

Simon Peter, 3 The Cripple etc.

Section 3 of 5 (chapters 13-19) of:

Simon Peter — His Life and Letters.

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Contents

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|--|----|
| Simon Peter — His Life and Letters. | 1 |
| Chapter 13 — The Cripple, and the Builders. | 1 |
| Acts 3, 4: 1-22. | 1 |
| CHAPTER 14 — TEMPTING THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD. | 9 |
| Acts 4: 23-37, Acts 5: 1-16. | 9 |
| CHAPTER 15 — SIGNS AND WONDERS. | 12 |
| Acts 5: 12 — Acts 9. | 12 |
| CHAPTER 16 — FIFTEEN DAYS WITH PAUL. | 18 |
| Acts 9; Gal. 1. | 18 |
| CHAPTER 17 — CORNELIUS AND HIS HOUSEHOLD. | 21 |
| Acts 10 — Acts 11: 1-18. | 21 |
| CHAPTER 18 — PRAYED OUT OF PRISON..... | 28 |
| Acts 12..... | 28 |
| CHAPTER 19 — WITHSTOOD AT ANTIOCH. | 32 |
| Acts 15; Gal. 2. | 32 |

Chapter 13 — The Cripple, and the Builders.

Acts 3, 4: 1-22.

In Acts 3, if I may so say, God rings the bell the second time to gather the people together, that He may continue His testimony to His beloved Son. In the second chapter it was by the

coming of the Holy Ghost, and the miraculous gift of tongues, that this testimony was produced. Now we shall see how it was maintained.

Peter and John, evidently bosom friends, and peculiarly linked together all through the gospels, went up together at the ninth hour of the day to pray. They had been partners in business in olden times, had caught fish together on the Sea of Galilee, and now they were partners in a new business, and go out together, not to catch fish, but men.

These two men were the complement one of the other. What Peter lacked John possessed. The latter was in the main as calm as the former was impulsive. John was evidently a quiet, restful, meditative man, with deep affection, resembling Mary of Bethany, while Peter was the counterpart of Martha, among the apostles. That John could thunder was evident, for the Lord, when he called him and his brother James, "surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder" (Mark 3: 17). Peter was always thundering, his torrential character carrying him resistlessly along, and sweeping all before it. Nevertheless in John was the greater moral power. Real power is always quiet. But the two were evidently devoted to each other, as to their common Master, and we never read of a hitch between them. Theirs manifestly was a friendship with a holy, and consequently an abiding basis, and well would it be for us if all our friendships had a substratum of a similar nature. In the work of the Lord it is of all-importance to have a well-chosen companion, a true yoke-fellow, as was John to Peter, and Timothy or Epaphroditus to Paul (see Phil. 2: 22, Phil. 4: 3).

It is here well to mark that Peter and John go up together to pray. It is sweet to see how frequently prayer is recorded as ascending to God in the Acts. In the first chapter we find the disciples continuing "with one accord in prayer and supplication," and then praying about the choice of a fresh fellow-worker. In the second chapter we find the disciples continuing stedfastly "in prayers." In this chapter — Acts 3 — we have Peter and John going up to the temple at the hour of prayer; and in the fourth chapter we find them praying again, and being "all filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 4: 31). (See also Acts 6: 4, Acts 7: 60, Acts 8: 15, 22, Acts 9: 11, 40, Acts 10: 2, 9, 30, 31, Acts 11: 5, Acts 12: 5, 12, Acts 13: 3, Acts 14: 23, Acts 16: 13, 25, Acts 20: 36, Acts 22: 17.)

I believe we have here the secret of the power of the moment. The servants and the saints were continually dependent upon God. They looked to, Him to work, and He did work most blessedly.

The incident in chapter 3 is familiar. "And a certain man, lame from his mother's womb, was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms." The next chapter tells us that this man was forty years old. Forty, we have seen, is in Scripture the number of perfect probation. Every one knew him, he was no longer a child, and he was in a condition that no one could meet or reach; and now he is met by the power of the Name of Jesus. Forty years old, and well known, no one could dispute the fact of his being healed. A notable miracle was to be wrought, and God takes care to have it well attested. The poor lame beggar is the type of a sinner who has got nothing if he has not got Christ. "And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to

receive something of them." I have no doubt his heart beat high as he heard Peter's words. Doubtless he thought to receive something of them, and he did not know what that something was. He was like many a one now casting about to get money. Look what the Lord gives him. "Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." How his heart must have sunk as he heard the words, "Silver and gold have I none," and thought — They are two paupers, just like myself.

But, observe, that ere he has time to be thoroughly depressed, Peter goes on to bid him to "rise up and walk." And then we read that Peter "took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength." The power of the Name of Jesus is manifested in the healing of the physical disability. The power of that Name thrills through him, "and he, leaping up, stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God." I understand his radiant joy, and I can understand too the immense joy that a sinner feels, when the Gospel meets him, and he finds his sins forgiven — washed away through his Saviour's blood. It is beautiful to see it in each respective case, and this man goes into the temple "walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God: and they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him." And if you were to become converted, my friend, all your friends would be amazed. If you appear as a totally new man, would they not be thoroughly surprised? and what a testimony would it be to the power of Christ! I do not know anything more powerful, as a testimony to the grace of God, than the fervent joyous life of a devoted Christian.

Then you find that the man holds on to Peter and John. He knows where the power is, and I do not wonder at his keeping close to them. The next day, when they were taken prisoners, this man goes boldly into the council, and although silent, becomes a witness to the power of the Name of Jesus, for he was the one who was healed.

In the next verses of our chapter Peter again charges home the guilt of the nation on their consciences, but at the same time shows how the grace of God can override the guiltiest act of the guiltiest nation on the face of the earth. Observing how the masses marvelled, for "all the people ran together unto them, in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering," Peter says to them, "Why marvel ye at this?" It was only what Christ was worthy of. Peter had this in his soul, My Master is worthy of anything, there is no limit to the power of His name. The people marvelled because they had no faith; and the reason why Christians so often marvel now, when the Lord works mightily, is because they have so little faith. They were looking at the instrument, — a very foolish thing to do in things divine. God almost always uses base and foolish things to work His ends. It was at the blowing of trumpets of rams' horns that Jericho's mighty walls fell down. It was into the hands of the three hundred men that lapped, that the Lord delivered the hosts of Midian, in the days of Gideon. What we want is what Peter had here. He was full of the Holy Ghost, and his heart was full of Christ, as to his affections and confidence, and this is exactly what we want now.

Then Peter tells his tale. "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus," or rather his "servant" Jesus it should be. You do not find Peter preaching Jesus as the Son of God. That was reserved for Paul. Peter preaches Him as

God's servant Jesus. When we come to the ninth chapter of the Acts, where Paul is converted, he at once begins the ministry of the Son of God. "And straightway he preached Jesus in the synagogue, that he is the Son of God" (Acts 9: 20).

Peter's point here is clearly this — Jesus is in glory, the One who was once here on earth, is now in the glory. Then he comes down on their consciences, as he says, "Whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go." He does not speak of Judas, though no doubt Judas was the immediate instrument of delivering Him up. "But ye denied the Holy One and the Just"; they denied the One whom he asserts to be the Messiah, and whom God declares to be the Holy One and the Just.

See how fearlessly he proclaims the truth as he says, "Ye denied the Holy One." It is possible some one may have retorted, "Why, Peter, you are very bold, it is only a few weeks since, that, in the high priest's hall, you denied Him." Yes, Peter would say, alas! it is true that I denied Him, but I have bitterly repented of my folly and sin; I have met Him, and owned it all to Him, and He has forgiven me. I have had it all out with Him, and I have learnt that He has died for me, that I might be forgiven, and I am forgiven. I have met Him, and have had an hour alone with Him — yes, alone with Him — and all is forgiven, and effaced.

How charming and effectual is the work of grace in a real heart. Peter illustrates this beautifully, for now that he is cleansed, and forgiven, his conscience is purged, and though it was only seven weeks and a few days, since he had denied his Lord, yet now he can fearlessly turn round and charge his hearers with the sin which he himself had been guilty of. "Ye denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go." They helped to seal Pilate's doom, as well as to murder their own Messiah. "Ye denied the Holy One and the Just" is a terrible charge against them, while withal it is a precious testimony as to who and what his Master was, the Holy One of God. Face your sins, Peter, so to speak, says, go down before God, and face your iniquities. "Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you, and killed the Prince of Life." Terrible indictment!

But you, my reader, may say, Surely you do not charge me with such an awful sin? Well, I ask you, have you ever taken your place on the side of the murdered One? If not, you are still on the side of His murderers. "He that is not with me is against me," the Lord says. It was the world or Jesus, in that day; it is the world or Jesus, in this day. I appeal to you, how does it stand with you, my friend?

When Peter says, You "killed the Prince of Life," I can imagine their souls trembling, because they knew it was true. There was no gainsaying this charge of the Holy Ghost's. What an indictment! "Ye killed the Prince of Life." True, He suffered Himself to be slain; but Peter says, You killed Him. And now look at the chasm between the world and God. Look how opposed are the thoughts of the world, and God's thoughts of Jesus, "whom God raised from the dead." Could there be a greater contrast? — You killed Him, but God raised Him from the dead.

Now then, my dear reader, on which side will you range yourself, on God's side, or the world's? There is no middle ground between the world and God, not one step. Satan would like to make you think that there is. He does not mind your being religious. If you do not get

converted, and come to Christ, you may be as religious as you like, for he knows that you may be a professor of Christ, while not a possessor of Him; that you may be a perfect encyclopaedia of Biblical knowledge, and yet go to hell. Every man goes there that is not savingly converted. If you have been a formalist till now, just turn to the Saviour now, at once, just where you are, and as you are, and learn His grace. There is no satisfaction, or salvation in mere religiousness, you must know Jesus.

Peter, you will observe, informs the Jews that day, that they and God had taken two quite opposite courses. You put Him into a grave, God took Him out of it, "whereof we are witnesses," — and further, He has put Him into glory. Nor this only, "His name through faith in his name, hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know. Yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all" (Acts 3: 16). And only faith in His name can do anything now for you, my friend. It is His name, and faith in His name alone, that secures blessing for the soul. This man rose up, and walked in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, and, my unconverted reader, I say to you, In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise out of your bed of sins, and come to Him. You may be saved this very moment if you have faith in the name of Jesus.

At this point of his discourse, Peter brings in the balm of grace as he says, "Brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." On the cross Jesus had prayed, "Father, forgive them," and now Peter, following in his Master's steps, is led to proclaim forgiveness. Here is the way of escape he opens, "Repent ye therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." Do you want your sins blotted out, my friend? Nothing but the blood of Jesus can blot them out. And how can you get this blessing? By repentance, and turning to God, having faith in the name of the Lord Jesus. What is repentance? Repentance is this: I judge myself. What is conversion? Conversion is this: I turn round to the Lord. This is all illustrated in the parable of the prodigal son. He was convicted when he said, "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger." His conviction was of a double nature, there was *goodness* in his father's heart, while there was *badness* in his own. This conviction altered his whole course, and turned him round. "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance," we read (Rom. 2: 4). It is His goodness that leads man to repentance, and not man's repentance that leads God to goodness. This conviction ends in his conversion. He was converted when he arose and came to his father. He was confessing his sins when he said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee." He was repentant when he said, "I am no more worthy to be called thy son."

Repentance is the judgment which the soul passes upon itself in the presence of God, believing the testimony of God. Repentance is not the stepping-stone to conversion. Repentance is taking God's part against myself, and judging that what God says of me is true, believing His testimony. Faith is the soul's reception of a divine testimony: repentance is the result in the soul of that reception. Some one has well said, "Repentance is the tear drop in the eye of faith." Very wisely and rightly then did Peter preach and press this wholesome moral process upon their souls, with this end in view, "that your sins may be blotted out."

That "God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets that Christ should suffer," was no excuse for the nation's guilt. God really sent Jesus to be a Saviour, Peter says, and you

showed your guilt, and the evil state of your hearts by murdering Him; but God knew what was needed, and what He had foreordained. Christ must needs suffer, the Scriptures said, "it behoved him to suffer." It is all fulfilled now, therefore repent, and believe, and get your sins blotted out, and then God will send Jesus Christ back again. There is a splendid character about Peter's exhortation at this point. "Repent ye, therefore, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ, who was foreordained for you; whom heaven must receive until the times of the restitution of all things" (Acts 3: 19-21). A lovely Gospel for repentant sinners to listen to was this indeed, and the next chapter shows that two thousand souls at least turned round to the Saviour, and got forgiveness of their sins. The Word was mixed with faith in those who heard it that day.

