality. How few there are, who know what it is—to delight in God, to rejoice in the dying love of Christ, and to exult in a clear and unclouded prospect of heaven! How little is there of spirituality of mind, of mortification of sin, of habitual watchfulness, and of wrestling prayer! There may be no gross or glaring immorality—but in the absence of what would be deemed *publicly disgraceful in religious professors*, there is, in instances not a few, a manifest decline in vital and experimental godliness.

There is something exceedingly *insidious*, pertaining to a state of spiritual declension; and hence it is a common thing, for those who are under its influence—to be in a great measure unconscious of the fact. It is said of Ephraim, "Strangers have devoured his strength—and he knows it not! Yes, grey hairs are here and there upon him—yet he knows it not!" Hosea 7:10. So it is, alas! with many a professor in the present day. Instead of his soul being in a vigorous and thriving state, there has been a woeful decline—yet he knows it not. Others know it; they cannot fail to observe what an altered man he is now when compared with what he was a few years ago. They clearly perceive that the *world* has been gaining the ascendancy over him; that the conversation and company of the people of God are now but little relished; and that he is far less attentive to his pious duties than he was formerly. But while this is so palpable to others, it is, if not altogether, yet to a considerable extent—unknown to himself.

This may be accounted for by the fact, that declension generally comes on in a *gradual* manner. Had the person passed all at once into such a state, the transition would have been so great, that he could not fail to perceive it. But it stole over him *imperceptibly*, and thus he knew it not.

Another cause of this ignorance, is the *neglect of self-examination*. There are very few who rigidly scrutinize their own hearts, and it is, therefore, no wonder that their piety should decline without their knowing it. It is with many in spiritual things, as it is with some in reference to their temporal affairs; they take it for granted that all is going on well. Many a tradesman, had he examined his books in time, might have been preserved from bankruptcy; and many a spiritual bankruptcy might have been avoided, had the secrecies of the inner man been thoroughly scrutinized, with a full determination to know how matters really were.

Reader, seek to know yourself—for all wisdom centers there. Be honest with yourself, and do not allow plausible appearances to impose upon you. Be continually jealous over yourself, and that with a godly jealousy. The fruits of *self-confidence* have been truly disastrous; while a befitting *dread of self-deception* has produced the happiest results. With the Royal Psalmist, then, let your daily prayer be, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life." Psalm 139:23-24

11. The Great Concern

"We labor, that we may be accepted of Him." 2 Corinthians 5:9

Before we shall ardently desire, and strenuously seek any object, we must be brought to see its worth, and feel its importance; and what object can be compared with that after which the apostle aspires in these

words? To be "accepted of Him," was the one thing about which he was concerned, being fully convinced that without it—all else would be in vain.

Reader, it will matter but little what you may possess—if you live and die destitute of this great blessing! Were you to attain everything that mankind regard as enviable; were all the treasures of the globe to be heaped upon you; were you endowed with all *knowledge*, so that the wisest sages should think it an honor to sit at your feet; were the most magnificent *titles* to be conferred upon you, and your *fame* to ring to earth's remotest bounds; were you raised to the heights of *universal empire*, having all the nations of the world as your willing subjects; in a word, had you all that the most unbounded ambition in her loftiest heights and most extravagant wishes ever panted after—what would the whole be if, instead of being accepted of God, you were disowned and rejected by Him, and exposed to His everlasting wrath!

But, enjoying His favor, which is life; and His loving-kindness, which is better than life—it matters but little whether we are rich or poor; whether the sun of prosperity shines—or the clouds of adversity lower; whether we are reveling in health—or stretched upon beds of languishing; whether we are toiling as slaves—or wearing crowns and diadems. After a few more rising and setting suns—*it will not matter a single straw*—what our earthly lot may have been! The only matter of importance then—will be whether we have been accepted of God.

This high privilege is now attainable! To be accepted of Him is not an impossibility. Every barrier which stood in the way has been removed. The ever-blessed Son of God assumed our nature, and was made under the law—to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. He is the only medium of access to the Father, and all who are reconciled to Him are accepted in the Beloved, to the praise of the glory of His grace.

For the *rebel angels* no such way has been provided. No messenger of mercy has been commissioned to wing his way with an offered reconciliation to them. No multitude of the heavenly host ever burst in the brightness of their glory upon their dark and desolate abodes, chanting the glad anthem of peace and goodwill. That song was sung for us! The peace was to be *on earth*, and the good-will unto sinful men. It was for *us* that Jesus suffered; for *us* He languished, groaned, and died! "He was wounded for *our* transgressions; he was bruised for *our* iniquities; the chastisement of *our* peace was laid upon him; and with his stripes *we* are healed!"

Reader, we would have you to be intensely solicitous about securing the precious treasure of which we have been speaking. Let its *importance* on the one hand, and its *attainableness* on the other hand—stimulate and encourage you in its pursuit. It is placed within your reach; it lies at your very door. O neglect, despise, refuse it not, lest you should be guilty of the dream of those who judge themselves unworthy of everlasting life; a dream which will require eternity to comprehend, and eternity to deplore!

12. Communion with God

"And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." 1 John 1:3

It is said of Moses that "the Lord spoke to him face to face, as a man speaks to his friend." Now there is an important sense in which the words may be applied to every true believer. He is favored with intimate and endearing fellowship with his Heavenly Father. View him on his bended knees, in the secrecy of his closet, having shut out the world for a while, with its manifold anxieties. How sweet the privilege he enjoys—that of making all his requests known by prayer and supplication unto God! Is he conscious of his own *weakness*, of the *temptations* which surround

him, and the many *foes* which beset him? His earnest cry is, "Hold me up—and I shall be safe!" Well, God is there, being ever near to those who call upon Him in truth, and says to him in return, "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine! When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior!" Isaiah 43:1-3

Does he feel sorely *perplexed* as to the course he should pursue, when conflicting claims are pressing upon him? He looks upward, and says in the language of the Psalmist, "Teach me your way, O Lord; and lead me in a plain path because of my enemies." And what answer does God unto unto him? "I will instruct you, and teach you in the way which you shall go; I will guide you with my eye." "I will lead you in paths that you have not known; I will make darkness light before you, and crooked things straight; these things will I do unto you, and not forsake you."

Is he oppressed under a deep sense of his exceeding sinfulness, his iniquities being set in fearful array against him, staring him in the face, and covering him with shame and confusion? He knows, however, what it is to look to Him whom he has so often found to be gracious; he therefore prays, "Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities!" And God remembers him with the favor which he bears to His people, and in the plenitude of His compassion He proclaims, "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and will not remember your sins!" "I will be merciful to your unrighteousness, and your sins and your iniquities, will I remember no more."

Sometimes the child of God is in great trouble concerning his *temporal needs*, his earthly prospects being dark and gloomy. But knowing that He who is the God of *grace*, is also the God of *providence*, he

draws near to the divine footstool for himself and family, and he there cries, "Remember us, O God, for good; oh! leave us not destitute." And He who hears the young ravens, hears him, and says to him, "Fear not, my poor child; no evil shall befall you, and no plague shall come near your dwelling. Even strong young lions sometimes go hungry, but those who trust in the Lord will never lack any good thing."

