

Acts — Introductory
Introductory Lectures on the Acts.
THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

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Acts 1-7.

First of all we see man in an entirely new place — man risen from among the dead and ascending to heaven. The risen ascended man, Christ Jesus, is the new starting-point of the dealings of God. The first man afforded the great and solemn and saddening lesson of human responsibility. The cross had just closed the history of the race; for Jesus in no way shrank from all that was connected with the creature responsible here below, but met it to God's glory. He alone was capable of doing all; He alone solved every question; and this as a perfect man, but not a perfect man only, because He was very God. Thus was glory brought to His Father all through His life, — to God as such in His death; and glory to God not merely as one who was putting man to the test, but who was removing from before His face the root and the fruits of sin; for this is the wonderful specialty of the death of the Lord Jesus, that, in Him crucified, all that had hindered, all that had dishonoured God, was for ever met, and God infinitely more and after a better sort glorified than if there never had been sin at all.

Thus on the setting aside of the old creation, the way was clear for man in this new place; and we shall see this in the blessed book before us—the Acts of the Apostles, although I am far from meaning that the title is an adequate statement of its contents: it is but its human name, and man is not capable even of giving a name. It is a book of deeper and more glorious purpose than acts of the apostles could be, however blessed in their place. Flowing down from the risen man in heaven, we have God Himself displaying fresh glory, not merely for but in man, and this so much the more because it is no longer a perfect man on earth, but the working of the Holy Ghost in men of like passions as ourselves. Nevertheless, through the mighty redemption of the Lord Jesus, the Holy Ghost is able to come down holily and righteously, willing in love to take His place, not merely in the earth, but in that very race that had dishonoured God down to the cross of Christ, when man could go no lower in scorn and hatred of that one man who in life and death has thus changed all things for God and for us.

Accordingly this first chapter, and more particularly the verses (1-11) that I have read, show us the groundwork, by no means unconnected with all that follows, but the most fitting introduction, as the facts were the necessary basis of it; and this the more strikingly because at first sight no man perhaps could have understood it thus. Indeed I doubt that any believer could have scanned this until there was a fair measure of intelligence in the revealed truth of God. And I do not mean merely now that truth which, being received, constituted him a believer, but the large infinite truth which it is the

object of the Holy Ghost to bring out in this book as also throughout the New Testament. At first sight many an one may have found a difficulty why it was that the Spirit of God, after having in the gospel of Luke shown us Jesus risen and Jesus ascended, should take it up again in the beginning of the Acts. If we have had such questions, we may at least learn this lesson, that it is wise and good, yea, the only sound wisdom for us, and that which pleases our God, to set it down as a fixed maxim that God is always right, that His word never says a thing in vain, — that if He appear to repeat, it is in no way repetition after a human infirm sort, but with a divine purpose; and as the resurrection and the ascension too were necessary to complete the scheme of truth given us in the gospel of Luke, so the risen man ascending to heaven was necessary to be brought in again as a starting-point by the very same writer, when God gives by him this new unfolding of the grace and ways of God in man.

We see then the Lord Jesus risen from the dead. We have the remarkable fact that He does not act independently of the Holy Ghost in His risen character any more than as man here below. In short, He is man, although no longer in that life which could be laid down but risen again; and the blessedness of man always is to act and speak by the Holy Ghost. So with the Lord Jesus, until the day in which He was taken up, it is said, after that He, through the Holy Ghost, had given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen. Resurrection does not supersede the Holy Ghost. The action of the Holy Ghost may be very different in resurrection, but there is still the blessedness of the power of the Spirit of God working by Him even though risen from the dead. It is not only that the disciples needed the Spirit of God, but that Jesus was pleased still through the Holy Ghost to deal with us so. But this is not all. Assembled with them, He explains that the Holy Ghost was to be given to themselves, and this not many days hence. It was the more important to state this great truth, because He had said a short time before "Receive ye the Holy Ghost;" and the ignorance that is natural to us might have used the words in John 20 to deny the further power and privilege that was about to be conferred in the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. They were both of the deepest importance. It is not for us to compare for our preference. But of this I am persuaded, that to have the Holy Ghost according to the Lord's words on the resurrection-day has its own blessedness as decidedly as the gift of the Holy Ghost sent down from above: the one being more particularly that which forms the intelligence of the new man; the other, that power which goes forth in testimony for the blessing of others. I need not say the order too was perfect, — not in power for others first, but as spiritual intelligence for our own souls. We are not fit vessels for the good of others until God has given us divine consciousness of a new being according to Christ for ourselves.