We must bear in mind that the Jews were always looking for the kingdom, the millennial reign of the Messiah. Very well, says Peter, the millennium will come, but it will come in connection with that Jesus whom ye have crucified, and "whom heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, of which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." If you are going in for the kingdom, you must have God's King — the Lord Jesus.

Then he presses on them some scriptures. Jesus was the One to whom all the prophets gave witness; Moses had said unto the fathers, "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things, whatsoever he shall say unto you." Even on the mount of transfiguration God had said concerning Jesus, "Hear ye him," but alas, they did not. Yet see how grave are the issues that hang upon hearing the voice of this Prophet, "And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people." Now, that Jesus was this indicated Prophet is plain, for Peter goes on to say, "Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days." Everything depends, he says, on how you hear Him. Nothing could be plainer. To hear Jesus is to secure salvation. To deafen the ear, and harden the heart against Him, is to seal the soul's eternal doom.

Listen, my undecided readers, to this warning voice, for Peter's sermon was not only for the people of Judea, in that day, it is meant for you and me today. It is world-wide in its application. You know, my unsaved friend, that you have turned a deaf ear to the Lord's voice up till now. Do you say, I have made up my mind not to be converted? Then, you may, at the same time, make up your mind to be eternally damned, for Peter warningly says, "It shall come to pass that *every soul*, which will not hear that prophet, *shall be destroyed* from among the people."

Then he goes back to quote the beautiful covenant word of God to Abraham, "And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed," and with the most touching grace thus concludes his address, "Unto you first, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." It was a charming peroration, and contained the most beautiful Gospel that could possibly fall on their ears. Little wonder that many of the people believed. But not so the leaders, as the next chapter tells us.

In Acts 4 we find that the priests, and the captain of the temple, joined with the Sadducees in persecuting the apostles. Two very different companies were these, the priests, and the

Sadducees. The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection, angel, spirit, or in a future state, in fact, they believed nothing (see Acts 24: 8). They were the Rationalists of that day, and if you are like these Sadducees, my friend, you have nothing to rest your soul upon. But the devil will put these two opposing sections together, in order to fight against the truth, and the servants of God. These men were preaching a risen Saviour, One who had gone into death, and annulled it, and come up out of it: and that One, I rejoice to say, is my Saviour. No wonder that the devil, and all his servants, were "grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from among the dead" (ver. 2), for the soul who knows a living, triumphant, and victorious Saviour, for ever passes out of Satan's clutches.

"Howbeit many of them that heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand." It says nothing about the women and children, and if we may judge of the companies who heard the Word in that day, by the companies who listen to the Word today, there must have been a grand lot of conversions, for there are usually far more women and children than men ready to hear, and, thank God, to believe the Gospel too.

Men often think the Gospel is only for women and children, but what fools such will look in eternity, who, having despised the Gospel now, then find themselves, when too late, eternally damned. Oh, be a man for Christ now, come out boldly for Christ now!

The common people had the Gospel presented to them in the third chapter, the leaders are going to get it now in the fourth. "On the morrow, their rulers, and elders, and scribes, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this? Then Peter, *filled with the Holy Ghost*, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole." The secret of Peter's power here was, that he was full of the Holy Ghost.

But did you ever hear of such utter folly as putting a man in prison, and trying him for a good deed — healing a cripple? God brings the man in, as it were, to give witness to that council. I do not expect he was invited by the council, for he was an awkward witness. Look at him now, whole! Yesterday he was a poor cripple until three o'clock, now he is a hale man. And what had done it? The power of the Name of that Jesus "whom ye crucified," that was their guilt, "whom God raised from the dead," there was God's righteousness.

And now for the application, "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner." And what was the stone? Christ, of course, but Christ in glory, as the Head Stone of the corner. Here Peter is in conflict with these poor, foolish builders, and there are plenty of them in our days, people who are building without Christ. The Lord had said, speaking of Himself as the Stone — (see Matt. 21: 44) — "Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." The corner stone, about to fall, is the exalted Christ, coming by-and-by in glory, and destroying the godless Gentiles in the day of His wrath. Those who fell over it and were broken, were the Jews,

stumbling over Jesus in His humiliation. Ah, take care that you, my friend, are right as regards that Stone, for Peter goes on to say, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name, under heaven, given among men whereby we must be saved."

You yield your heart to Jesus now, and you will find your sins blotted out, and that you are pardoned and forgiven; yea, built then on the Rock that can never be shaken, because you are built on Him who died and rose again, and you will find that His Name is everything to you now, and will be your joy for ever, the Name of Jesus. The Lord give you to know, my reader, the power of that Name. God will have that Name to be honoured, the Name of the glorified Saviour. The Lord give you grace to trust Him now, and know that you are saved by Him, and by Him alone, the Chief Corner Stone. The one only Name "given among men whereby we must be saved" will then be your delight, and you will learn to sing truly and joyfully: -

"There is a name I love to hear,

I love to sing its worth;

It sounds like music in mine ear,

The sweetest name on earth.

Jesus! the name I love so well,

The name I love to hear,

No saint on earth its worth can tell,

No heart conceive how dear."

Peter's statement, "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved," evidently staggered the august council before whom he and his fellow-apostle stood. They pause in their opposition, and have a secret conference what to do. "The boldness of Peter and John" (Acts 4: 13) impressed them, and "beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing" (Acts 4: 14) — they were silenced. Faith and facts are two stubborn witnesses. Both attest God's grace.

The outcome of the conference was — "That indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it." They admit defeat, and then, calling in the apostles, "commanded them not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus." This command raised the most important question possible: Was God to be obeyed or man? The apostles permit of no ambiguity as to the course they judge right to adopt, for we read, "Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." The prohibitory injunction of man had no weight with them. God had commanded them to preach Christ — to preach the Gospel, and "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" is their emphatic, and bold rejoinder. The

religious leaders of Israel were not now the expositors of the will of God — they were opposed to His will. The path of Peter and his companions is plain. God must be obeyed rather than man.

It is to be noted here that the action of the apostles is in no sense opposed to the scripture that enjoins: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God" (Rom. 13: 1, 2). Again, Peter himself said at a later day, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as 'unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well" (1 Peter 2: 13,14). In the case before us it was not a question of the king or of the civil power, — which the saint ever recognises as the sword of God, put into man's hand, — but of ecclesiastical and priestly arrogance, which has no claim on the conscience for allegiance. There is a principle of immense importance here, viz., that a child of God is never supposed to disobey God, in order to obey man. The civil power may make regulations which deprive the saint of privileges he would like to enjoy, but the latter must never disobey God, in order to conform to the will of the former. He may have to endure deprivation of a privilege, but never can disobey a divine command. This Peter's action here makes abundantly clear.

"And being let go, they went to *their own company*." This is a fine word. There was a separated people, who all knew each other, and to them the liberated apostles repair. When set free from earthly toil, or bonds, do we each know what it is to find out this company day by day? They did so in Peter's day, and had a prayer-meeting with great results.

CHAPTER 14 — TEMPTING THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD.

Acts 4: 23-37, Acts 5: 1-16.

THE connection between the early part of Acts 5 and the end of chapter 4 is easily apparent. In the fourth chapter we hear of the apostles, and those with them, having a prayer-meeting, and we get the result. "When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled *with the Holy Ghost*, and they spake the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4: 31). This was the normal condition of things at the beginning of Christianity. Every one possessed the Holy Ghost, and knew it. As a Divine Person He was on the earth, and dwelt in every believer. The Church was a large company by this time. Five thousand *men* had been converted, but we do not hear of the introduction of a woman till the fifth chapter. Afterwards we hear of numbers of men and women being added.

It must have been a lovely spectacle that met the eye, in these Pentecostal times, recorded in the end of Acts 4. The Church then made everything of Christ. It was not a community, formed and maintained, on a dead level, by law, but the result of the working of the grace of God in the heart, so that every one was thinking of everybody else — no one of himself. It was the spontaneous outcome of Divine love in the believers, as they found out the place of blessing and privilege they had in Christ. We read that, "With *great* power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and *great grace* was upon them all" (Acts 4: 33). Great power and

great grace are here seen, and the two ever go together; wherever you have great grace, you will find great power.

"Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the price of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need." I have little doubt there was a common fund. Very likely many a young believer lost everything by becoming a Christian, but they counted it all joy to suffer shame for Jesus' name. Yet none were allowed to lack, for all were supplied by the love of the rest. Those who had goods came and laid them down at the apostles' feet, as they liked; there was nothing to compel, it was all voluntary.

This you have Barnabas beautifully illustrating (Acts 4: 36, 37). He makes a beautiful start, for there is the complete surrender of all that he had to Christ. I Wonder if you, my reader, have started so. I do not believe there is a real start, if Christ has not become everything to the soul.

The beauty of this scene is great. It is a sort of spiritual Eden. But, alas! as the serpent entered that scene of joy, so does he enter this. Eden was the habitation of man, with God as a visitor. Satan entered to spoil it. The Church is the habitation of God by the Spirit, who has formed it by His presence. It is here seen in its first beauty as formed of God, and being His habitation. The Holy Spirit of God dwelt there, and ruled for a while. Alas! the flesh soon entered, for Satan could not bear to see unbroken communion, and unalloyed attachment to Christ.

In Acts 5 the imitation of this lovely attachment of heart to Christ is before us. Undoubtedly Barnabas was looked on as very devoted to the Lord. Things among men are often merely imitative. We have such hearts that even the desire to seem devoted may be imitated, and, evidently, Ananias and Sapphira desired to appear as devoted, in the eyes of men, as Barnabas really was. Alas! they did not think of how their actions would appear to the Lord. Ananias posed as one who would appear more devoted than he really was; but God will not be mocked. Ananias appears in the guise of a man devoted to the interests of Christ. Peter comes to the front again, and, led of God, at once detects this unreal state of matters.

"A certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?" Did that man tell a lie? We do not read, at that moment, of any words being spoken. He came and laid down his money at the feet of the apostles, for the common need of all. But God was there, and He could not be deceived. Peter simply says, "Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost" (Acts 5: 4, 5). This man wanted to appear to possess a devotedness that was not real, but God was in the midst of His assembly, and the unreality was detected, exposed, and judged by Him. How solemn! Yet, if there be anything that it is truly blessed to learn, it is that God *is in the midst* of His people, in the bosom of the assembly, and He will have reality. What burning thoughts must have possessed Ananias's soul at that moment, as he felt — God has detected me!

"I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified," God had lone, ago said, as He judged the impiety of Nadab and Abihu (see Lev. 10: 3). They offered strange fire, and died. Again, Achan took of the accursed thing, and died too (Joshua 7).

Here Ananias dies, for the Lord will have reality. The two priests betrayed impiety; Achan, cupidity; Ananias, unreality. These are solemn lessons. The Lord would have every one of us weigh them in His presence, and feel that it is a solemn thing to enter God's assembly, and to take His name upon our lips. I believe the nearer we get to the truth, the more sure we are to be detected if we are not real. If you want to have mammon inside, with a cloak of religiousness outside, do not you come to the Lord's table. Do not come near the place where the Lord is, for you will be detected. Such is the lesson of Acts 5.

A little later Sapphira comes in, "And Peter answered and said unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much." She is bold, and defiant in her lying. "Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?" God knew what had taken place — they had talked over the matter, and made an agreement. What did Peter mean by tempting the Spirit of the Lord? How could they do that? Israel tempted God in the desert, saying, "Is the Lord among us, or not?" (Ex. 17: 7.) They were not sure of His presence among them. Ananias and Sapphira, evidently, were not sure if the Lord was in the assembly after all. But God was there! The great, the grand truth of the Acts is, that a Divine Person is dwelling on earth in the bosom of God's assembly. The Lord showed that His Spirit was there, by unveiling the heart of both husband and wife to His servant Peter, and then judging the evil and the evildoers.

God is ever intolerant of evil in His assembly. He judges evil amongst His saints, just because He is amongst them. He cannot allow evil even where He does not dwell; how much less where He does dwell. The more His presence is manifested, and realised, the more intolerant is He of what is unsuited to Him. It cannot be otherwise. God is holy, and He will have holiness among His saints. What makes this scene so sad is the subtle way in which the evil came in to at first corrupt the Church. Ananias and Sapphira pretended to follow an impulse of the Holy Ghost, whose actual presence they disregarded — yea, even doubted, — and they fall dead in the presence of Him whom in their blindness they forgot they could not deceive, though they might deceive His servants.