Sometimes, looking forward to the future, he says, "Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone." And the voice from heaven proclaims, "I created you and have cared for you since before you were born. I will be your God throughout your lifetime—until your hair is white with age. I made you, and I will care for you. I will carry you along and save you!"

And so with all his needs, and all his wishes—he draws near to God, and God draws near to him, and thus sweet fellowship is enjoyed between them.

There are some who are disposed to sneer at the idea of spiritual communion with God. But let them sneer as they may; let them regard it, if they are so disposed, as a dream of enthusiasm. The believer, however, is not to be laughed out of his enjoyments. *Fellowship with God* is a privilege with which he would not part for ten thousand worlds! Of all precious things, it is to him the most precious. He regards it as the dawn of eternal day, and feels it to be glory begun below! *Fellowship with God* is to him, like the grapes of Eshcol which were brought down to the wilderness; it is a draught from those crystal streams which make glad the city of the Most High; it is a flower plucked from the amaranthine bowers of the Paradise above. In a word, *fellowship with God* is the prelude and pledge of the fullness of joy which is at God's right hand, and in which consists the very essence of that transporting bliss which will be realized by saints and angels forever and ever! And while he gazes upon the toilsome pursuits of men for the things which perish in their using, his language is—

"Let others stretch their arms like seas,
And grasp in all the shore;
Grant me the visits of your grace,
And I desire no more!"

Christian, is there any *ambition* in your breast? Here is a noble field for its display! O how unspeakable the honor of holding familiar fellowship with the King of kings! And this honor has, not only the more favored servants of God—but *all* the saints! This is the *hidden manna* they have to eat—of which the world knows nothing. This is the joy they possess, which a stranger cannot understand. This is the honor they realize, which comes from God alone. They may be poor and afflicted; they may be frowned upon by an ungrateful and ungodly world; but this makes amends for all—"they have fellowship with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ."

13. The Contented Spirit

"But godliness with contentment is great gain." 1
Timothy 6:6

Reference is made in one of the epistles, to "Whatever is noble, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable." And among the several virtues which deserve to be thus characterized, that of *Christian contentment* can be particularly specified. The believer is frequently exhorted to cultivate such a feeling, and there are many considerations by which the duty may be enforced.

One thing is very evident—that *there is no condition in the present world, which is free from trouble!* Let us pitch our tent wherever we may—we shall be sure to find something to annoy us! And if there is no situation without some inconvenience, had we not better make up our minds to be satisfied with that condition in which we are now placed?

We are too much in the habit of judging by outward appearances. Things are often very different in *reality*—to what they appear to be. The sun appears to *rise* and *set*—but we know that it does neither the one nor the other. The earth appears as if it were a vast extended plain; and when we used to hear in our childhood that there were people who lived on the under-side of it—we were greatly puzzled. But since then we have learned that *above* and *below* are only relative terms, and the *mystery* concerning the people on the other side of the earth, walking, as we imagined, with their feet upwards—does not puzzle us any longer. In winter, again, all the plants and flowers appear to be dead; experience, however, has taught us to think otherwise. Notwithstanding the *deadness* which appears on every hand during the winter—we look forward with confidence to the coming spring, and we expect to see animation where all before was torpor, and life where everything had borne the aspect of death. So wide is the difference between objects in their *outward appearance*, and what they are in *reality*.

As it is with *things*—so it is also with *people*. If we judge according to appearance, we shall be led to regard the most *prosperous*—as the *happiest* individuals. But we are assured by universal experience that to be *great* is one thing, and that to be *truly happy* is altogether another thing! Under the glittering robes of the proudest nobilities—there are hearts pierced with anguish, and wrung with grief! In splendid palaces there are not a few broken hearts to be found. To sit upon thrones may seem to be something very fascinating; but, as the poet remarks, "Uneasy lies the head—which wears a crown!" This is a truth which receives from every passing year, fresh confirmation. Let us not then regard those who occupy the high places of the earth, with feelings of envy. Instead of *envying* them—it befits us rather to *pity* them and *pray* for them!

Reader, learn to distinguish between things that differ; and be well assured that things as they *appear* outwardly, and as they are *really*—do often differ, and

that very substantially! Such knowledge will tend, under the divine blessing, to make you more *contented with your present lot*, notwithstanding its trials and privations. It is not unusual—to be exposed to things which are grievous and hard to be borne. This is not some strange thing that is happening to us alone—but what is constantly happening to our brethren. Let us lay aside, therefore, all murmurings and complainings, and ever remember that *God's arrangements* are the wisest and the best!

14. The Savior's Commendation

"*She has done what she could*, and has anointed my body for burial ahead of time. I assure you, wherever the Good News is preached throughout the world, this woman's deed will be talked about in her memory." Mark 14:8-9

Pious women are set forth in the word of God, in a very pleasing light. Among those who were devoted to the Savior during His sojourn upon earth, a prominent place is assigned to certain pious women. Who was it that ministered to Him of their substance? Who was it that sat at His feet, and received with eagerness, the gracious words which fell from His lips? Who was it that washed His blessed feet with tears, and wiped them with the hair of their head? Who was it that followed Him wherever he went, through evil and good report? Who was it that attended Him in His dying moments, when His disciples had forsaken Him and fled? Who was it that showed such anxious concern about His precious bodily remains, after He had bowed His head and given up the Spirit? These questions, to which only one reply can be given, reflect no little credit upon the *softer gender*, and the respect they paid to the Savior should lead us to give due honor to them. Of woman it is said—

"She ne'er with traitorous kiss her Savior stung,
Nor thrice denied him with a lying tongue:

She, when apostles shrank, could danger brave,
Last at his cross—and earliest at His grave!"

Of the many striking testimonies contained in the gospel narratives concerning women, that which is given of Mary in the words before us, is not the least interesting or instructive. It was not much that she could do—but *she did what she could!* She could not stem the prejudices of the people; she could not silence the clamors of the priests; she could not prevent the base treachery of Judas; she could not rescue her Lord from the custody of the guards; she could not protect Him from the cruelty of Herod; she could not save Him from the ignominy of the cross; she could not pull out one thorn from the crown which pierced His sacred brow; she could not remove nor lighten the load which sunk Him down to death. But what she could do—she did; she anointed His head with her costly ointment, and thus paid Him the highest tribute of her reverence and love.

We are to remember, that it is not the *total amount* of what we do—which God looks at—but rather its proportionate or relative amount. Solomon, for example, built a house for Him, which was the wonder of the world. Such was his offering to that great and glorious Being, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain; an offering which casts that of Mary, when viewed in its intrinsic value, completely into the shade. She, again, with her precious ointment, very costly as it is called, far outdid the poor widow, with her two mites, which made a penny. But *in God's great register*—the three are set down at the same valuation! *Solomon* did what he could; *Mary* did what she could; the *widow* did what she could. To Him they were alike fragrant, and were equally accepted by Him. O let us aspire after the honor of doing in connection with the Savior's cause—what we can! The poorest among us—can do that! The highest archangel that stands before the everlasting throne—can do no more!

"If the *willingness* is there," says the apostle, "the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not

according to what he does not have." "O Lord, grant me that willing heart—a heart prepared to serve You to the utmost extent of my ability, limited though it be. You do not despise the day of small things—but have often employed the feeblest means and the most insignificant instruments, for the accomplishment of Your vast designs—that no flesh should glory in Your presence. Keep me from being an unprofitable servant; and, remembering that You are not a hard master, may I be stimulated and encouraged by the hope of hearing from Your lips those gracious words—You have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things; enter into the joy of Your Lord!"