But there is more still. It was necessary too that they should know the vast change. Their hearts, spite of the blessing, had little realized the ways of God that were about to open for them. Thus not only do we hear the Lord intimating that the promise of the Father must be poured out upon them, but further, even after this, they asked Him whether He was at this time about to restore again the kingdom to Israel. This furnishes, as our foolish questions often do, the inlet for divine instruction and guidance. We need not always repress these enquiries from the Lord: it is well to let that which is in the mind come out, especially if it be to Him. Nor must His servants be impatient even at the curious questions of those that least understand; for the importance is not so much in that which is asked as in the answer. Certainly this was ever the case with our Lord and the disciples. "It is not for you," says He, "to know the times and the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own authority, but ye shall receive power." The measures and the fit moments that had to do with earthly changes were in the sole control of Him to whom all belonged. "But ye shall receive power" (for the two words are different), "after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me." It was not the time for the kingdom in the sense of manifested power; and this was in their desires. The kingdom in a mysterious form no doubt there is, and we are translated into it., and it is in the power of the Spirit. But emphatically it was

to be a time of testimony till He returns in glory. Such is our place. Blest perfectly according to all the acceptance of Christ exalted in the glory of God, our business is to be witnesses to Him. And so the Lord tells the apostles, "Ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Then we have the finishing touch, if one may so say, to this introduction. The Lord ascends to heaven, but not with whirlwind nor with chariot of fire. It is not simply that He was not, for God took Him, as is said of Enoch, but in a way more suitable to His glory it is written here that "he was taken up, and a cloud" (the special token of the divine presence) "received him out of their sight."

While they looked steadfastly toward heaven, they hear from the angels who stood by them in white, that this Jesus that was taken up from them should thus come in like manner as they had beheld Him going into heaven.

Thus the only true foundation is laid, and heaven becomes the point of departure — not the earth, nor the first man, but the second man, the last Adam, from the only place that was suitable for Him according to the counsels of God. Such is the basis of Christianity. Altogether vain and impossible, had not redemption been accomplished, and a redemption by blood and in the power of resurrection. Redemption *in se* does not give us the full height and character of Christianity: man risen, and ascended to heaven, after the full expiation of sins on the cross, is necessary to its true and complete expression.

A further scene follows, by no means possible to be absent without a blank for the spiritual understanding. It must be proved manifestly that God had given even now a new place of blessing, and a new power too, or spiritual competency, to the disciples. At the same time they would have to wait for power of the Spirit in gift to act on others. Accordingly we see the disciples together, "continuing with one accord in prayer and supplication;" and in those days Peter stands up, and brings before them the gap made in the apostolic body by the apostasy and death of Judas. Observe how he brings out with an altogether unwonted force the scripture that applied to the case. This was in virtue, not of the promise of the Father for which they were waiting, but of that which they had already from Jesus risen from the dead. Hence without delay the disciples proceed to act. Peter says, "Of these men which have companioned with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be a witness with us of his resurrection."

It will be noticed that the words "ordained to be" are left out. Every one ought to be aware indirectly, if not from his own knowledge, that there is nothing in Greek to represent them. There is not, and there never was, the smallest pretence of divine authority for their insertion. It is hard to say how godly men endorsed so pure an interpolation — with what object can be easily surmised: it does not require a word from me.

"And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias." For these two had qualifications, as far as man knew, suitable to the requirements for an apostle, being the companions of the earthly path of the Lord Jesus. They had seen Him risen from the dead. Unable to judge between them definitely, the rest spread the matter before the Lord who must choose His own apostle. The mode of the disciples in this case, it is true, might seem peculiar to us; but I have no doubt that they were guided of the Lord. There is no reason from scripture to believe that Peter and the others acted hastily, or were mistaken. The Spirit of God in this very book sanctions the choice that was made that day, and never alludes to Paul as the necessary twelfth apostle. To do so would be, in my judgment, to weaken if not to ruin the truth of God. Paul was not one of the twelve. It is of all

consequence that he should be permitted to retain a special place, who had a special work. All was wisely ordered.

Here then they prayed, and said, "Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen." Man never chooses an apostle; apostles did not, could not, elect an apostle: the Lord alone chose. And so they gave forth their lots after a Jewish fashion. The twelve apostles were clearly, as it seems to me, in relation to the twelve tribes of Israel, "and they gave forth their lots." This was sanctioned of God in the Old Testament when Israel was before Him; it will be sanctioned of God when Israel returns on the scene in the latter day. No doubt, when the assembly of God was in being, the lot disappears; but the assembly of God was not yet formed. All would be in order in due time. "They gave forth their lots;* and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles." We shall find a little later, yet before Paul appears, that "the twelve" are recognised. So says the Spirit of God.