No testimony to the presence of God in the assembly could be more mighty, albeit that it be most painful in its effects. The presence of God in the midst of His own is a truth of the deepest importance. Its seriousness is only equalled by its blessedness.

But, you ask, had Ananias and Sapphira been really converted? Were they Christians? I do not know. They were, outwardly, members of God's assembly on earth, and they were unreal in the position they occupied. The hand of the Lord came upon them in judgment; and, as a direct result, "great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things." The assembly itself, and those outside it too, were greatly moved. All felt God's presence was there, and, as a holy consequence, "of the rest durst no man join himself to them." People were not in a great hurry to come into God's assembly in those days. Those who wanted to be thought

something of, said, It will not do to go in there; if we are not real, we shall be found out. I fancy I see a number of half-hearted souls, hangers-on round the divinely gathered company of that day, and when the news comes out that God would not have unreality, they feared to go in.

"And of the rest durst no man join himself unto them; but the people magnified them," is a striking word. "The rest" were clearly those who had some place in the world; religious or otherwise. They fear to offend the world that has given them a position; for the more place man gives us the less we like to forfeit his approval. "The people," — the common people, I presume, — however, were not so affected by the world's favour, or its fear. They had nothing to lose, and everything to gain by receiving Christ; and being simple they received the truth. Among them were found plenty of real souls. "Multitudes both of men and women," "were added to the Lord." Here, after Sapphira, we have the fact noticed of the introduction of women into the assembly, and they come in, in multitudes.

I believe the lesson we have to learn from such a solemn scene is, that God's eye is on us. He keeps a long look-out, and eventually always deals with unreality; but if a soul is simple and honest, it says, and loves to say, like the Psalmist, not only, "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me," but adds, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139: 1-24). The simple and dependent soul that clings to the Lord is always safe, and always kept.

CHAPTER 15 — SIGNS AND WONDERS.

Acts 5: 12 — Acts 9.

ALTHOUGH God never repeats Himself, there is often to be observed a similarity in His ways, at the beginning of a new dispensation, with His actings in that which preceded it. This is observable in the section of Peter's history now before us, in connection with the establishment and progress of God's new work — Christianity, — the essence of which is the presence and power of the Holy Ghost.

When the Lord Jesus began His public ministry, His divine, as well as Messianic attributes, were attested in a remarkable way. We read, "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them. And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan" (Matt. 4: 23-25). Most of His miracles of healing — and *all* His miracles, be it noted, were miracles of goodness, not judgment, as sometimes was the case in God's actings through His servants — were wrought in the early days of His earthly ministry. The object is plain. Attention were called to His presence, and mission. A divine person, the Son of God, was on earth, in human form. The same thing is to be noted in the Acts, in connection with the presence of the Holy Ghost here, as actually come to earth, and indwelling the assembly, and the servants of God. Thus signs and wonders — the

exercise of the "gifts of healing" of which we read in 1 Cor. 14 — were to be expected, and they are not wanting. A divine Person, the third Person of the blessed Trinity, though invisible to mortal eyes, was here, and here in a new way, and His presence was thus attested. Hence we read, "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one" (Acts 5: 12, 15, 16).

In truth it was the fourth of Matthew over again, the Spirit of God replacing the Son of God, and using as the vessels of His power the apostles, and Peter apparently chiefly.

This miraculous testimony to the power of God had a double effect; people came from far and near to profit by it, and Satan began to tremble for his kingdom, and his servants were "filled with indignation" (Acts 5: 17). Peter is evidently greatly used, as the Lord's messenger, both for the healing of the bodies of men and the blessing of their souls. Bitter opposition rises, and he and the rest of the apostles are cast into the common prison. But the Lord would not have His work put a stop to by Satan's servants. God, in providence, watches over His work, and, acting through the ministry of angels, frustrates all the plans of the opposers of His grace.

He had been working miracles *through* His servants, now He works miraculously *for* them, so the angel of the Lord opens the prison doors by night, and brings them out, and says, "Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life" (Acts 5: 20). Oh, what a commission! How beautiful for the angelic messenger of God to give these dear men this lovely message. "Speak all the words of this life." Do we know the words of this life? Then we too have a lovely commission, which takes in the whole circle of truth, as our testimony. "All the words of this life." It means all about Christ, all about redemption through Him, all about forgiveness of sins, all about sanctification, and the presence of the Holy Ghost, all the things that belong to Christ.

There is immense power in this charge, "Speak to the people all the words of this life." The Gospel was, and is, the power of God. It alone can meet man's necessity. All other agencies are really futile. We live in a day when education, equalisation, social elevation, and temperance reformation have each and all their many advocates. They all fail to meet the case. Man's condition as a sinner away from God, and sunk under sin, and the power of Satan, is alone met by the Gospel of Christ, which quickens him out of death, gives him a new nature, a new life, a new power, and a new object. To attempt to patch up, improve, mend, or reform the old nature is a hopeless, and God-forbidden task. "Go, stand and speak to the people all the words of this life", is the divine commission now. This is God's panacea for the hopeless ruin, and moral pravity in which the whole human family is sunk. A dead man needs life. "Dead in trespasses and sins" exactly describes man's condition. How sweetly suited to his state is the remedy the servants of God are to use, "the words of this life." Let us see to it that we use only this divine remedy. It is all powerful. Like Goliath's sword, "there is none like it." The Lord's command is plain. Ring out the Gospel. Preach it "in season and out of season." It alone will lift man up to God, as, in it, God has come down to man.

Peter and the apostles gave immediate heed to the angelic injunction, and go to the temple and preach.

Meanwhile the council gathers, and sends officers "to have them brought." The officers go, and return, saying, "The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers without before the doors; but when we had opened, we found no man within." Well might the council be puzzled, and doubt "whereunto this would grow." They had to deal with God, not man, and had left Him out of their reckoning. This is ever the way of the world. Their confusion is added to at the moment as "then came one and told them saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people" (Acts 5: 25). Again the preachers are taken, but without violence, for the officers feared the people.

After this Peter and his brethren stand before the council again, and the high priest asks them, in a supercilious way, "Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in *this name*?" Ah! my friend, you will have to own "this name" yet. God has raised Him who bears it from the dead, and the day is not far distant when every knee shall bow to Him, angels, men, and demons. Have you confessed His name yet? The day is coming when you must, if you have not. You had better do it now, willingly, in the day of grace, and be saved, rather than be compelled to bow to it in the day of judgment.

The high priest says, "Ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine" (it was lovely doctrine, for it was all about Jesus), "and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." Oh, Satan is a crafty master. He knows how to urge a man on to a deed of darkness, and then come and give him good reasons for it. This high priest was the very man who had condemned the Lord, and round him were the people who, in Pilate's hall, had clamoured for His blood, saying, "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matt. 27: 25); and now he says, forsooth, "*Ye intend to bring this man's blood upon us.*" Ah! my friend, His blood must be upon you, either as a shelter from judgment, and as bringing you to God, or, as crying for vengeance, because of His murder!

Had not these men clamoured for the blood of the Saviour? Yes; and, as far as they were concerned, had brought about His death, and they now wished also to put His servants to death.

The high priest remonstrates with them on the ground of his former prohibition, but the contemptuous language used is very notable. He will not name Jesus. He only speaks of "this name" — "your doctrine" — "this man's blood." Peter's reply, in name of the apostles, is the expression of a settled purpose, rather than any attempt to remonstrate, or to give light to those who need and seek it. This his audience did not desire. They were utterly opposed to God — Peter and his friends were for Him.

Observe now Peter's answer, given by the Holy Ghost, — "We ought to *obey* God rather than men." These religious leaders of men were opposed to Christ. The apostles were not setting themselves up against the civil power. That a Christian must never do. But Judaism was an ecclesiastical principle, judged of God, and set aside, and here acting in opposition to Christ.

Then Peter once more boldly presses home their sin upon them, saying, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right

hand to be a prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things: and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that *obey him*" (Acts 5: 31, 32). Let me draw you, my friend, from the toils of the god of this world, and bring you bended low at the feet of this Prince and Saviour now. Is not a Saviour just what you want? It is! and what you need God sends to you. He is a Saviour in glory today for every anxious soul that wants Him. God gives repentance, and forgiveness of sins through Him, not to Israel only, but to any needy sinner that will bow to Him. Believe Him now, and get these two deep blessings, — repentance, and forgiveness of sins. Have you never bowed to, never owned Him yet? Are you still a guilty sinner, an opposer of Jesus? Ah! it is high time you were brought to repentance, for there is something else coming — judgment! It is looming in the distance, but, mean time, we preach repentance and forgiveness of sins.

What is repentance? Owning that what God says of you is true. Repentance is the judgment that the soul passes on itself. It receives the testimony of God, and when a soul believes there is a Saviour in glory, and that it has never yet bowed down to that Saviour, I believe an arrow of conviction goes through that soul.

Peter was repentant when he said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Job, when he said to God, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee," was repentant, for he adds, "Wherefore I abhor myself" (Job 42: 5, 6).

Never let us forget that, "Repentance is the teardrop in the eye of Faith." If you are brought to repentance, self-judgment, and contrition now, I know the hand that will wipe that tear from your eyes. It is the hand that was nailed to the tree for you! I know whose voice will whisper, "Fear not, thy sins are forgiven thee." But if you go on heedless and unrepentant, O sinner, and wake up in hell, you will have tears in plenty, but no hand there to dry them.

There is forgiveness of sins *now*. When I see my ruined and lost condition, and bow to Jesus, I get forgiveness, and then the Holy Ghost sheds abroad the love of God in the heart.

Peter's testimony cuts his hearers to the heart; but, alas! they did not repent. This is proved by what follows, for "they took counsel to slay them." At this juncture Gamaliel steps in with his advice, "Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to naught: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found to fight against God" (Acts 5: 38, 39). To this they agree in measure, beat the apostles, command them that they shall not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. They, in no wise depressed, or dejected, depart, "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." Affliction for Christ's name, and joy in the Spirit ever go together. What a happy company they were that day! Would that we were all more like them. Weak in themselves they were maintained of God, and consequently "daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5: 42).

The opposition of the high priest and his followers towards the apostles and their work was only checked for the moment, and not extinguished, as events show. If we turn now to Acts 7, we find Stephen witnessing for Jesus, and martyred for his faithfulness. Thereafter a general persecution broke out against the saints (Acts 8: 1-4). I have no doubt Satan thought he had done

a good stroke of business when he sent Stephen out of the world, but Satan always outwits himself. Numbers went out preaching the Word. Philip, who had been among the seven deacons, ordained by the apostles to look after the poor in Jerusalem, found his office interrupted by the persecution. But he evidently had a gift from Christ, and a warrant to preach from the Lord. He made such good use of his gift, that in the Acts 21: we find that he has graduated, and had a degree conferred on him. There he is called "Philip the Evangelist." A noble degree indeed! Here, in the eighth chapter, Philip, turned out of diaconal work, begins a far higher service, and, going down to Samaria, preaches Christ. As a result — and it is just the right one — "there was great joy in that city" (Acts 8: 8). Yes, when Christ is preached, and Christ is believed, there is always "great joy" — and if you have not great joy, it is because you have not given Christ His right place in your heart. The man that is happy in the Lord has the right to look bright. Some believers in Jesus are joyless, because they are so little looking to Christ. They are occupied with themselves, their circumstances, their bodies perhaps, something that is not Christ. They have too much of Christ to be able to enjoy the world, and too much of the world to enjoy Christ.

Next we have the devil coming in to imitate God's work, so he gets Simon the sorcerer, to profess conversion, that he may spoil it, and cast discredit on it. But the devil is always outwitted. Simon's case does not really fling discredit on Christianity at all. What does a bad bank-note prove? That there are plenty of good ones. Even so, a false professor of Christ is really a testimony to the truth, of which he knows nothing, but which tons of thousands rejoice in, or he would not have falsely essayed to join them.

Simon Magus was a miracle-lover, and lived to influence the people's minds thereby. But Philip was preaching Christ, something that met the deep need of the heart of man, and Simon was distanced. "Then Simon himself believed also; and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done" (Acts 8: 13). But the faith of a man who sees miracles and believes is not divinely produced faith; for what I believe, because I see it with my eye, is not faith at all. I have no doubt when Simon confessed the Lord, and Philip baptized him, that Philip thought he had caught a great fish, and would have brought him into the assembly; but the Lord had His eye on His assembly, and on His dear servant, as well as on this daring sinner, so, by means of Peter, He brings out his real state.