15. The Faithful Promiser

"For He is faithful, who promised." Hebrews 10:23

The *faithfulness of God* is a favorite theme with the inspired writers. No attribute of the divine character, is more prominently set forth or more devoutly celebrated. Of this the glowing strains of the Royal *Psalmist* may be adduced as a specimen. "I will sing," he says, "of the mercies of the Lord forever; with my mouth will I make known your *faithfulness* to all generations." "All heaven will praise your miracles, Lord; myriads of angels will praise you for your *faithfulness*." "O Lord God Almighty! Where is there anyone as mighty as you, Lord? *Faithfulness* is your very character?" It was thus he ascribed faithfulness unto God; and by harping again and again upon the same string—he shows what sacred joy he realized in its contemplation.

Not merely are we furnished with general representations of this interesting subject—but we have innumerable instances set before us, which clearly confirm the above statements. In the history of the church from the earliest ages, what *striking monuments of the divine faithfulness* appear.

There was *Abraham*, to whom God promised a child in his old age. His faith was severely tested by the mighty obstacles which stood in the way, and his patience also by the lengthened period which intervened between the prediction and its fulfillment; but at length the child of promise appeared.

Think of the *Israelites in Egypt*. They were long there in a state of cruel bondage—but their deliverance at the appointed time took place. And just so—with their possession of the promised land, of which God had said that He would give it to them. That there was a performance of all He had declared, the dying appeal of Joshua to the assembled tribes most convincingly shows: "I am now going the way of all the earth, and you know with all your heart and all your soul that none of the good promises the Lord your God made to you has failed. Everything was fulfilled for you; *not one promise has failed.*"

Above all, there was the great crowning promise—that of the coming of Christ. Prediction had been given after prediction, and prophets, and kings, and righteous men looked and longed from age to age for His appearing. But, although the promise tarried—yet it did not fail. In the fullness of time—God sent forth His Son for the rescue of our lost and ruined race!

The *works* of God speak the same language in reference to this particular, as His revealed *word*. Day and night in their orderly succession; the revolutions of all the stars and planets moving with undeviating uniformity in their appointed courses through the skies; the seasons as they come and go, following each other as they have done, even from the beginning of the creation—all bear testimony to God's faithfulness! *Spring* with its life and loveliness, the buds appearing on the leafless branches, the peeping plants and the blooming flowers; and *summer* and *autumn* with their teeming abundance, the valleys covered with grain, the pastures with flocks, and the little hills rejoicing on every side—in most impressive language do they proclaim this blessed truth!

Rejoice, then, in the Lord, you righteous ones, and give thanks at the remembrance of His faithfulness. Abundant grounds have you for placing unbounded confidence in Him. What He has promised He is able to perform, and He will do for you exceeding abundantly above all you can ask or think. He may lay *affliction* upon you; as a wise as well as a gracious Father, He may have to *chastise* you for your evil doings, visiting your transgressions with the rod, and your iniquities with stripes. But this is the sweet assurance he gives—"Nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from them, nor allow my faithfulness to fail."

16. Harmony Restored

"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"
Amos 3:3.

There are three expressions employed by the inspired writers concerning the Christian's walk, in reference to God.

Sometimes we read of walking *after* God, as in the prophecies of Hosea. "They shall walk," it is said, "after the Lord." This supposes God to be the *leader* of His people, and they follow Him, even as the sheep follow their shepherd. It also implies that He is their *pattern*, and that it is their duty to be imitators of Him, according to the injunction of the apostle—"Be, therefore, followers of God, as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also has loved us."

Again, we read of walking *before* God. He is behind us to observe all our movements and watch all our ways. The command given to Abraham was—"I am the Almighty God, walk before me, and be perfect." And the Psalmist, after acknowledging the obligations he was under to his great Benefactor for having delivered his soul from death, his eyes from tears, and his feet from falling, made this resolution—"I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living."

But we also read of walking *with* God; it being said of one of the most eminent of the antediluvian saints—"And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." And Micah says—"He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you—but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."

It is evident that walking together presupposes a state of *friendship*. Where enmity exists between individuals, there is an invincible barrier to everything like true fellowship. If people under the influence of hostile feelings are compelled to meet, it will be with reluctance; the hour that brings them into contact will be dreaded when distant, and hated when it comes, and the moment that terminates their meeting, will be hailed as the harbinger of delight. In such a case there cannot of necessity be that warm and welcome fellowship which attends the meeting of those whose minds are cemented by affection and esteem; there will be the entire absence of that cordiality and confidence which a habit of free and friendly communion implies.

Now this state of feeling between man and man, is a true parallel to that which exists between man and God. All men in their unregenerate condition are enemies to Him. There is in the human heart a natural repugnance to God—a repugnance which justifies to the very letter the strong language of the apostle—"For the carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Now to have communion with God while such enmity lasts, is altogether impossible. It must be not merely lessened—but abolished and destroyed. Not partially subdued—but uprooted and slain—before spiritual fellowship can be realized.

It is a blessed truth, that we, however sad our state is by nature, can be brought to enjoy the divine friendship and favor. The adorable Redeemer has been set forth as a propitiation, and through faith in His blood—God and man can once more become friends! There is no other way of reconciliation, nor

has there been any other since the period when the fruit of the forbidden tree was plucked, which brought death and innumerable woes into our world. It is by the exercise of simple faith in the one Savior, and the one sacrifice which He offered—that our guilty persons can be accepted, and our wicked hearts be renewed. Justified through His atoning merits and washed in His precious blood, we shall have peace with God, and be enabled to look up to Him as our Father and Friend.

O my soul, has your enmity been slain? Can you be addressed as one with those to whom the apostle said—"And you who were once alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works—yet now has he reconciled." O Lord, give me to feel that the quarrel has been made up; that the old dispute has been forever settled; and may I walk henceforth in the light of Your countenance, and rejoice in Your name all my days.

17. The Cheering Assurance

"God has said—Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Hebrews 8:5

All the promises of God are *faithful* and *true*, and have never been forfeited yet. They are called *precious* promises, and while there are many particulars which render them such, their absolute *certainty* is one of the chief.

"*God* has said"—He is not a man that He would lie, or change His mind. He with whom saying and doing, promising and performing—as far as sureness is concerned—are one and the same. Man, weak, fickle, faithless man, may deceive us; but if we make the *Great Unchangeable* our trust, disappointment is a thing altogether impossible.

But what has He said? "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." The believer is thus assured that

God will be with him at all times, and under all circumstances, and that He will especially be with him in every time of need. His presence shall go with him when he is called to the performance of any arduous duties; it shall go with him when he has to pass through the furnace of affliction; and, above all, it shall go with him when he has to enter the dark valley, and bid a final adieu to all things here below. "Don't be afraid, for *I am with you*. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my victorious right hand." Isaiah 41:10

We might confidently conclude that God will be then with the Christian, even had no express intimation been given us on the subject. It is not likely that He who was with him during the whole of his voyage, to preserve him from the winds and waves, the rocks and quicksands—will forsake him when the vessel is entering the port. It is not likely that He who shielded him during the heat of the battle—will desert him when the victory is about to be won. It is not likely that He who was with him through his wanderings in the desert, supplying all his needs, delivering him from all his enemies, and directing him during the entire course of his pilgrimage—will abandon him when he treads the verge of Jordan, and beholds beyond its foaming billows the brightness and the beauty of the promised land. The thing is not for a single moment, to be supposed! God's love and compassion, as well as His faithfulness and truth, forbid the entertainment of such a thought.