* The true reading, as arrested by , A, B, C, D (corr.), and many ancient versions, is ἀὐτοῖς (not ἀὐτῶν, as in D, E, the mass of cursives, etc.). The meaning is, "they gave lots for them." This meets the chief reasoning founded on the common text which Mosheim urges with his usual force against the view in which, he confesses, and the commentators agree (i.e., in representing Matthias as having been chosen an apostle by lot, agreeably to the ancient Jewish practice). It is evidently of no consequence who they were that set forth or appointed (ἔστησαν) the two: some, like Alford, arguing that the whole company thus produced them; others, like Mosheim, contending that it must in all propriety have been the eleven apostles. I think that the vagueness of the phrase, without a defined subject, shows that the stress laid on either side is a mistake. It suffices to say, that two candidates were brought forward, possessed, as far as either apostles or disciples could say, of adequate qualifications. The Lord alone could decide: to Him all looked after the manner so familiar to the people of God. But Mosheim's conclusion destroys the whole point, besides doing violence to the text by confounding κλήρος "lot" with ψῆφος vote or suffrage. It would bring in man's will and voice where the prayer just offered was an abandonment of it for the intervention of the heart-searching God. This, no doubt, was natural to one who was swayed by Lutheran prejudice, and strengthened by the practice which undoubtedly prevailed (from the third century at latest), the assembly deciding by suffrage, not by lot, between the candidates proposed by those who took the lead in their affairs. There seems little difficulty in understanding, a Hebraistic extension of the word "gave" (1 Sam. 14: 41) for the more common "cast"; and as to the pronoun, it is as intelligible and correct in the dative, as in the genitive it is perplexing in sense, and, I think, inaccurate in form; for the article would be requisite with the substantive if it were the true reading. Compare J. L. Mosheimii de rebus Christianorum ante Const. M. Comm. Saec. Pr. § xiv. pp. 78-80.

But now, when the day of Pentecost was running its course, they were all with one accord together; for God put the disciples in waiting in the attitude of expectation and prayer and supplication before Him. It was good that they should feel their weakness; and this was indeed the condition of true spiritual power, as it always is for the soul (if not for testimony, certainly for the soul). "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." The manner of the Holy Spirit's appearing thus it is well to notice. It was exactly adapted to the intent for which He was given. It was not, as in the gospels, a testimony to the grace of the Lord, although nothing but grace could have given Him to man. It was not, as we find it afterwards in the Revelation, where mention is made of the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. The

tongues were parted; for it was not a question of people being now made to speak of one lip. God was meeting man where he was, — not setting aside the ancient judgment of his pride, yet graciously condescending to man, and this to mankind as they were. It was no sign of government, still less of government limited to a special nation. The parted tongues clearly showed that God thought of the Gentile as of the Jew. But they were "as of fire;" for the testimony of grace was none the less founded on righteousness. The gospel is intolerant of evil. This is the wonderful way in which God now speaks by the Holy Ghost. Whatever the mercy of God, whatever the proved weakness, need, and guilt of man, there is not nor can be the least compromise of holiness. God can never sanction the evil of man. Hence the Spirit of God was thus pleased to mark the character of His presence, even though given of the grace of God, but founded on the righteousness of God. God could afford fully to bless. It was no derogation from His glory; it was after all but His seal on the perfectness of the work of the Lord Jesus. Not only did He show His interest for man, and His grace to the evil and lost, but, above all, His honour for Jesus. There is no title nor ground so secure for us. There is no spring of blessing that we are entitled so to boast of as the Lord: there is none that so delivers from self.

At this time too there were dwelling at Jerusalem men from all nations, we may say, generally speaking, under heaven — "Jews, devout men." And when it was noised abroad that the Holy Ghost had thus been given to the congregated disciples "the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speaking in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all of these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new the (or sweet) wine. But Peter, standing up with eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem." For he first addresses them on a narrower ground than that into which he afterwards branches out, and both with a wisdom that is not a little striking. Here he is about to apply a portion of the prophecy of Joel. It will be seen that the prophet takes exactly the same limited ground as Peter does. That is, the Jews, properly so called, and Jerusalem, stand in the foreground of Joel 's prophecy: so admirably perfect is the word of God even in its smallest detail.

The point he insists on, it will be noticed, was this — that the wonder then before them in Jerusalem was after all one for which their own prophets ought to have prepared them. "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel." He does not say that it was the *fulfilment* of the prophet. Men, divines, have so said, but not the Spirit of God. The apostle simply says, "This is that which was spoken." Such was its character. How far it was to be then accomplished is another matter. It was not the excitement of nature by wine, but the heart filled with the Spirit of God, acting in His own power and in all classes. "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: and I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." There he stops, as far as Joel is concerned.