Evidently, before Philip reached Samaria, Simon Magus had by his sorcery gained an immense hold on the Samaritans. We read that he "bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one; to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God" (Acts 8: 9, 10). But the ministry of Philip, meeting, as it did, the deep need of the conscience and heart, delivered numbers from Simon's influence. His sorceries were dispelled from their minds by the truth and light of God. Seeing the way the current ran, I take it, Simon thought the best thing he could do was to go with the tide, and see if he could not yet keep his position. Carried by the strong current, it is quite possible his intelligence assented to the authority and power of the name of Jesus, whom Philip preached. That his conscience and heart were not reached is manifest, as the desire for his own glory is his uppermost thought. This reveals the profound moral darkness of his soul. Light — God's light — he could not have had; as the reception of that always leads the new-born soul to have, in measure, thoughts which are according to God. Simon had nothing of this about him; and Peter is

instrumental in saving the assembly from the introduction of a hypocrite, that Satan sought to foist in, and whom the warm-hearted evangelist Philip appeared prepared to welcome.

The apostles Peter and John had come down from Jerusalem and having laid their hands on the Samaritan believers, they had received the Holy Ghost. "And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God." How solemn for any one who is a mere professor of Christianity? Are you only a mere professor of Christianity? "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter," is a Spirit-blown trumpet note that may well awaken you from your awful delusion. With what divine clearness does Peter look into the man's soul, as he says, "Thy heart is not right in the sight of God." I ask you, Is your heart right with God? Shirk not this plain question, I beseech you. Peter's last words to Simon are, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity."

And when Simon gets these solemn words said to him, what does he do? Fall on his knees, and cry to God for mercy? No; he would have his praying done by proxy, like thousands in Christendom today. "Pray ye to the Lord for me," is his answer. You pray for me, Peter, he says. I do not hear that Peter did pray for him, and we hear no more of him. I fear he had a grand opportunity of salvation, and missed it. Do not imitate him!

Simon Magus is like a buoy, affixed to a sunken rock by the hand of God, to keep passing ships off it. He is a solemn warning to all false professors. To all such I would say, Learn this lesson — that neither baptism, nor making a profession of Christ can save you. He was baptized, and professed to follow Christ, and sought entrance into God's assembly. That he was not then saved is clear; that he ever was saved is doubtful. Nothing will do but the real possession of Christ.

Ananias and Sapphira, we see, were detected inside the assembly; Simon is detected outside it, never getting in. May I ask, my friend, Is your soul right with God? If not, do not sleep tonight till this question is happily settled in the affirmative. Are you still in the gall of bitterness, or are You in the happy position of a child of God, having Christ as the joy of your soul? If you have Christ as your life, your object, and your guardian, going through this scene, learn also that He is the coming Bridegroom, and soon He will take you up to be with Him.

If you have never known Him in this way yet, the Lord grant that this day may be the beginning of your thus knowing Him, and of your having the joy of that knowledge.

CHAPTER 16 — FIFTEEN DAYS WITH PAUL.

Acts 9; Gal. 1.

AFTER the solemn incident recorded in our last chapter, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the Gospel in many villages of the Samaritans on the way (Acts 8: 25). Their presence there was doubtless necessary, to help and cheer the assembly in that city, still passing through great persecution, and further, God was about to introduce a work, and a workman of another character, into the scene of His operations.

Before we hear anything more of Peter's history we get the interesting account of Saul's conversion. This event took place apparently soon after Peter's return to Jerusalem. Not there, however, where Saul, afterwards called Paul, was well known, did it occur, but afar off, and for a wise purpose was this. Saul had been a witness of, and was consenting to Stephen's death, and "yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that, if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem" (Acts 9: 1, 2). He becomes the apostle of Jewish hatred against the Lord Jesus, and His dear followers. Thus engaged in his sad missionary enterprise he nears Damascus, when a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, dazzles him with its overwhelming glory. Falling to the ground, he hears a voice saying unto him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" That glory and that voice end his career of self-will for ever. Subdued, and humbled in his mind, he meekly asks, "Who art thou, Lord?" He knew it was God's voice, but what was his surprise to learn that the speaker was Jesus, that He was the Lord of glory, and that He acknowledged His poor disciples — whom Saul would have marched off to Jerusalem to imprison and slay — as being Himself.

"I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest," carried volumes to his trembling soul, and now awakened conscience. Supposing himself to be doing God service (John 16: 2), he found out that he was the enemy of the Lord, and the chief of sinners. On the other hand he learned that the saints are one with Christ in glory. This latter truth formed his life from that moment. Utterly smashed up in all the springs of his moral being, and habits of thought, he discovers a new standing altogether, where he is neither a Jew, nor a Gentile, but "a man in Christ." From that moment his life and his ministry flow from the sense of being united to, and having association with, a heavenly Christ.

"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" is the question with which he begins his new career. Directed by the Lord to go into the city he goes. Although "his eyes were opened, he saw no man; but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink" (Acts 9: 8, 9).

Then, in a vision, Saul sees a man called Ananias coming to him, and restoring his sight. Ananias, sent of the Lord to him, goes, and "putting his hands on him, said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost."

What a thrill of joy must have gone through the blinded man's soul as he hears himself called "Brother Saul"! But a "brother" he was most truly, and at once begins to testify of Jesus. Driven out of Damascus by the fury of the Jews, who would have now slain him, Saul is dropped over the wall at night, and, when he gets to Jerusalem, finds his way into the assembly by the help of Barnabas. This event, I gather, took place some time later than the record in Acts 9: might, at first sight, lead one to think. Reference to Galatians 1 shows that it was not at the moment of his conversion that Saul went to Jerusalem. These are his words: "When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son *in* (not *to*) me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood; *neither went I up to Jerusalem* to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then *after three years* I went up to Jerusalem *to see Peter*, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother" (Gal. 1: 15-19).

What took place in these fifteen days God has not been pleased to record, but we can, from our other knowledge of these two dear men, safely conjecture what that meeting meant. A good deal can be learnt in a fortnight's residence with a brother in Christ. The time was not long, but surely long enough for the apostle of the circumcision, and he of the uncircumcision, to mutually get to know, and love each other in the Lord.

Possibly Peter, with a keen remembrance of the part Saul had played in Jerusalem at Stephen's death, and the fact that he had been so long of presenting himself at what Peter doubtless regarded as "Headquarters," may have been reserved. That the assembly as a whole was chary of receiving him, is clear from verse 26 of our chapter, "And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples; but they were *all* afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple." (Acts 9: 26.) But Barnabas came to his rescue, and heartily commended him as a sincere believer and disciple. When confidence was established, communion was assured. Peter's was not a nature to harbour suspicion, and Paul was so simple and straightforward, that the former's heart, we may well be assured, was soon gained. That it was so is certain, as we hear him speak, at a later date, of "our beloved brother Paul" (2 Peter 3: 15).

How much of surpassing interest would Peter have to tell Paul of the Lord's earthly life, and of all that had taken place up to the date of their meeting. With what interest, too, would Peter listen to Paul's tale of his unique conversion, of his seeing Jesus in glory, and of the special commission he held in regard to the Gentiles.

The meeting of these two remarkable men has a peculiar interest to one's heart. Neither they, nor those about them, knew how much was to be connected with their ministry. One thing is certain, that of all the men that then lived, these two are the best known today. Others may have had a passing notoriety, or possibly a place in the page of history; these two have honourable mention, and a marvellous record in the eternal pages of God's Word. Their words and testimony for Christ were the means of the conversion of thousands of precious souls, while they lived, and their writings have been the priceless heirloom of the Church. Untold millions, in hundreds of languages, have had the faith of their souls imparted, fed, and nourished by the words of God, which, as His "chosen vessels," they received and indited, and the Holy Spirit has

applied. Thank God for Peter and Paul! Their reward will be great in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus; and a poor outlook has that man who has not an assured place in that kingdom. In face of this, who would not be a follower of the Lord Jesus? The soul who declines this blessing, and this honour, will have eternity in which to repent of its folly.

But the fifteen days Paul spent with Peter were not idle days; for we read, "He was with them coming in and going out of Jerusalem. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed with the Grecians; but they went about to slay him" (Acts 9: 28, 29). To save his life, the brethren sent him away to Tarsus, his own town.

The conversion of Saul must have caused immense joy, as well as relief, to the Christians; and we can understand how thanks went up to God concerning him, as they said to each other, "He which persecuted us in times past, now preacheth the faith which he once destroyed" (Gal. 1: 23).

At this moment, under the good hand of God, the persecution against the saints began to lull, and the assemblies throughout Judea and Galilee and Samaria having rest, were edified. Peter thereupon again comes on the scene outside of Jerusalem, and passes throughout all parts of Israel (Acts 9: 32). This circumstance the Spirit of God relates after Paul's conversion, and before the record of his special work, without doubt to show the spiritual and apostolic energy still existing in Peter, at the very time that God was calling a new apostle, who should bring in much new light, and commence a new work. What God had done by Peter, and what He was about to do by Paul, are thus intermingled, to preserve the unity of the Church, and, although Paul be the apostle of the Gentiles, it is Peter who is first instrumental in bringing them into the Church. This we shall find in our next chapter.

But first we have the peculiar place which Peter occupied in the Lord's work strikingly attested by the healing of Aeneas, and the raising of Dorcas. There is something exquisitely beautiful in the record of the last few verses of Acts 9, because that which comes before us occurs among the saints, and not out in the world as such. It is noticeable that this title "the saints" is first found here, in the New Testament scriptures, as applied to believers in the Lord Jesus. Most people when they speak of "saints" think of the dead, and are apt to limit the number of those who are worthy of the title to a few bright examples, such as John, Peter, etc. That those who have died are so called is clear from Matthew 27: 52. But in Acts 9 thrice is the term applied to the living (see Acts 9: 13, 32, 41). It belongs to all who are born of the Spirit, and washed in the Saviour's blood; all such are set apart to God, as belonging to Him by redemption. All through the epistles it is the common term applied to God's children. I know many dislike to accept the term. Why? Because they rightly connect practice with it, and say, "If I were to acknowledge that I was a saint, you would want me to walk like one, and that I know I can not do." The great thing is to find out what you really are before God, and then to be it practically. Thus was it in our chapter.

While at Lydda, a town lying about ten miles east of Joppa, between it and Jerusalem, Peter finds one who had been eight years in bed, sick of the palsy. "Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole; arise, and make thy bed," suffices to at once heal him, and all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron turned to the Lord. God can use a miracle like this to convert a district, as easily as the

preaching of His Word. "Jesus Christ maketh thee whole," was gospel to the sinners of Lydda and Saron, as well as to poor Aeneas.

While Peter is yet at Lydda he is called to Joppa. This town, now called Jaffa, was, and is the most important seaport of Judea. It is situated on a sandy promontory jutting out into the Mediterranean, south of Caesarea, and about thirty miles from Jerusalem. The occasion of Peter's call was the death of Dorcas. She was a remarkable woman, "full of good works, and alms-deeds which she did." Here was a practical saint, if you like. As a result she was deeply beloved of the saints, who greatly mourned her loss. On his arrival Peter got the fullest testimony as to the ways of Dorcas, whose name meant "Gazelle," both in the Greek, and in the Syro-Chaldaic form, Tabitha. Whether the weeping widows and others at Joppa expected what took place, we are not told, but God had His purpose in the event. Putting all forth, Peter first entreats the Lord in prayer, and then "turning to the body, said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive."

In this miracle, for such it was, God doubtless desired to attest outside Jerusalem the power of the Name of Jesus. Beyond this it gave our apostle, as a vessel of God, both in the eyes of the saints, and of the world, a place that was, at the moment, called for. Added to this, one sees the grace of the Lord in stepping in to comfort those that mourn, in a manner unlooked for, and unknown in that day, save at His own blessed hand, while treading the earth. The effect without was great — "and it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord" (Acts 9: 42). A great awakening took place evidently, so much so that "Peter tarried many days in Joppa, with one Simon a tanner" (Acts 9: 43). From this interesting scene, however, he is soon called to one of wider and outstanding importance, as we shall see in our next chapter.

CHAPTER 17 — CORNELIUS AND HIS HOUSEHOLD.

Acts 10 — Acts 11: 1-18.

THERE is a peculiar interest attaching to this section of the Acts of the Apostles, because it shows the way in which the Gentiles step into blessing. It shows the way in which you and I can get saved, and opens up the manner in which those who had no claim on God whatever get God's salvation.