Reader, will you accompany us to the chamber where the Christian awaits his death? It is a favored spot, being privileged beyond the common walks of life. Draw aside that curtain, and you see a countenance which, notwithstanding its paleness, is lighted up with joy and peace in believing. His friends are weeping around him—but he is calm and composed. And from whence does this arise? Is it from the softness of the couch on which he languishes? Is it from the attentions and sympathies of surrounding friends? Is it from a retrospective survey of his past life? Is it

from indulging a fond hope that health and strength may yet return? Not so! It arises from the Divine presence! This is the secret of his happy frame of mind—"For You are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

"Grant, O, Lord, Your gracious presence to me. May I feel that You are near, in health and in sickness, in affluence and in poverty, in life and in death. Having You, no one can pass my humble door and say— There dwells a friendless person. Having *You*, I have *all*—a sure defense, a constant guide, a never-failing portion. I shall then be able to take down my harp from the willows, and sing in joyful strains—

"In your presence I am happy,
In your presence I'm secure;
In your presence all afflictions
I can easily endure:
In your presence, I can conquer,
I can suffer, I can die;
Far from you, I faint and languish
O my Savior, keep me nigh."

18. The Day of Trouble

"Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me." Psalm 50:15

We are told that the word of the Lord is *tried*, and what is true of it as a whole, is especially true of this portion of it. It has been tested in thousands of instances, and in all cases the result has been alike satisfactory.

In the 107th Psalm, we are furnished with several representations, which strikingly show how this promise has been fulfilled. We have, first, an account of a company of ***desolate wilderness wanderers***, surrounded by a boundless expanse of burning sand. In the course of their wanderings they lose their way, and they roam to and fro in search of a place where

they can encamp in safety. Their situation is most deplorable; they are on the point of perishing, and on the verge of despair. But there is one alternative left them, and of that they wisely availed themselves; it is that of calling upon Him who has promised to be a very present help in time of need; and they did not call in vain. "Some wandered in the desert, lost and homeless. Hungry and thirsty, they nearly died. 'Lord, help!' they cried in their trouble, and He rescued them from their distress. He led them straight to safety, to a city where they could live."

The second instance is that of a number of *poor captives*, who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and are bound with fetters of iron. In a condition so helpless, what can they do? Even they can lift up their cries to Him, who hears the groanings of the prisoners, and who executes judgment for the oppressed. This they did; they cried to God for help, and that help was not withheld. "Lord, help! they cried in their trouble, and He saved them from their distress. He led them from the darkness and deepest gloom; He snapped their chains."

We have a third instance in the case of certain *afflicted* ones, who were brought so low that they abhorred all manner of food, and were near to the gates of death. They also do what the others did, and the result is still the same. "Lord, help! they cried in their trouble, and He saved them from their distress. He spoke, and they were healed—snatched from the door of death!"

And, finally, we have the poor *mariners*, when overtaken by a terrific storm. "Some went off in ships, plying the trade routes of the world. They, too, observed the Lord's power in action, His impressive works on the deepest seas. He spoke, and the winds rose, stirring up the waves. Their ships were tossed to the heavens and sank again to the depths; the sailors cringed in terror. They reeled and staggered like drunkards and were at their wits' end. 'Lord, help!' they cried in their trouble, and He saved them from their distress! He calmed the storm to a whisper and

stilled the waves. What a blessing was that stillness as He brought them safely into harbor!"

We have thus, successive witnesses adduced for the purpose of showing that the saying before us, is "a faithful saying." "Call upon me in the day of trouble," is the command; "I will deliver you," is the subjoined promise. But has it been according to His word? Yes—is the instant and unfaltering reply of these various classes. "He delivered us, when we called upon Him!" is the language of the wanderers in the wilderness desert. "He delivered us also!" say the poor captives, liberated from their dismal dungeons. And the afflicted ones, raised from the borders of the grave, and the sinking mariners, rescued from the yawning billows, add likewise that He heard their cry, and came to their timely deliverance!

And with Him whom they sought, there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning. He is still the same—with His ear as ready to hear, and His arm as powerful to deliver! Not merely was He formerly—but He is still near to all who call upon Him in truth. Reader, invoke His aid; cry unto Him, even from the lowest depths in which you may be plunged; and be fully assured that God's children never seek Him in vain.

19. Light out of Darkness

"All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, to all those who keep his covenant and obey his decrees." Psalm 25:10.

Many of the Lord's dispensations are deeply *mysterious*. His way is often in the sea, and His path in the great waters, and His footsteps are not known. Though "*clouds* and *thick darkness* surround Him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne." He does all things well—a consideration which should make us fully satisfied with His arrangements, however *mysterious* and *troubling* they

may now appear. If we only wait patiently for Him, He will, in His own good time, bring us to see that they all work together for the present and everlasting well-being of His people.

How wonderful were the divine dealings as they are set forth in the history of *Joseph*. He was hated by his brethren; he was sold to mercenary men; he was taken to a distant and friendless land; he was calumniated by a shameless and chasteless woman; and at length he was incarcerated in a gloomy dungeon. What must his feelings have been, during his long confinement in prison? How often would he be likely to ask, "Why were my brothers permitted to sell me to strangers, and thereby pierce with anguish my father's heart, and expel me from my fondly cherished home? Why was that vile woman permitted to rob me of my character, by her slanderous accusations? Why was the butler, whose dream I so readily solved, unmindful to redeem his promise?"

Many questions of this kind, we can easily suppose, would be likely to start up in his mind. How *strange*, how *dark*—would the ways of God appear to be! We have every reason to believe that he submitted without murmuring, to all that he had to endure; but, undoubtedly, he knew not what to make of it; nor would we have known—had we been in his situation. Let, however, a few years revolve, and the *clouds* are dispersed, and the *mystery* is made known. Look at him as the governor in the whole land—as the monarch's distinguished favorite—as the appointed almoner of God's bounty to perishing thousands—and, especially, as the preserver and support of his aged and revered parent, who had received him as life from the dead. When *Joseph* is thus viewed—all the divine purposes are unfolded and made plain!

The language of Jacob was—"You have deprived me of my children! Joseph has disappeared, Simeon is gone, and now you want to take Benjamin, too. All these things are against me!" O mistaken saint! instead of being *against* you—they are all, from first

to last, *for* you! And, old as you are, you shall live to see that such is the case!

See Jacob settled in the land of Goshen, living in the enjoyment of peace and plenty, his last days being by far the happiest of his whole life. And if there was anything to mar his enjoyment—it would be the recollection, not of the troubles through which he had passed—but the hard thoughts he may have entertained of that gracious Being who had overruled them all, for bringing about so blissful a consummation.

And what effect, O timid and troubled Christian, should the consideration of these things produce upon you? Should not fear be banished from your mind? Should not *patience* and *submission* be exercised? Should not a feeling of simple, child-like *confidence* be nourished? Should not a lively *hope* be indulged? O never yield to despondency, even under the most gloomy circumstances! Continue to trust in Him—who can bring light out of darkness, and who has declared that what we don't now know—we shall know hereafter.