It is a very interesting occasion when the Gospel comes out first to the Gentiles, and very beautiful to note the way the Lord sends to an anxious man the blessing he wants. Evidently the eye of God is on this scene, — on the man who was anxious for light, and on the servant who was to carry the light to him. We find that both were praying. Cornelius was praying when a vision came to him (Acts 10: 30), and Peter was also praying when a vision came to him (Acts 11: 15). A very interesting lesson this for preachers and listeners! Cornelius was, I believe, a truly converted man when he got that vision. He was, however, without peace, and without the sense of pardon, but deeply desirous of getting that which he had not yet. He knew nothing about the accomplishment of redemption, and the coming of the Holy Ghost.

Cornelius was a Gentile undoubtedly, and by his very connection with the famous Italian band must have been a man of noble birth. He had moral features, too, which were very lovely. He feared God "with all his house." There are very few people of whom that can be said. "With all his house" would include his servants and children. Added to this remarkable statement we find, moreover, that he gave "much alms to the people." He was a benevolent man, much interested in others; a man who thought of others, as well as of his own soul's need. Regarding that, we are told he "prayed to God alway." This Gentile centurion, then, could not have been an unconverted man, for an unconverted man has no fear of God before his eyes. Cornelius, on the contrary, was a prayerful man, a man in whom the Spirit of God had worked, and had wrought in his heart spiritual desires. He is a type of hundreds and thousands of Gentiles today. He was an awakened man, — an anxious, pious, prayerful, and God-fearing man; but had you gone and asked him if his sins were forgiven, he would not have dared to say so, because the testimony of the Gospel, and the preaching of forgiveness to the Gentiles, had not gone out up to that moment.

It would have been as wrong for Cornelius to say, before he heard Peter's address, that he was forgiven, as for you and me now, if believing on Jesus, to say we do not know it. But although Cornelius knew not this great blessing, it is clear that most fervently he desired it, for he tells Peter that the angel had said unto him, "Cornelius, thy prayer is heard," (Acts 10: 31). What does that mean? That God read his heart, and knew what he desired — light. Bear in mind that he was not a Jewish proselyte. He had not embraced Judaism, though the Jews evidently thought well of him; but clearly he had never bowed to the yoke of the law. Christianity had just begun to be heard of, and the Jews loudly claimed to be still under the law of God, so that I can understand this pious man wondering where the truth lay.

Tidings of Jesus had gone out, — tidings of His death, and of His resurrection; for some time before the scene laid in our chapter, Philip had announced the glad tidings to "all the cities, till he came to Caesarea" (Acts 8: 40). Cornelius, therefore, must have heard about Jesus; but evidently he had not heard the full truth, and I believe the prayer of that man was, Lord, give me light; and wonderful light for him was then in store.

In this exceedingly interesting, awakened state, a man born of the Spirit (he could not have been acceptable to God otherwise, yet the angel said to him, "Thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God"), touched, anxious, wrought on by the Spirit of God, but not knowing the full truth of the Gospel, burning for light, desiring to have it, praying to God for it he got a vision. As he prayed, "a man stood before me," he says, "in bright clothing, and said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the seaside; who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee" (Acts 10: 30-32). In order to be saved, he was not told to *do* works, but he was to *hear* words, when Peter came. "He shall speak to thee." And when Peter relates the tale in Jerusalem, he says that the angel had said to Cornelius, "Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; who shall *tell thee words*, whereby *thou and all thy house shall be saved*" (Acts 11: 13, 14). Mark that now! What God bids Cornelius do, is to listen to "words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved." Many souls think that if they are to be saved, it is by some kind of works; but, when God opens the way to the Gentiles, He precludes the thought of works, as He says to this anxious man, Send for my messenger, who shall "tell thee words." No man was ever yet

saved by his own *works*: and no man was ever saved without believing *words* — the words of God.

In speaking of being saved, I am using the word as Scripture uses it. By being saved, I mean, a man not only knowing that he is set free from his sins, and that he is pardoned, but that he is brought to God, — that he is united to a living triumphant Saviour, who died on the cross for him, and is ascended and accepted for him, and who has sent down the Holy Ghost to make his emancipation known to him.

No sooner has Cornelius heard from God what he is to do, than he does it. This shows the earnestness and the fervour of the man. "Immediately therefore I sent to thee," he says to Peter. He will not wait a day. He does not say, I will think about it. Many a man has said, I will think about it, I will "hear thee again of this matter," and, blinded by Satan, and snared by procrastination, has gone to hell for eternity. Well did Rowland Hill say, "Procrastination is the recruiting officer of hell." Cornelius was no procrastinator.

Look at this earnest seeker! No sooner has the angel departed than he obeys the divinely given instructions (Acts 10: 7, 8). He feels that not a moment is to be lost; and, my reader, can you afford to wait another day to get the concerns of your soul settled? The moment this man hears God's word he sends off his three servants, on their forty miles' journey by the sea-coast, to Joppa. Travelling was not very rapid in those days, and they stayed no doubt somewhere for the night (Acts 10: 9), but Cornelius was not long kept waiting. God loves to meet an anxious soul, and oftentimes does it straightway.

Now, let us see how the Lord was preparing His servant to meet this exercised and obedient Gentile. Peter went up to pray on the housetop; and he did pray, for he says in the next chapter, "I was in the city of Joppa praying." It was the sixth hour, noonday, not the time people generally go up to pray. Once Peter had been told to watch and pray, and he did not, with the result that he fell; now we find him praying, and the Lord speaks to him in a vision. He "saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth; wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter, kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice; and the vessel was received up again into heaven" (Acts 10: 11-16). Some have imagined this to be the Church, but I do not believe that is the thought here. Peter was not the vessel through whom God was going to bring out the truth of the Church — that was given to Paul. I believe the vision was given to teach Peter the lesson, that the Cross had done away with all the barriers that had previously existed between Jew and Gentile, and that the grace of God was going out to each alike, and that the same cleansing power was to bring both into blessing.

But Peter could not interpret the vision; and while he was doubting what it should mean, the men sent from Cornelius stood before the gate. At this moment, while Peter thought upon the vision, God does not send an angel — a servant — to call him and tell him about the messengers who stood before the gate; but "the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise

therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them" (Acts 10: 19, 20). How beautiful this is. I believe Peter now begins to get an inkling of what the Lord means by the vision. It was to teach him that with God there was henceforth to be no distinction between Jew and Gentile. Peter had been a good Jew up till this time; but the special thought of the Church is that "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3: 2); and Peter was the vessel chosen of God to begin this work, and to call in the Gentiles, although Paul was distinctly the Apostle of the Gentiles.

Under law, God had forbidden the Jew to mingle with the Gentile. Now the Lord taught Peter that that day had gone by, — that what God had cleansed, he was not to call common; and at once he began to carry out the truth, for we read that he called the men in and lodged them (Acts 10: 23).

We have been observing that Peter was a very impulsive, ardent, incautious man, but it is striking to see how cautious he became here. He took with him six brethren (Acts 10: 23, 11: 12) to be witnesses of what God was about to do; and I have no doubt these six men had a warm heart to Peter ever after, for taking them with him that day. I should be thankful to any one who took me where the Lord was going to bless and save a whole houseful of anxious souls.

While Peter and his companions are journeying to Caesarea, Cornelius is very urgent to get others blessed as well as himself. He is anxious to get light for himself, but he is very anxious too for others, for when Peter arrives we read, "Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends" (Acts 10: 24).

As Peter was coming in, we find that Cornelius worships him; that is, he pays him deep reverence. Peter lifts him up, and they go into the house together, and Peter finds "many that were come together." The house was full of souls that God was going to bless. Peter then says, "Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for." Peter has learned his lesson now, he has got the key to the difficulty that he pondered over on the roof. When he had gone down and obeyed, he saw quite clearly, that the grace of God was going out to the ends of the earth.

Then he probes Cornelius, and tries to find out his state of soul, as he says, "I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?" It is a good thing to let a soul, anxious about divine things, speak out for itself. Cornelius tells his own story. He says, "Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house." Here you have another indication of Cornelius's moral state, he was fasting as well as praying; pouring out his soul to God, and fasting till the ninth hour. Then, having told of the angel's visit, Cornelius adds, "Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." I do not know anything more cheering to one who loves souls than to get an audience like this, all anxious to hear. Peter, before he began to preach, knew there was not a listless soul among that company, not a procrastinator, nor a scoffer; he knew he had a company of downright, earnest, seeking, longing souls, only wanting to know the truth. "Now are we all here present before God

to hear." Oh, what an audience! Anxious listeners, make earnest preachers; longing hearers make it easy to preach. Ah, have you never yet been anxious about your soul? The days of your anxiety will surely come, my friend.

Then Peter begins, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him." It is a question now of the grace of God going out world-wide; wherever there is a soul looking to God, that is the soul God will bless. "The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) that word ye know," adds Peter. He knew full well that Jesus was Lord of the Jews, but it never seemed to have got into his soul before that He was Lord of *all*. But He is Lord of *all*, and you, my friend, will have to give an account to Him hereafter.

In the compass of one short verse (Acts 10: 38) Peter brings out the truth which Matthew opens with, and unfolds in his gospel, "They shall call his name Emmanuel; which being interpreted is, God with us." The preaching in the house of Cornelius brings before us three great truths: first, "God with us" (Acts 10: 38); then "God for us" (Acts 10: 40-43); thirdly, God in us" (Acts 10: 44-47). God with us was the whole life of Jesus, "who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil: for God was with him, and we are witnesses of all things which he did in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree." Peter does not charge his hearers with having any part in the crime of slaying Jesus, but he details the truth nevertheless.

"Him," he next says, "God raised up, and showed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead." Here we get the second wonderful truth, viz., God for us. The One whom man refused, God raised up, and put into glory.

There was no doubt about His resurrection; the preacher himself had seen Him, and had eaten and drunk with Him. Peter remembered the piece of broiled fish and of an honeycomb, which they had given Him after His resurrection; and he remembered too the fire of coals with the fish laid thereon, and bread, when Jesus had called him and his six companions to come and dine with Him, on the shores of the Lake of Galilee; and he brings out now the truth — rich beyond all expression in its fruits — the beautiful, blessed truth of the death and resurrection of Christ. His death met the claims of God, while His resurrection displayed His absolute victory over death, and sin, and all the power of Satan.

In the moment of His death He did a work which absolutely and eternally glorified God about sin, and His resurrection is God's answer to that work. It is the demonstration of the satisfaction and delight of God in Christ's work, as well as the proof of the complete victory which Christ has won in the very domain of death, for it is annulled. But more than, and because of that, He it is "which was ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead." It is His victory, as Man, over death, that gives Him title to judge (see John 5: 21-27). But, ere the day when He will judge, comes the day in which He saves. Concerning this. "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins."

Long before man is to be judged for his sins God unfolds two things; first, that forgiveness is offered to every soul that believes in His Son, and secondly, that He sends the Holy Ghost to dwell in the believer. Is not that wide enough, broad enough, to take you and me in? Is not forgiveness of sins the very thing you need and desire? That is the very thing God proclaims to you.

Christ is risen: man slew Him, God raised Him, we have seen Him, says Peter, He is going to be the Judge of the living and the dead by-and-bye, and in the meantime "whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." This is what Peter proclaims to his audience, and they were anxious, truth-seeking souls. Cornelius was a man wanting light, wanting to know how to be forgiven, and how to get saved. He wanted to hear God's words, and what were these words? "Whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Do you believe on His name, my reader, do you rest your troubled soul on that blessed One? Then forgiveness of sins is yours.

Now see what follows. "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word." They got the seal of God, the seal of the Holy Ghost. Now what does the Holy Ghost seal? Not doubts, not fears, surely; He always seals faith. He dispels my fears by telling me that the One, who is to be the Judge by-and-bye, died on the cross to save me; He dispels my doubts by turning my eye off myself on to Christ, and the moment my eye is on Him, and the work He has done, I get rest and peace.

The moment, by simple faith, my eye is on the Person of Him who is Son of God, and Son of Man, I derive blessing from the glory of His Person, and I get all the benefit of the work He has accomplished. I get the Person of Christ for my heart, and the work of Christ for my conscience. Your heart can never rest save in a Person, while your conscience can only be calmed by knowing the work that He did.

It is most important to see that the unfolding of these truths, and the coming down of the Holy Ghost are intimately connected. The Holy Ghost has come to minister these truths to the believing soul. What led to the gift of the Holy Ghost in the second of Acts? They believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. What brought in this plenitude of blessing in Acts 10? They believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. They heard of Jesus, of His death and resurrection, the power of His name, and forgiveness through His name, and, like simple souls, they believed the word, and God gave them the Holy Ghost on the spot. They did not get the Holy Ghost to help them to believe, but they got the Holy Ghost as the seal of their simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Holy Ghost has come down here to tell me God's thoughts about Jesus, and the moment I believe in Him, I receive the forgiveness of my sins through faith in Him, and the Holy Ghost comes and takes up His abode in my body. The believer gets the seal of the Spirit, not merely as an influence to give him a bit of comfort for a moment, but to be the abiding, indwelling Comforter. He is the seal of faith, and the earnest of future glory. If you bought a hundred sheep, the mark you put on them does not make them yours; it only shows to all around that they are yours. It was the money you paid for them that made them yours. Similarly, it is the blood of Jesus that redeems me, cleanses me, brings me out of darkness into light, sets me free, brings me to God, and makes me a child of His. What is the next thing? The Lord gives me the

Holy Ghost, as His seal that I am redeemed and blessed, and belong to Him. The possession of the Spirit does not make me His, but it is the seal which shows that I am His.

In this sermon of Peter's, then, you get three things: first, God *with* us, that is the life of Jesus; then, God *for* us, that is the death and resurrection of Jesus; then, God *in* us, that is the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Then Peter says, we cannot keep these people out of their privileges. "Can any one forbid water," he asks, "that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" No, he says, they are forgiven, they have the Holy Ghost, and they must be let into the House of God on earth. Here is the second occasion on which Peter uses the keys of the kingdom of heaven. He opens the door afresh this day as thus he brings in the Gentiles. He has no authority to let people into heaven, but into the kingdom of heaven, as a scene of profession on earth, he lets them enter, I apprehend, by the door of baptism.

I have no doubt that these people had repented before Peter went down to them, but, having received God's testimony to the name and work of Jesus, they know they are forgiven, know they are saved, and they receive the Holy Ghost to dwell in them. That is the privilege of every simple soul today. You may know you are forgiven and saved the moment you simply believe in the work done for you by the Lord Jesus Christ, and God then gives the Holy Ghost to dwell in you, as His seal and mark that you belong to Him.

After Peter had returned to Jerusalem we find that his action at Caesarea is called in question, as might be expected. "They that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them" (Acts 11: 2, 3). Thus challenged, Peter rehearses the interesting account of his visit to Cornelius, winding up thus, "and as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water: but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift, as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I, that I could withstand God?" (Acts 11: 15-17.) His argument was unanswerable, and his auditors were silenced, for "when they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."

It is important to grasp the real significance of what occurred at Caesarea. The Church of God, the assembly, already existed, but the truth or doctrine of her oneness as the body of Christ had not yet been promulgated. The reception of Cornelius and his friends by Peter into the assembly, although it may be said to pave the way, nevertheless did not announce the glorious truth of the true nature, calling, and destiny of that assembly. Paul, already called, was to unfold that in due course. The vision that Peter had did not reveal the assembly as the body of Christ, nor did the admission of Cornelius. They showed that in every nation whoever feared God was acceptable to Him, and that it was not necessary to become a Jew in order to obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. The specific truth of the Church, viz., the oneness of the body united by the Holy Ghost to its Head in heaven, was not brought out by the events at Caesarea. Nevertheless they prepared the way for the unfolding in due time of that peculiarly Pauline truth — for the Gentiles were admitted to God's spiritual house on earth without

becoming Jews. The doctrine was not preached, because not yet known, but the thing itself was enacted or illustrated. The great truth of the mystery, which Paul develops so fully in the Ephesians, "that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph. 3: 6), received its first expression here. Repentance unto life eternal was granted unto the Gentiles, as such, and the Holy Ghost, the seal of forgiveness, and the fruit of Jesus' work on the cross, by which God had been infinitely glorified, was given to them, as to the Jews at the beginning. The latter might marvel and cavil, but God's purpose was not to be resisted, and, after Peter's explanation, it is good to observe that they glorify God, i.e., I take it, they praise Him for His grace to the Gentiles.

When the note of praise began, I fancy Peter must have felt much relieved, for, as we shall see later, he was evidently a man not a little affected by Jewish thoughts, which had great possession of his own mind, and ruled yet more strongly in the minds of his fellow-believers in Christ. What they, too, thought of him, and of his actions, he was not altogether indifferent to, forgetful of the scripture which says, "The fear of man bringeth a snare" (Prov. 29: 25). What this snare was, we shall yet see.

CHAPTER 18 — PRAYED OUT OF PRISON.

Acts 12.

THE duration of the time of quiet, that we read of in Acts 9, was not long. Within little more than a year after the events recorded in our last chapter, the flame of persecution against the Christians again burst forth. Famine reigned, and the poor in Judea had help sent to them by the hands of Saul and Barnabas. Thus these beloved men of God were again in Jerusalem at an important crisis.

At this moment "Herod the king stretched forth his hands, to vex certain of the church." This Herod was the grandson of Herod the Great, who commanded the massacre at Bethlehem, and the father of that King Agrippa before whom Paul was brought. He is usually known in history as Herod Agrippa I. His ruling passion was to stand well with everybody, no matter at what cost. This personal vanity he combined with punctilious attention to the rites of the Jews' religion, so he stood well with his subjects. To yet further ingratiate himself with them, the new persecution of the Christians was undoubtedly commenced.

The first victim to his vanity which we read that he offered up was the apostle James. "And he killed James the brother of John with the sword" (Acts 12: 2). This apostle, we have already observed, was one of the favoured three who were present when the Lord raised Jairus' daughter; when He was transfigured on the mount; and when He was praying in the garden. Equally with his brother John he was surnamed "Boanerges," i.e., "sons of thunder." From this one gathers that, although we have no record of his life in Scripture, he must in some way have been a prominent man among the saints at Jerusalem. Be this as it may, Herod put him to the sword.

You remember that this martyr's mother, Salome, had once prayed, "Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom." Turning

to them, the Lord had replied, "Are ye able to drink of the cup which I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able" (Matt. 20: 21, 22). The moment had come here for one of the two brothers to drink of the cup — the other drank his many years later. Probably John was the latest of all the apostles to suffer martyrdom, but James was the first. His career was short, as the date of his death was only some twelve or thirteen years after his Master's crucifixion.

Nothing is told us of the manner of his soul in the hour of his going forth to be beheaded, but his mother's prayer, and his Lord's reply, we may be sure, would not then be unremembered, and the grace that sustained a Stephen would doubtless make a James more than conqueror, in view of that heavenly kingdom into which he was to pass, and rejoin his blessed Lord. Seeing that James' death pleased the Jews, Herod laid hands on Peter also, intending after Easter to lead him to the scaffold, and the care he took to make sure of his purpose was excessive. After Easter a grand public spectacle in connection with Peter's death was evidently designed, whereby the king would still further secure the adulation of the Jews.

There are many Herods in our day; he is not the only one who has lost everything because he would like to stand well with the world. Do not think I speak harshly of Herod. He was fighting against God. Follow him not! He puts forth his hand and takes Peter, really to exalt himself, although doubtless thinking that he was taking the one who had influenced the people most largely with the Gospel. He judged that he had made a grand step when he took Peter, and he put four quaternions of soldiers beside him — sixteen soldiers — to guard one solitary man! Peter had escaped from prison once before, and no one knew how he got out (Acts 5). But Peter knew, and that is why here he went to sleep so quietly, for he knew the Lord could take him out again, if He so willed. It is a grand thing to know God, and an awful thing not to know Him. Peter knew God, and slept peacefully, while Herod, recollecting what had taken place in days gone by, put these sixteen soldiers to guard him, four at a time, by watches.

Of these two were chained to him, one stationed at the door of his dungeon, and one a little farther off, at the prison door outside. Herod's excessive precautions were evidently designed to make a second escape impossible to Peter. But Herod was leaving God out of his reckoning. What availed all his bolts, bars, sentinels, and "two chains" upon his prisoner, if God stepped in? We shall see.

"Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him" (ver. 5). To turn to Herod they knew was in vain, to turn to God was their only resource in this critical moment. God has ever been the help of His people. The case seemed very hopeless, save in view of that which the poet wrote —

"But there's a power which man can wield,

When mortal aid is vain;

God's eye, God's arm, God's love to reach,

God's list'ning ear to gain.

That power is prayer, which soars on high,
Through Jesus, to the throne,
And moves the hand, which moves the world,
To bring deliv'rance down."

When the Lord was upon earth He had said, "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18: 19, 20). Acting on this scripture the assembly besought God for Peter "without ceasing" (Acts 12: 5), and "many were gathered together, praying" (Acts 12: 12), when he appeared in their midst.

What shape these earnest supplications took we are not told. God interpreted the desire, as well as answered the faith of His people. The day for the carrying out of Herod's settled purpose was allowed to draw near. The morrow was to see the end of the imprisoned apostle. So had man proposed, but God disposed, in a marvellous manner, of the wicked king's intentions.

But what of Peter all the time he lay chained in his cell? No record is given of the exercises he doubtless passed through, but this we read, that the night before he was to be led forth to execution on the morrow, he had unbound his sandals, loosed his girdle, cast off his garment, and lain him down to sleep. All this bespoke sweet confidence in the Lord, an easy conscience, and a restful heart. Sweeter far, I trow, was the sleep of the manacled man of God in the dreary prison cell, than that of Satan's servant, Herod; although he might lie on a sumptuous couch, amid the splendour and luxury of a palace. Better far be God's man in a prison, than Satan's man in a palace!

Reader, let me ask you, whose man are you? Face this question honestly. A thousand times better is it to be the "prisoner of Jesus Christ," as our beloved Simon was here, than be apparently a free man, and yet all the while be the prisoner of Satan; lust, passion, and sin forming, not two, but countless unseen chains, that bind the soul in a veritable condemned cell — the world — and ensure the execution of its final judgment at the hand of God.

But the prayer of faith on earth, had moved the hand of God on high, and the time was now come for Him to step in, and do His will. No sentry said, "Ho! who goes there?" as the angel of the Lord entered the cell of the soundly sleeping Peter and "a light shined in the prison." God always brings in light. "In him is no darkness at all," is the character of His nature. I presume Simon's two keepers slept too, for they saw not the light, nor heard the voice, "Arise up quickly," which the now awakened Peter heeds, for he had been aroused by the angel's touch, ere he "raised him up." It would appear that as Peter obeys the call to rise, "his chains fell off from his hands." No turnkey or smith's tool effects this. When God sets Himself to unlock man's fetters, how noiseless, rapid, and effectual is the work; and even the clanking chains, as they fall on the floor, arouse not the insensible keepers.

"Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals," is the next command. There is no undue hurry; all is orderly. Peter obeys, and then hears, "Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me." Thinking he "saw a vision," and not knowing "that it was true that was done by the angel," he nevertheless accompanies him. The first and second guard are safely passed without interruption, and then "they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city, which opened to them of his own accord; and they went out and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him" (Acts 12: 10). The street of the city, which Peter knew so well, once reached, there is no further need for angelic, or miraculous guidance, so the angel of the Lord leaves our twice liberated apostle to his own reflections, and ways.

Peter's bewilderment at the moment one can readily conceive to have been great. We all know how difficult it is to apprise the situation when suddenly aroused from profound slumber. Peter was in that condition. He had lain down only expecting to wake and go forth to die, and then to see and hear an angel bidding him — chained man that he was — to arise, clothe himself, and walk out of prison, and then suddenly to find himself on the pavement of a well-known street, a free man, might well be accompanied by considerable bewilderment. But it soon passed, for we read, "And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectations of the people of the Jews" (Acts 12: 11). Thus he acknowledges the gracious intervention of the Lord on his behalf, and then "when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying." The deep earnestness of the saints in prayer is strikingly marked by their being thus before God at the untimely hour of Peter's appearance on the scene.

Arrived there he knocks, and Rhoda, the portress, going to inquire who was at the "door of the gate" — the wicket-gate into the court — hears his voice. So overwhelmed is she with gladness that instead of at once letting the apostle in — as a more sensible girl would have done — she ran back into the house to apprise the others of the answer to their prayers, and "that Peter stood before the gate." Alas! faith and fervour are not always combined. "Thou art mad" was the first response that the supplicants at a throne of grace made to the messenger, who simply told them that their prayers were heard, and answered by God. When she "constantly affirmed that it was so," the others — instead of going out to the gate to see if the report were true — argued thus, "It is his angel." They evidently thought Rhoda had seen some apparition like unto Peter, or that his representative angel (see Matt. 18: 10) had paid her a visit.