20. The Heavenly Race

"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? **Run in such a way as to get the prize.**" 1 Corinthians 9:24.

In running the race which is set before us, it is not sufficient for us to make a good start; unless we hold on, in spite of every hindrance—all will be in vain. Who are they, who will be saved? None but such as *endure* unto the end. Who are to receive the crown of life? None but those who are *faithful* unto death. Who will attain the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus? Only those who are pressing onward toward the mark, forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth, with quenchless ardor, unto the things which are ahead!

It is, alas! no uncommon thing for people to run well for a time—and then to turn back to the beggarly elements of this world. Such there were formerly, and such there are still. "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." "All those who are in Asia," says the apostle, "have deserted me." It appears that he had a high opinion of *Demas* at one period, for in the close of his epistle to the Colossians, he is ranked among the saints; and we find Demas sending his greetings to the distant brethren in the Lord. But before long, Paul had occasion to change his note, and with deep emotion, he says, "Demas has forsaken me—having loved the present world!"

The resolution of Peter, was, in itself, an admirable one—"Though all should forsake you—yet I never will!" Reader, make the same resolve—but not in the same spirit. Let it be your firm determination, in reliance upon Him who gives power to the faint, and to those who have no might increases strength—to cleave to Christ with full purpose of heart. Every encouragement have we to do so. That grace, which is all-sufficient, is promised; and having your heart established therewith, you have nothing to fear. Looking unto Jesus, trusting in Him, and strengthened by Him—you shall reach the goal in safety!

Where are now the mighty cloud of witnesses? Where are the patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles? Where are those heroic spirits, "who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens?" Where are those faithful martyrs, "who had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yes, moreover of bonds and imprisonments, who were stoned, who were sawn asunder, who wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented"? Where are they now? They are before the Throne, with, crowns upon their heads, and waving palms in their hands, ascribing salvation to God and the Lamb! O think of that blessed band! Let the thought that

they were sustained by God in the midst of all their struggles, and that their faith and patience have issued in so large a reward—impart both encouragement and stimulus to you—to hold fast the beginning of your confidence, steadfast unto the end!

21. The Heart Established

"For it is a good thing that the heart is established with grace." Hebrews 13:9

The benefits which flow from the possession of grace, are numerous and exceedingly important. It is only as our hearts are established with grace—that we shall be preserved from departing from the living God; that we shall successfully resist the temptations of our spiritual adversaries; and, especially, that we shall be able to exercise a spirit of uncomplaining submission under the afflictive dispensations of divine providence. The inquiry of the prophet is—"Why does a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" To complain, however, under what is trying and painful—is what human nature always did, and is, doubtless, what it ever will do. How is it with nature, under crosses? It is like a goaded and wounded animal—it skulks, and groans, and growls. But how is it with grace? She kisses the hand that is uplifted; the stroke she meekly and uncomplainingly receives, and says with him of old—"It is the Lord; let him do what seems good unto Him." The language of nature is—"This evil is from the Lord; why should I wait for him any longer?" But what is the language of grace? It is—"Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" The evil referred to, being not *moral*—but *penal* evil. The language of nature is that of Job's wife—"Curse God, and die!" But what is the language of grace? It is that of the afflicted patriarch himself, when, with uplifted hands and eyes, he exclaimed, "Though he slays me—yet will I trust in him!"

It is quite certain, that there can be no murmuring when grace is in lively operation. If it cannot do as *Job* did, saying, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord;" it will do as *Aaron* did, of whom it is said, that "he held his peace." It will silently *submit*—if it cannot *bless* and *adore*.

But we cannot do better than point to the *Great Head*, as an example of patience and suffering affliction. Never were there sorrows like unto His. But if His sufferings were great, He was full of grace, and it was not by measure, that the Spirit, in His diversified gifts and graces, was given to Him. And how did that great grace operate under the extremity of grief which He bore in our stead? It was in a spirit of entire resignation to the divine will. Had He to endure the opposition of His enemies, and the fickleness of His friends? Had He to endure the malice of hell, and, especially, the dread indignation of heaven? But, in the midst of all, there was no murmuring. "When they hurled their insults at Him—He did not retaliate; when He suffered—He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly."

Christian, are you for bearing your sufferings—as the Savior bore His? If you are, seek that grace which, not only was strikingly exemplified by Him—but which also dwells in unbounded plenitude in Him. It has pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell; and happy are those who can say, "Of his fullness have we received, and grace for grace."

At an examination of the deaf and dumb, in one of those excellent institutions, where such of our afflicted fellow-creatures are taught, the following incident is recorded as having taken place. To one of the children, a gentleman present put the question, Who created the world? The little creature wrote in reply on his slate, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Who redeemed mankind? was the next question; and no sooner was it asked, than the answer was given—"For God so loved the world,

that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish—but have everlasting life." And who was it, was the third question, who made you deaf and dumb? At this unexpected inquiry, the little one was deeply affected, and burst into a flood of tears; but, after having in a measure recovered himself, he wrote with a trembling hand, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight." Dear boy! he had learned an important lesson—and well would it be for you, reader, to learn the same; so that under every affliction and distress, whether in mind, body, or estate, your language might be, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight." Possessing such a spirit, you will derive from the most painful dispensations, those peaceable fruits which they were intended to produce—and God will be glorified thereby!

22. Rejoicing in God

"They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of your countenance; in your name shall they rejoice all the day; and in your righteousness shall they be exalted." Psalm 89:15, 16.

The happiness of the believer, consists in the enjoyment of God's approbation. In His *favor* is life—and in His *frown* is death. The one is realized in full perfection by the saints in heaven; the other in, perhaps, equal perfection by the lost in hell. The one are rejoicing under His smiles, and the other are withering under His frowns; and it is in this that their respective happiness and misery emphatically consist. But God is now angry with the wicked every day, and He is also pleased with His people, over whom He rejoices with joy, even as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride. Thus, while the smiles of God constitute the happiness of heaven, the believer, while walking in the light of His countenance, has his heaven begun below. His joy is of the same nature, and emanates from the same source, as that of the perfected spirits above. Should we not be anxious, therefore, to

partake of the Christian's joy? "Many are asking—'Who can show us any good?' Let the light of your face shine upon us, O Lord. You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound."

Glad, indeed, may be he who is blessed with such a blessing. How reasonable is it that he should rejoice in the divine name—who possesses the divine favor. His outward circumstances may be anything but prosperous; he may meet with numerous reverses, and be exposed to the greatest distress. But what says the prophet? "Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vine; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!"

It is a common prejudice against true religion, that it is associated with gloom and sadness, and that its requirements are incompatible with happiness. Those who entertain such a view allow that it leads to heaven hereafter—but they regard it as being little better than *penance* here. They admit that it conducts its possessors to the realms of bliss—but it is by a way, they imagine, as gloomy as the shadow of death. Some pious people, by their austere spirit and mournful aspect, have, doubtless, helped to foster such an impression; but it is evident that *the tendency of true religion is to make its subjects at once, both holy and happy*. "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

And what a ground for rejoicing is furnished by the statement—"In your righteousness shall they be exalted." This is the best robe in which returning prodigals are clad; it is the wedding garment which qualifies the believer for sitting down at the marriage supper of the Lamb; it is the fine linen, clean and white, which is the righteousness of saints. Clothed in this pure and spotless dress, we shall be highly exalted—exalted from a state of alienation—to be friends, yes, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ—

exalted from the tribulations and frailties of time—to the thrones and palaces of eternity. Such is the blessedness realized by, and such the glorious destiny in reserve for, all who know the joyful sound. O my soul, do you know it? Has the gospel come to you, not in word only—but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance? If so, you may well rejoice, even with exceeding joy!