"But Peter continued knocking," a manifest testimony to the truth of Rhoda's statement; so at length, either calming down, or overcoming their incredulity, they proceeded to the gate, "and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished." If we did not know our own hearts, we should be inclined to wonder at all this. Here were a number of God's people crying specially to Him for a certain thing, and when it was granted, they were "astonished." Alas! our faith is often so feeble that God's answer to our prayer surprises us. Were we only truly simple and right before Him, the surprise would be if the answer were not quick in coming.

But surprised as the attendants at this late at night, or early morning prayer-meeting, were, it was nevertheless the fact that God, true to Himself, had heard and answered their prayer. This would never surprise us if only we knew God better. He loves to respond to the cry of His

people. He delights in being counted on. "Without faith it is impossible to please Him," but it is manifest that faith — real child-like confidence in Himself — does greatly please Him.

The effect of Peter's entrance among the gathered ones evidently was great, and many Voices were heard. Doubtless, uppermost in every mind, and possibly on every lip, was the query — "How ever did you get out, Peter?" But he, "beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of prison. And he said, Go, show these things unto James and to the brethren. And he departed, and went unto another place" (Acts 12: 17). The danger of his situation, though free, was manifestly more patent to Peter than to his friends, so he wisely withdrew to more secret and safer quarters.

At daybreak "there was no small stir among the soldiers what was become of Peter." He was in God's safe keeping; so that though Herod sought for him, he found him not. Thereafter, disappointed in his bloodthirsty scheme, in which Peter was to have played so prominent a part, he wreaked his wrath on the keepers of the prison, and then going to Caesarea shortly after, died under the dire judgment of God, of a most terrible malady. Most men give up the ghost, and are eaten of worms; Herod "was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost," is the record of the Holy Ghost; while, in striking contrast with the fleeting character of all the earthly greatness of this wicked man, He immediately adds, "But the word of God grew and multiplied" (Acts 12: 23, 24). That is the moral that adorns this striking tale of human plans, and Divine intervention, while the lesson it teaches us, as to the efficacy, and all prevailing power of prayer, is most blessed. It should indeed encourage us to wait on God in united, persevering, believing prayer. No case could seem more hopeless. God sufficed for it Is He changed? Not one whit. What we want is more faith in Him, and more importunity before Him. "Lord, teach us to pray," we may well say.

This interesting chapter closes with, "And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John whose surname was Mark" (Acts 12: 25). From this one may conclude that Paul had been in Jerusalem at the time of Peter's imprisonment, and exodus under God's hand. If this were so, one can understand the joy that would fill his large heart in seeing the beloved Simon again at liberty, and free to go on with the Lord's work. Jealousy of another servant's pre-eminence never seems to have had any place in Paul's heart, At this point, however, Paul becomes specially the vessel of the Spirit's power, and Peter passes off the scene, only for a brief space reappearing in the momentous conclave of Acts 15, which our next chapter will bring before us.

CHAPTER 19 — WITHSTOOD AT ANTIOCH.

Acts 15; Gal. 2.

THE retirement into which Peter entered, to escape the vigilance of Herod, would appear to have been of some long continuance. Coincidentally with his retiral for these reasons, Paul comes to the front, in the history of God's work on earth, as narrated in the Acts of the Apostles. Acts 13 and Acts 14 give us a most interesting narrative of the spread of the Gospel among the Gentiles in Asia Minor, through the ministry of Paul and Barnabas. The link of association that

we noted between these two men, in connection with Paul's first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion (Acts 9: 27), had been strengthened by the action of Barnabas shortly after.

Paul, as we remember, had gone to Tarsus, his native city (Acts 9: 30). Shortly after this, news reached Jerusalem of the work begun at Antioch, in the province of Seleucia, through the preaching of those who "were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen" (Acts 11: 19). Two places called Antioch are named in the New Testament. The Antioch referred to here was more important in every way than the smaller city in Pisidia, visited by Paul (see Acts 13: 14). This Antioch, which Seleucus Nicator built, 300 B.C., and named after his father Antiochus, was a city on the banks of the Orontes, three hundred miles north of Jerusalem, and about thirty from the Mediterranean. It consisted of four townships or quarters, each surrounded by a separate wall, and all four by a common wall. It was the metropolis of Syria, the residence of the Syrian kings — the Seleucidae — and afterwards became the capital of the Roman provinces in Asia, ranking third, after Rome and Alexandria, among the cities of the empire. It had a population of about 200,000, and will always have an interest to all lovers of Christ, because "the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch" (Acts 11: 26).

When tidings arrived that in this important city "a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord," the assembly in Jerusalem despatched Barnabas to help in the work, "who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. . . . And much people was added to the Lord" (Acts 11: 23, 24).

Doubtless feeling the importance of the work going on at Antioch, Barnabas departed to Tarsus "to seek Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people" (Acts 11: 26). From this time Barnabas and Saul were fellow-workers and close companions in the work of the Lord, till the events recorded in Acts 15. Antioch would appear to have been their headquarters for a considerable time. From it they went out, prayerfully commended by the assembly there, on the special missionary tour recorded in Acts 13, and to it they return. "And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode long time with the disciples" (Acts 14: 27, 28).

This tour is the first formal mission to the Gentiles; among whom assemblies are formed, and local officers — elders — appointed by the apostles. The Word of God, with marked and distinct energy of the Holy Ghost, thus goes out to the Gentiles, converting them, gathering them together in the Name of the Lord Jesus, forming assemblies, and establishing local officers (not ministers so-called — but elders, certainly, and possibly deacons too), and all this apart from, and independently of, the action of the twelve apostles, and the assembly at Jerusalem, and without the obligation to comply with the Mosaic law, which still had rule there,

At Antioch the question is now raised whether this last could be allowed. This question is not raised by the Jews who opposed the Gospel, but by those who had embraced it, yet were still going on with the law, and now desired to impose the same yoke on the Gentiles. In Acts 15 we get a full account of this deeply important matter, affecting as it does the very foundations of Christianity.

"And certain men, which came down from Judea, taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved" (Acts 15: 1). Coming as these men did from Jerusalem, they appeared to have the sanction of the assembly, and of the twelve apostles there, — and this gave their statements the greater weight. Paul and Barnabas, fully alive to the gravity of their error, "had no small dissension, and disputation with them" (Acts 15: 2); and well. they might, for to insist that conformity to the law of Moses was essential to salvation, was to absolutely nullify Paul's gospel, to destroy the doctrine of grace, and to elevate the deeds of the law into being at least a partially saving grace. Justification by faith, if this doctrine were true, was a delusion, so we can well understand the uncompromising hostility with which Paul met these seducers, or "false brethren," as he calls them in Galatians 2.

But it was the will, as well as the wisdom of God, that this grave matter should be settled at Jerusalem and not at Antioch, either by Paul's apostolic authority, or even by the Holy Ghost's verdict, first delivered there. Had such taken place, the unity of the Church might, and most certainly would, have been endangered. A resolution made at Antioch, affecting the whole church, would have been a different thing from the same resolution made at Jerusalem, as things then were. The care of God over His Church in this matter is most blessed. A conference at Jerusalem He knew would settle the matter absolutely, no matter what prejudices the Jews might have, and would maintain union instead of perilling it. That there was bigotry at Jerusalem was true, but if there, of all places, the truth was maintained, it would carry weight universally. On the other hand, had the assembly at Antioch decided the point, the Jewish assembly at Jerusalem would not have acknowledged the truth, and the apostolic authority of the twelve would have been lacking in the promulgation of the truth. All this God obviates.

Paul's reference to this matter in the Epistle to the Galatians shows the gravity of the crisis. In reality things were in question that touched the very foundations of Christianity. If any were circumcised, he was under law, had given up grace, and had fallen away from Christ (Gal. 5: 2-4). All this was plain to Paul, but not to those he opposed; so eventually it was arranged that he and Barnabas, "and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question" (Acts 15: 2). This statement gives us the outward history of Paul's action, as he yielded to the motives others presented to him. In Galatians 2, speaking of the same occasion, he states, "I went up by revelation" (Gal. 2: 2). The communication of God is his inward guide. God did not allow him to have his own way. It is good sometimes to have to submit, though ever so right. Full of faith, and energy and zeal, as Paul was, he was obliged to go up, in order to have every mouth shut, and unity maintained. When he does go up he takes Titus with him, uncircumcised. Truth was at stake, and principle involved, so he will not yield on this point in Titus's case. This was a bold step, the taking of Titus. It compelled the decision of the question between himself and Judaizing Christians. Paul was walking in the liberty of the Spirit in this matter, and seeking to introduce other believers into it, and he won the day, as we shall see.

When the Antiochan deputation arrived in Jerusalem, "they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses" (Acts 15: 4, 5). The issue is thus plainly stated, and thereafter "the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter." Much discussion followed, for which there was the fullest liberty, and then Peter comes

on the scene again. He reminds them of what God had done through him among the Gentiles, saying, "Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us: and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that, through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, *we* shall be saved, even as *they*" (Acts 15: 7-11). Manifestly Peter at this juncture flings the full weight of his influence in favour of the utmost freedom being accorded to the Gentiles in respect of the question raised. His speech, though short, is very pithy and pointed, and the closing sentence fine to the last degree, "*We* shall be saved, even as *they*." It was not, even "*They* shall be saved, even as *we*." No, it is thus: "We Jews will have to be saved on the same lines as they — and they most assuredly were never under law." This was a crushing blow to the Judaisers. The convincing effect of Peter's sweeping, and truly characteristic assertions was doubtless great.

He is followed by the Gentile ambassadors. "Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them" (Acts 15: 12). Thereafter James speaks, and quotes from the prophet Amos to show that God meant to have a people from among the Gentiles. He fully agrees with Peter, saying, "My sentence is, that we trouble not them which from among the Gentiles are turned to God" (Acts 15: 19).

The effect of James thus summing up is that the judgment of the assembly becomes clear. "Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren" (Acts 15: 22). They carry with them a letter to the brethren of the Gentiles which closed the vexed matter authoritatively. The terms of the decree were these. "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well" (Acts 15: 28, 29).

The Gentiles were in the habit of doing all these forbidden things, but it is important to note that they were not things forbidden by the law only, so that to regard this injunction as a compromise between the legalists and Paul — as some have done — is a mistake. All these things were contrary to God's order as Creator. Marriage — i.e., purity, not license — was the original institution of God in Eden, and thus only were man and woman to be connected (Gen. 2: 21-25). After the deluge, when God gave Noah leave to eat flesh, He then prohibited the blood, for life belongs to God (Gen. 9: 3-5).

Again, all fellowship with idols was an outrage against the authority of the only living and true God. To do any of these forbidden things, — therefore, was contrary to the intelligent knowledge of God, and had nothing to say to Moses and the law. The Gentiles had walked in ignorance. They needed to be instructed on these points, and the instruction is addressed to their Christian intelligence, with the object of pointing out to them the character of man's true relation to God in the things of nature.

In no sense is the decree either a compromise with Jewish prejudice, or a new law imposed by Christianity. It is the concise statement of principles important for every Christian man to know, — viz., 1. The unity of God, as one only and true God — hence to in any way acknowledge idols was to provoke Him to jealousy. 2. Life belongs to God. 3. God's original ordinance for man was purity in marriage.

In this matter it is apparent that Peter and Paul are quite of one mind. Paul must have been cheered as well as charmed, by Peter's bold way of putting the truth, that he himself so loved, and lived to enunciate, viz., that the believer is in no sense whatever under law. It must have been an immense comfort to Paul too, that the apostles, and the assembly in Jerusalem, not only wrote as they did, thus fully sanctioning Paul and Barnabas in their ministry, but likewise sent with them persons of note, — "chief men among the brethren," — who could not be suspected of conveying a letter which supported their own views, a thing that might have been alleged had Paul and Barnabas returned alone, merely bearing the edict. It was Jerusalem that had decided that the law was not binding on the Gentiles, and they, when they hear this, rejoice greatly at their freedom from the yoke of bondage, which others would have thrust upon their necks.

Judas and Silas remained some time at Antioch together; then Judas departed, leaving Silas in this fresh and interesting scene of the Lord's happy work. He preferred rather to work among the Gentiles than to return to Jerusalem, and the lines fell to him in pleasant places afterwards. "Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also" (ver. 35). This last clause would indicate that the assembly there had now become large and important, inviting the care and attention of many servants of God, and easily accounts for Peter's presence in the city, at no great distance of time after the conference at Jerusalem. From that time no further mention of Peter is made in the Acts.