23. The Sure Hope

"And has given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace." 2 Thessalonians 2:16

The Christian's hope well deserves the appellation given to it here. It rests upon a good foundation, being built, not on the shifting sand—but on the rock of ages! O blessed hope! a hope that is sure and steadfast. It cannot be overthrown by all the malice of men, or all the rage of devils. The *tempests of time* cannot destroy it, neither can the *waters of death* quench it. It defies the war of elements, triumphs amid the wreck of matter, and smiles at the crash of worlds! Its most glorious anticipations will be realized on that great day, when the hope of the wicked will be extinguished in the blackness of darkness forever.

"And hope," says the apostle, "makes not ashamed;" but it is only to this good hope that the words will apply. Those who possess it will not be ashamed nor confounded world without end. Men may raise expectations which will never be accomplished; but "God is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent." How decisive are the declarations of His word as to the absolute certainty of those things which He has promised to His people. "In hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began." "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong

consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." Having such assurances, our language may well be, "It is enough!" How clearly do they show that the expectation of the righteous shall not be cut off, and that his hope will never be as the giving up of the Spirit.

Reader, it befits you to look well to the nature and grounds of your hope. For it to disappoint you at last, will be sad indeed. We ask then—

"What is your hope? Will it stand the test
Of nature's expiring hour?
Like armor of proof, will it shield your breast,
Against the grim tyrant's power?

Will it gladden your soul, and dispel the gloom,
The horrors of darkness which veil the tomb,
When the damps of death to your brow shall start,
And the life-blood ebbs from your freezing heart?

Away with it else!—it is worse than vain
To cherish a hope that will fail you then!
But you hope in Christ! to a dying hour
This hope sweet assurance brings,

When worldly preferments, and wealth, and power,
Shall all be forgotten things.
Yes, you hope in Christ, though a feeble worm,
And your soul shall be safe, and your confidence firm;

You shall traverse in triumph the gloomy abyss,
Which divides the eternal world from this;
And consigning in hope your frail flesh to the sod,
Your soul shall ascend to your Savior and God!"

24. Trusting in Christ

"That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first *trusted in Christ*." Ephesians 1:12

Trusting in Christ is, in the most emphatic sense, one of "the things which accompany salvation." All who

are strangers to it have no part or lot in those spiritual blessings which are in Him. How important is it, then, that we should have proper views of its nature; for to err in reference to such a subject cannot fail to affect our eternal safety.

Our trust in Christ, in order to be availing, must be **exclusive**. Of this many appear to be ignorant, or unmindful, for they think it necessary to mix up some supposed *worthiness* of their own with His finished work. But this will never do. Like the feet in Nebuchadnezzar's image, partly of iron and partly of clay—such diverse ingredients, possessing no property of coherence, cannot possibly stand. No, the word has gone forth and shall not return; the counsels of eternity have settled it, and every page of the inspired volume in the most explicit manner declares it—that "no one can lay any other foundation than the one we already have—Jesus Christ."

Let us see to it, then, as we value our soul's salvation, that Christ is our only trust. *Merits* of our own we have none. Of this the true believer is fully conscious, and hence his language is—

"Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to your cross I cling;
Naked, come to you for dress;
Helpless, look to you for grace;
Guilty, to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Savior, or I die!

Not the labor of my hands
Can fulfill your law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
You must save, and you alone!"

In the next place, our trust in Christ must be **implicit**. This feature may be illustrated by a familiar comparison. A physician is sent for, to visit a sick person, and after examining the case, he writes out a prescription. The patient, however, tells him that he

will not take a single spoonful of the medicine unless he is informed of what it is composed, how the various ingredients are likely to act, and what effects they are intended to produce. If the explanations are satisfactory, and the course to be pursued meets his approbation, he promises to follow the advice given. The physician informs him that he is not accustomed to do anything of the kind, and that no reasonable man would expect it from him. "I always take it for granted," he says, "that I know what to prescribe for my patients better than they do themselves; and if you have no confidence in me, the sooner my visits are discontinued the better." Now such language commends itself at once as just and appropriate; for every person possessed of the least grain of common sense must acknowledge that to place implicit trust in his medical adviser, is one of the first duties which a patient owes to him. And that earthly physician's claim is demanded by Christ, the great Physician of souls. He requires of us to trust Him—to trust His skill, His wisdom, His power, His tenderness, His fidelity—and that with a full and unquestioning acquiescence. And what ample grounds have we for doing so!

We would further observe that our trust in Him should be *continuous*. An unspeakable importance belongs to what the apostle calls, "the beginning of our confidence;" but such an act must be again and again repeated. The Christian's life is throughout a life of faith; by whatever his pathway may be distinguished, this is one of its most prominent features. And as trust is either an essential element of faith, or its inseparable adjunct, it follows that it is to be exercised during the believer's whole career. Through life and in death his language should be, "Into your hands I commit my spirit, for you have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth."

Happy is the man who thus trusts in Him; he will not be ashamed nor confounded, world without end. Reader, may His happiness be yours; and rest not until you can say, "I know whom I have trusted, and

am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

25. The Needful Duty

"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves." 2 Corinthians 13:5

We are frequently called upon to look **backward**—to look to the rock from whence we were hewn, and the whole of the pit from whence we were dug; and such a retrospect will be likely to fill us with deep *humility* on the one hand, and with, fervent *gratitude* on the other.

At other times we are exhorted to look **forward**; and in proportion as we are under the influence of that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen—we shall undoubtedly do so; it being the special province of that divine principle, not merely to make *hidden* objects visible—but to bring *distant* objects near.

We are likewise often directed to look **upward**. Owing to our proneness to cleave to the dust, and earthly things, the voice from heaven proclaims in our ears, "If you then are risen with Christ—seek those things which are above."

But in the words before us we are commanded to look **inward**; it is an exhortation which calls upon us to turn our attention from all outward objects, in order to cultivate a closer acquaintance with ourselves.

In enforcing this duty two expressions are employed. The first is, "Examine yourselves;" let a diligent and impartial search be made into your spiritual state and character. But it is added, "test yourselves;" in allusion, probably, to the manner in which metals are tested for the purpose of ascertaining whether they are pure or alloyed. We, in like manner, should bring our motives, principles, tempers, language, and

actions—to the test, that we may find out whether they are false or true, counterfeit or genuine.