The exact date of his visit is uncertain, as no record of it is given in the Acts. Certain, however, it is that he did visit Antioch, and then acted in a way that compelled the apostle Paul to withstand him to the face, before all.

The account of what transpired is given by Paul in the Epistle to the Galatians. There (Gal. 2), after narrating what led him to Jerusalem, he recounts what the Acts does not record, — the way the twelve Apostles received him, and the effect on them of his visit. Briefly it was this, that they saw and acknowledged that Paul was taught of God independently of them; they also recognised his ministry and apostleship, as one called, and sent of God; and that he was acting on the part of God as much as themselves. Further, he communicated truth to them, which he had been already teaching the Gentiles, while they added nothing to him. He delightedly owned God's grace to Peter, saying, "For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me towards the Gentiles: And when James, Cephas (Peter), and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship: that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision" (Gal. 2: 8, 9).

Then comes the account of Peter's visit. "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew, and separated himself, fearing

them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly, according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" (Gal. 2: 11-14). The story is very simple, if it were not so sad. While alone at Antioch, — where we may well believe, as the fruit of Paul's ministry, that heavenly truth prevailed, — Peter went in and out among the Gentiles, and ate with them. He walked in the same liberty as Paul, in this respect. But when certain came down from James, and from Jerusalem, which was the centre of fleshly religion, and where its notions and customs yet largely ruled the Christians, and where, I take it, Peter usually resided, and of course was exceptionally well known, he was afraid to use this liberty, being fully conscious that it was condemned by many of his friends there, who, though believers, were yet entirely Jewish in their thoughts and ways. Fearing their disapproval, he withdrew, and separated himself from the Gentiles."

Doubtless the Jewish brethren had many an argument to plead with Peter ere this took place. They doubtless represented to him what the effect of his ways in Antioch would be in Jerusalem, when they became known there; that the result would be loss of esteem for, and confidence in him as a leader; possibly too that dissension would arise. In an evil hour our apostle listens to these legalist croakers, blind to the baneful results of the retrograde step, which they induce him to take, under the influence of "the fear of Man, which bringeth a snare."

Fervent, energetic, and ardent as we have found Peter to be, he appears always to have cared too much about the opinion of others regarding himself. If not delivered from this, by the realised presence of God, the opinion others have of us is always apt to influence our hearts, the more so if that opinion makes anything of us after the flesh. Hence we are weak just in proportion as we esteem any position of importance which we have before men. If we are as nothing in their eyes, and in our own eyes too, we act independently of them. This did not Peter here. As a result, his action influences "the other Jews": and Barnabas — the last of all men to be so influenced we should have thought — is "carried away by their dissimulation." But this is the legitimate fruit of what we have been considering. In the measure in which others influence us, we exercise an evil influence over them, if the desire to: maintain our reputation with them be carried into action in the form of meeting their wishes, contrary to that which we well know to be the truth. The more godly a man is, the greater is the evil effect of his course on others if it consist in the allowance of what is not of God, as he gives the weight of his godliness to the evil he consents to or goes on in.

But why is Peter's course, and that of the others here, called dissimulation? Because Peter had not one whit changed his convictions. He had recorded them boldly in Acts 15; now, to please others, he merely altered his practice. Had any one gone and said, "Peter, do you believe that circumcision, and keeping of the law of Moses, are necessary to salvation?" he would have instantly replied, "Certainly not." Why, then, this change of front? Human influence, religious influence, and desire to stand well with old friends. Poor Peter! He saw not that this action of his, in refusing to eat with the Gentiles, was a virtual denial of them As his brethren in Christ; a resiling to his old views that they were common and unclean, which we thought the vision of

Acts 10 had for ever swept away; a contradiction of his own words in the congress of Jerusalem; and a violation of the spirit of the letter he helped so largely to indite on that occasion.

His conduct here is, in a measure, in keeping with his sayings at the supper-table, and with his actings in the high priest's hall. There is the same professed valour, and impulsive boldness; to be, alas! followed by the same shrinking timidity, in the hour of trial. Whether this too was followed by the same revulsion of feeling, as he saw that he had really denied his Lord once more, in the person of these Gentile converts, and that thereupon he went out, and once more "wept bitterly," we are not told; but our knowledge of Peter would lead to this conclusion, as the most likely thing to happen.

The way in which he got his eyes opened to the effect of his course, we will now just glance at, ere we close our meditations on Simon's interesting life, with its fruitful lessons for our hearts.

Paul alone seems to have stood firm at this crisis at Antioch. To him Peter, notwithstanding his peculiar eminence, was not as a superior before whom he must be silent, when the truth of God was at stake. He "withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed." Paul, who had been converted by the revelation of heavenly glory, and was full of the Holy Ghost, felt that all that exalted the flesh only obscured that glory, and falsified the Gospel that proclaimed it. He lived morally in heaven, and in the company of a glorified Christ, whom he had seen there, and whom he knew to be the centre of all God's thoughts. Thus living, he became eagle-eyed to anything that detracted from Christ's glory, or exalted man, as the claims of the Judaisers for the law, and its deeds, most certainly did. He thus saw that Peter's walk was carnal, and not spiritual; and himself occupied with Christ, and set for the defence of the truth, he is bold as a lion for the truth, and will not spare any who overturns it, no matter how high their position in the assembly be.

Paul is not deterred by man; and in this his conduct here shines by contrast with Peter's. But the way Paul acts is charming. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Prov. 27: 6). Judas has illustrated the last clause of this verse, in his betrayal of Jesus; Paul illustrates the former, in his treatment of Peter. He goes frankly to him, while he publicly exposes the glaring inconsistency of which, equally publicly, he had been guilty. He knew that Peter really believed in his heart that which he himself did. He was certain that Peter's convictions were the same as his own. He was equally certain that Peter had been betrayed into his inconsistent course — which in faithfulness he cannot describe as anything less than dissimulation — by the pressure brought to bear on him from without. He was equally convinced that Peter, at bottom, loved the Lord, the Gentiles, and himself; and this explains the faithfulness of his public address, which is a model of frankness coupled with delicacy, and of logical argument combined with persuasiveness. Let us give earnest heed to it.

"If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor: for I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain" (Gal. 2: 14-21).

He, a Jew, had felt free to live as the Gentiles. Why now compel the Gentiles to live as Jews, in order to enjoy full Christian communion? If he was at liberty to disregard the law of Moses a little while ago, how absurd to oblige Gentiles now to conform to its requirements. That was not insisted on in words, but is the natural inference, his withdrawal from them implying that circumcision was essential to salvation. But this affected the very foundation of the Gospel, for themselves Jews by nature, and not poor sinners of the Gentiles, they had quite given up the works of law, as a means of righteousness and of securing God's favour, and had fled to Christ for justification and salvation. But if in doing this they are found sinners, as having wilfully neglected the law as an appointed means of salvation, it follows necessarily that as they had neglected it in order to come to Christ, and really at His bidding, therefore Christ had been to them the minister of, and the inciter to sin. Since it was in order to come to Christ that they had ceased to seek righteousness by the law, and had exchanged the supposed efficacy of the law as a means of righteousness, for the work of, and faith in Christ, then Christ was the minister of sin, if they had made a mistake in this step, for He had prompted to it. Again, if they were now to rebuild the edifice of legal obligations in order to obtain righteousness, why had they overturned it? They were then transgressors in overturning it; for if it was to be rebuilt, it ought not to have been overturned, and, as it was Christ who led them to do this, He was become the minister of sin.

That was a conclusion that I am sure Peter shrank from with horror, but he had to face it. If he was wrong in eating with the Gentiles, he certainly did it by the Lord's direct command, given to him in the vision he got in Acts 10. If he was wrong therein, Christ it was who had instructed him to do wrong. If, on the other hand, he was right then, he was wrong now, and had become a transgressor.

What an awful result from the effort and the weakness of attempting to please men by returning to the things that give the flesh a place, and gratify it. Such is the result that ordinances, touched as a matter of legal obligation, ever have. How little do many professing Christians see the truth in this striking scene between the two apostles. Numbers today are resting on ordinances. To rest on them is really to rest on the flesh. Christ is everything to the believing soul, and these ordinances — baptism and the Lord's Supper — drop into their right place. He has ordained them, not as means of grace to be rested on, but as distinguishing His people from the world, — on the one hand, as dead with Him to it in baptism; and on the other, — the Lord's Supper, — as gathered to Him, in the unity of His body, on the ground of the redemption which He has already, and perfectly accomplished.

Christ dead and risen is now our righteousness, hence to rest for this in ordinances, is exactly to deny the special truths they present. The flesh can occupy itself with ordinances, —

alas! all Christendom is busy therewith today, — so let all who are resting on them learn this, that what they are really resting on is not Christ, but the flesh, which will find in them just enough to hide the Saviour from the soul, in its deep need, and spiritual hunger.

Paul felt all this acutely, hence his closing words, "I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God," etc. He had learned the utter good-for-nothingness of the flesh, and that the law could not help it. It is incorrigible, and incurable in its evil. God has, therefore, condemned sin in the flesh. Its place is that of death, and not being better, as many a soul is today trying to effect.

Further, Paul had learned that to be under law was to find himself condemned to death, and his soul had realised death in all its power. If dead, — and he learned how that was, viz., by the cross of Christ, — he was dead to law. It ruled over a living man — not a dead one. Its power does not go beyond life, and if its victim be once dead it has no more power over him.

But if the law only slew him, where could he find life? Only in Christ risen. He was crucified with Christ, so that the condemnation of the law was, for him, gone in the cross. The law had reached him — Saul the wayward sinner, the chief of sinners — in the person of the Son of God, who loved him, and gave Himself for him; and the life to which sins attached, and to which the dominion and penalty of the law also attached, had come to its end in the cross. Nevertheless he lived, yet not he, but Christ lived in him — that life in which Christ rose from the dead. But what sort of a life had Paul now? The old Adam life was gone in the death of the cross. The new life was Christ's life. He was a new creature, and Christ was his object. "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who *loved* me, and *gave himself* for me," are his words. This is personal life, the individual faith that attaches the soul to Christ, and makes Him the precious object of both faith and affection. Thus God's grace is not frustrated. If, indeed, according to the Judaisers' view, righteousness came in connection with law, in any shape or form, Christ had died in vain, since our righteousness would consist in our keeping the law. And what would be the effect? Loss, — immense, unspeakable! We should really lose Christ, lose His love, His grace, and the righteousness of God which is by faith of Him, — we should lose Him who is our life, our portion, our all.

How Peter received Paul's rebuke we are not told, but we may be well assured, from our knowledge of his warm, honest temperament, that he received it in the spirit in which it was administered, and was convinced by it of his own wrong course. If he did not at once acknowledge this, and seek to repair the mischief he had done, and remove a stumbling-block out of the way of the Gospel going out to the Gentiles, he was not the Peter we have been following with so much interest all this time. That any grudge or ill feeling towards Paul remained is scarcely consistent with our knowledge of the man, and is negatived by the way he wrote of Paul afterwards, as "our beloved brother Paul" (2 Peter 3: 15).

We may be sure that the Lord would have us learn much from this scene. In Paul's behaviour we learn how we should stand for the truth at all costs; but if we have to withstand a brother, then it should be to his face, and not behind his back. Too often the reverse obtains, and the man who is judged guilty of fault is the last to hear of it, — and that perhaps only by a side wind, — while amongst others his supposed errors are freely discussed and canvassed. All this is

wrong. If we have anything to say to a brother, let us go to him and say it to his own face first of all, and let us say nothing behind his back that we would not say to his face. If this rule was observed what sorrows would be saved in the Church of God, where, alas! frequently, whisperers have had encouragement rather than rebuke. God says, "A whisperer separateth chief friends" (Prov. 16: 23). I believe "chief friends" were more than ever cemented in holy friendship by the godly course Paul took here, and which we should all imitate.

From Peter's vacillating course we may well learn the lesson, that one fall, even though it be met by perfect grace, and full restoration, does not cure a natural disposition, though it may go far to correct it. That the weak link in Peter's chain still existed is manifest, and to this — blessed man of God though he was — can be traced the breakdown here recorded.

If he, an apostle, could so act, after all he had passed through, what need have we each to cry to the Lord, "Hold thou me up; and I shall be safe" (Ps. 119: 117).