The test by which we are to prove ourselves is the word of God. This is one of the special purposes to which the scriptures should be applied. They have many other uses, all of which are of the most important kind. An excellent—but somewhat eccentric minister observed on one occasion in the application of his discourse, that his subject might be improved in four different ways. First, as a *whetstone*; secondly, as a *loadstone*; thirdly, as a *milestone*; and fourthly, as a *touchstone*. And what he thus quaintly said of the special topic on which he had been insisting, can be applied to divine truth at large. It is a **whetstone**, sharpening our dullness, and giving a keener edge to all our feelings and exercises. It is a **loadstone**, drawing us from our distance from God, and attracting our desires and affections from the objects of time and sense—to heaven and heavenly things. It is a **milestone**, not merely pointing out the way of life—but telling us of the progress we have made in our journey; whether we are advancing towards the shining city, or whether we are going backward, or standing still. And it is especially a **touchstone**, evincing what we really are; whether our coin is of celestial currency, or whether it can be said of us, "Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord has rejected them."

Reader, dread above all things—the thought of self-deception. How dreadful it would be—for you to *imagine* that you are justified before God—and yet to *remain* under the condemning sentence of His righteous law! To take it for granted that you are renewed by the washing of regeneration—and yet to have no part or lot in the matter, being still in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity! To suppose that you are traveling to *heaven*—and yet to be approaching, day after day, nearer and nearer to *hell*! May God, in His infinite mercy, preserve you from such a state!

26. The Arduous Struggle

"Conflicts on the outside, fears within." 2 Corinthians 7:5

Says Peter, "if the righteous is saved with *difficulty*." The words clearly show that the Christian's pathway is beset with difficulties; and that it is not that easy work, which many seem to imagine, to get to heaven. How startling is the announcement—"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms!" Christian! all the armed legions of hell are against you! And if, with all their combined energies, they can keep you out of heaven—out of heaven you will assuredly be! No diligence will be lacking on their part to draw you astray, and prevent you from ever reaching that blessed abode. And were you properly to realize the solemn fact that such mighty and malicious foes surround you, and that their sleepless aim and object is to effect your destruction—it would be impossible for you to be lukewarm or unconcerned! "Be careful! Watch out for attacks from the **devil**, your great enemy. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for some victim to devour!"

And then there is the **flesh**, with its deceitful lusts, which war against the soul. There is the **world** also, with its pomps and pleasures, its smiles and frowns! The world in various ways endeavors to win our affections; or by its cares to engross our thoughts. And saved we cannot be—unless we overcome the world, unless we crucify the flesh, and unless we resist and defeat the devil.

It is said in the book of Revelation, "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven." There will, doubtless, be innumerable wonders there. "I believe," says one, "that heaven will be a place of eternal surprise." We may be quite certain that it contains countless objects which cannot fail to excite such a feeling. But, whatever its wonders may be—to see a

sinner there will be, perhaps, the greatest of all. If we only think of the many storms he has to weather, the determined enemies he has to subdue, the many formidable oppositions and difficulties which he has to encounter; and he, in himself, weaker than the bruised reed, which the feeblest breath might destroy: it will truly be a marvelous thing to see such a one—

"Safely landed on that peaceful shore,
Where pilgrims meet to part no more."

When the spirit of righteous Abel was admitted through the everlasting gates, it might with truth have been said, "There appeared a great wonder in heaven." And in reference to all who followed him—followed him in the conflict here, and in the triumphant entrance there—the same words could be repeated. God grant that you, reader, may appear as an object of eternal wonder in that blessed world! But that cannot be unless you are made a monument of His wondrous grace on earth, being brought out of darkness into the marvelous light of the gospel. You will then be even now, as was the Psalmist, "a wonder unto many;" and especially will you be a wonder unto yourself! If you have any grounds to believe that such is the case, it is your reasonable service to magnify His adorable name, who is "glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders." All His works, which are great and marvelous, praise Him; but His saints, with all their powers of heart and tongue, should bless Him. Then,

"Give to our God immortal praise;
Mercy and truth are all his ways:
Wonders of grace to God belong,
Repeat his mercies in your song!"

27. Gracious Dealings

"I know, O Lord, that your judgments are right, and that you have afflicted me in faithfulness." Psalm 119:75

The character of the Divine Being as "excellent in counsel, and wonderful in working," has been strikingly exemplified in His dealings with many of His suffering saints. Of this we have a memorable instance in the case of the patriarch *Job*. Great indeed were his trials, and the previous state of prosperity which he enjoyed, rendered them exceedingly difficult to be borne. And they all came upon him *suddenly!* He was cast down in a single day from the summit of prosperity—to the lowest depths of poverty and distress. His *property* was destroyed; his *children* perished in the hour of carnal festivity; his *body* was covered with a loathsome disease, which led his own friends to loathe and despise him. Some of his former companions went to comfort him; but, misunderstanding his case, they became his tormentors. His wife also, who, it might be supposed, as the only one left of his family, would afford him some comfort; but she advised him to curse God and die. The favor of all around him he had once enjoyed; nobles and princes maintained the most respectful silence in his presence; when he passed along the streets the old and young stood up to testify their esteem; when the ear heard and the eye saw him, they blessed him. But now contempt is poured upon him from every quarter; the vilest people scorn him; they make him their song and by-word, and even spit upon him as he passes by! His friends and kinsfolk forget him, and his very servants no longer answer to his call. But, above all, the hand of God was upon him; His power was crushing him, and His ears seemed closed to all his cries. Such was the state to which he was reduced, notwithstanding his preeminent piety; for he is called perfect and upright, one who feared God and eschewed evil.

"You have heard," says James, "of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy." In the season of his calamity he might have asked, and not

without apparent reason, "Will the Lord cast off forever? and will he be favorable no more?" But to whatever doubts he may have given way, "the end of the Lord" showed that he was not forsaken, however sorely he was chastised. All that he passed through, worked together for his good, and issued in a state of prosperity greater than that with which he was at first favored; for "the Lord restored his fortunes. In fact, the Lord gave him twice as much as before!"

Christian, cherish high thoughts of God in all His dealings towards you. Should your trials be great, still hold fast your confidence, and yield not to a complaining or desponding spirit. Remember that it is for the profit of His people, that God afflicts them; and, however hard to be borne at the time, they have been brought to see at length that they had cause to reckon their severest sorrows as the chief of their mercies. They were thereby weaned from the world; their affections were more ardently fixed upon heavenly things; their souls were purified, even as gold in the fire; the preciousness of Christ was realized as it had never been before; and they were led to live, not merely nearer to Him—but more entirely upon Him, and also much more for Him! May our afflictions produce such happy results; we shall then have abundant reason to bless God for *His chastising hand*.

28. Growth in Grace

"May the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely." 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Sanctification differs from justification in many respects, especially in its progressive character. We are as fully **justified** the first moment we believe in Christ as we shall ever be; such is the perfection of the act of justification, that it will not receive any addition—even in heaven.

But with **sanctification** it is far otherwise. It has, it is true, a completeness of parts, for in all its subjects every fruit of the Spirit is found, and a principle of resistance to every evil is implanted. Still the work, even in the holiest saint in the present life, is defective. He has to mourn continually over the remains of indwelling corruption, and at times he exclaims in bitter anguish, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

It is, therefore, a blessed thing for this sanctifying process to be carried on, and for all the powers of the mind to be brought more and more under its influence. Hence our daily prayer should be that the Lord would increase our faith, our love, our humility, our patience, and make us abound in all those fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the divine praise and glory.

Strange to say, some have denied the *progressiveness* of this important work. "We are told by certain people," says Mr. Jay, "that there is no such thing as growth in grace. As if Christians could not be more wise, more humble, more patient, more zealous—than they are. As if Paul's commendation of the Thessalonians was a falsehood, when he told them that their faith *grew* exceedingly, and the charity of everyone of them towards each other *abounded*. As if Peter enjoined an absurdity, when he admonished believers to *grow* in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As if God himself mocked or trifled, when he said, 'The righteous shall hold on his way, and he who has clean hands shall wax *stronger and stronger*.'" Let us, however, not merely believe the doctrine of progressive sanctification—but be anxious to realize it in our own experience. We shall thus be enabled practically to refute such an unscriptural notion.

O Lord; if the good work is commenced in my soul—carry it on by the effectual working of Your blessed Spirit. Deliver me from the power and practice of every sin—and incline my heart more and more unto

Your testimonies. Enlighten my *understanding*; rectify my *motives*; elevate my *desires*; spiritualize my *affections*; and thus prepare me for that holy state where nothing which defiles can enter, and where all the pure in heart dwell forever in Your immediate presence.

29. Christian Consistency

"Live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." Philippians 1:27

"By their fruits," says the Savior, "you shall know them." It is not by our *profession*, however blazing, nor by our *zeal*, however ardent, that we can evidence whose we are and whom we serve; but rather by abounding in whatever things are lovely and of good report. It is by an exhibition of the practical fruits of righteousness, that we are to "let our light shine before men, so that they may see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven!"
Matthew 5:16

There are many things connected with the Christian's pathway which worldlings cannot comprehend. Of the high and hidden walks of spiritual experience they know nothing. What is said of the workings of the divine life in the soul, is regarded by them as foolishness and fanaticism. Its internal principles, its constraining motives and impulses, its heavenly aspirations, its rapturous bliss and agonizing struggles—are things with which these strangers cannot comprehend. But still there is much that they are able to understand. Whatever is consistent in character; whatever is honest and straightforward between man and man; whatever is kind and compassionate in behavior; whatever is forbearing and forgiving under insults and injuries; not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing—but contrariwise, blessing. Such features, when unostentatiously exhibited, excite their attention, and, generally, call forth their praise. The manner in which the ordinary

duties of life are discharged, is something so tangible that it lies within the province of their own observation. These things they can understand; and it is of the highest importance that all who make a profession of religion, should be distinguished by such practical qualities as these.

What if a small band of Christians were placed in some locality, by whom the principles of the gospel were fully carried out; what a powerful effect, we may suppose, would their simple presence produce! Let them be connected with those around them by the ordinary engagements of life—but without employing any direct means to promulgate their Christian views. There they are—"blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation." Their hearts are filled, not merely with love to God—but with sincere and ardent affection for all by whom they are surrounded, whose welfare they seek to promote in every possible way. All the evil propensities of their nature are subdued; selfishness, pride, resentment, censoriousness, have no place among them; and their entire spirit and deportment are influenced and controlled by those noble, and generous, and god-like sentiments and feelings which Christianity inculcates and inspires. The holy religion they profess, would appear in its true character and beneficent tendency, and men would be constrained by the good works which they beheld, to glorify God.

It was a favorite prayer of the excellent Mr. Berridge, that he might be conducted "safely and honorably through the world." Reader, let such be your daily petition and request. Be willing to endure any privations rather than dishonor that blessed name by which you are called, and thus give occasion to the enemy to blaspheme. And may the Lord strengthen you with all might, according to His glorious power—"that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God!"

30. The Glorious Appearing

"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body!" Philippians 3:20-21

in Scripture, the people of God are frequently represented as looking for the Savior's appearance. And when we think of the joys and honors which they will then realize—the wonder is that they do not long for that blessed hope with a far more intense and ardent longing! How transporting will be their bliss when, at the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God—they shall meet their Lord in the air, to welcome Him as He descends with the streaming myriads of angels, who swell the triumph of His train! While all the unbelievers on earth shall mourn, and smite their breasts—they will be enabled to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

It is true that the Redeemer has promised to appear to His people on earth—and often have they gone forth to meet Him in the chambers of His ordinances. They have met Him in His house; and while feasting there upon His grace, their griefs have been forgotten, and their strength has been renewed. They have met Him at His table, while, at the breaking of the bread, He has manifested Himself to them—as He does not unto the world. They have met Him at His footstool, and He has sweetly communed with them from the mercy seat. But in the great day it will be said, in another and far higher sense, "Behold the Bridegroom comes! Go forth to meet Him!" It will be to meet Him, not in the means of grace—but on the throne of His glory! To meet Him, not for a transient visit—but to dwell forever in His immediate presence, to gaze upon His matchless beauties, and to join with saints and angels in chanting His endless praise!

Christian, will your *love to Christ*, stand this test? Are you looking and longing for His return? Are you often

asking, "Why is His chariot so long in coming?" O should such an event, so glorious in its nature, so blissful in its results, be unlonged for? Shall He be an unwelcome intruder when He comes? Such He will be—to the world of the ungodly—the language of whose hearts is now, "Delay Your coming; stop Your chariot wheels; we do not need You, for other matters occupy our thoughts, and engross our affections" But if such will not bid Him welcome when He comes, far otherwise ought it to be with us, who profess to be His followers and friends. Should not our whole lives be spent in anticipation of that great event! Should not our daily, hourly cry be, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!"

31. The Blissful Consummation

"Receiving the end of your faith—the *salvation of your souls*." 1 Peter 1:9

Many blessings are now possessed by the Christian; but salvation, in its *full* realization, is yet future. It embraces the whole of what God has in reserve for His people through eternity! Does heaven include the enjoyment of those pleasures, which no *sin* can ever pollute, which no *sorrow* can ever becloud, which no *time* can ever impair, which no *change* can ever affect, which no *calamity* can ever destroy? Does it include whatever the infinite *love* of God can prepare, whatever the infinite *wisdom* of God can devise, and whatever the infinite *power* of God can secure? Whatever it includes, is embodied in this expression. If only the salvation of our souls be secured—all the *blessings of grace* are ours here—and all the *ineffable treasures of glory* will be our heritage hereafter!

An aged saint was once asked by a Christian friend, "What are you now doing?" "Waiting, sir," was his reply. "And for what are you waiting?" "For the appearing of my Lord." "And what makes you long for His appearing?" "O, sir," did he say, his languid eyes brightening as he uttered the words, "I expect great

things then!" Well might he have said so, and well may every true believer adopt the same language. He does expect, and he has ample grounds for expecting "great things then!"

In the full and final salvation of our souls—all those great things are embraced. It is nothing less than complete deliverance from the bondage of corruption; entire emancipation from the power of every foe; the body of sin and death forever left behind; the good work, begun in the day of conviction, fully finished; every grace, however defective at present, grown to perfect maturity; all this, and unspeakably more, is involved in that end of his faith, for which the child of God is encouraged to look forward.

"Better," says the wise man, "is the *end* of a thing than the *beginning*." To the *commencement* and subsequent *progress* of the Christian's faith, no small importance appertains; but the *end* of his faith will be the best of all. Welcome shame and sorrow, if such an end shall at length be ours! The ungodly world may despise us; even our nearest friends may forsake us; yet we can well afford to bear their opposition without a single murmur, if we are only permitted to cherish the hope—that our course will eventually terminate in so blissful a consummation!