Then, verse 22, he addresses them as "men of Israel," not merely of Judea and Jerusalem, but now breaking out into the general hopes of the nation, he at the same time proves their common guilt. "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it."

And this the apostle supports by what David had spoken in Psalm 16: "I foresaw the Lord always before my face." The same psalm affords the clearest proof that the Messiah (and no Jew could doubt that the Messiah was in question there) would be characterised by the most absolute trust in God through an His life; that he was to lay down His life with trust in God just as unbroken and perfect in death as in life; and finally that He would stand in resurrection. It is the psalm therefore of confidence in God that goes right through life, death, resurrection. It was seen in Jesus, and clearly not applicable to David its writer. Of all whom a Jew could have put forward to claim the language of such a psalm, David would have been perhaps the uppermost one in their hearts. But it was far beyond that famous king, as Peter argued: "Men [and] brethren,* let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses."

* It may be well to guard the English reader from supposing that two classes are intended. The phrase is literally "men-brethren," and means simply men who were brethren. — Let me add, that the true text in the last clause of verse 30 is simply, "to seat from the fruit of his loins on his throne."

Thus the fresh and notorious facts as to Jesus, and no one else, completely agreed with this inspired testimony to the Messiah. Nor was it confined to a single portion of the Psalms. "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear." But David is not ascended into the heavens. Thus Peter cites another psalm to show the necessary ascension of Messiah to sit at the right hand of Jehovah, just as much as he had shown resurrection to be predicted of Him as of no other. "for he says himself, Jehovah said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool." Who was the man that sat at God's right hand? Certainly none could pretend it was David, but his Son, the Messiah; and this entirely corresponded with the facts the apostles had beheld personally. "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." Thus the proof was complete. Their psalms found their counterpart in the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus the Messiah. God had made Him "both Lord and Christ;" for here the testimony is very gradual, and the wisdom of God in this we may well admire and profit by. In meeting the Jews, God condescended to put forth the glory of His own Son in the way that most of all attached itself to their ancient testimonies and to their expectations. They looked for a Messiah. But apparently all was lost. for they had refused Him; and they might have supposed that the loss was irretrievable. Not so: God had raised Him from the dead. He had shown Himself therefore against what they had done; but their hope itself was secure in the risen Jesus, whom God had made to be Lord and Christ. Jesus, spite of all that they had done, had in nowise given up His title as the Christ; God had made Him such. After they had done their worst, and He had suffered His worst, God owned Him thus according to His own word at His own right hand. Other glories will open

there too; but Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, as Paul says, was to be raised from the dead according to his gospel. Timothy was to remember this; and Paul can descend to show the connection of the glorious person of the Lord Jesus with the Jew on earth, as he loved for his own relationship to behold Him in heavenly glory. Thus the link with the expectations of the earthly people, though broken by death, is reset for ever in resurrection.

Surprised, grieved, alarmed to the heart by that which Peter had thus forcibly brought before them, they cry to him and the other apostles, "Men [and] brethren, what shall we do?" This gives the opportunity for the apostle to set out in the wisdom of God a very weighty application of the truth for the soul that hears the gospel: "Repent," says he, which is a far deeper thing than compunction of heart. This they had already, and it leads to that which he desired for them: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." There is no true repentance unto life without faith. But it is according to God that repentance is put forward here rather than faith. The Jews had the testimony of the gospel, as well as the law; and now it had been pressed on them by Peter. Because they believed that testimony, brought home to their consciences, as we have seen, their hearts were filled with sorrow.

But the apostle lets them know that there is a judgment of self that goes far below any outburst of grief, any consciousness and hatred, even of the deepest act of evil, as undoubtedly the crucifying of Jesus was. Repentance is the abandonment of self altogether, the judgment of what we are in the light of God. And this was to be marked, therefore, not only by the negative sign of giving themselves up as altogether evil before God, but by receiving the rejected and crucified man, the Lord Jesus. Hence, to be baptized each one of them in His name for the remission of sins follows; "and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

This, therefore, is entirely distinct from faith or repentance. Believing, they had of necessity a new nature they had life in Christ; but receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost is a privilege and power beyond; and in this case it was made to be attendant on one's being baptized as well as repenting, because in Jews it was of the utmost moment that they should give a public witness that all the rest and confidence of their souls lay in Jesus. Having been guilty of crucifying the Lord, He must be manifestly the object of their trust. And so it was that they were to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

But indeed this gift is always consequent on faith — never identical with it. This is as sure as it is important to assert and to insist on, as well as to believe. It is no question of notion or tradition, the subject of which runs in quite another direction. I do not even allow it to be an open question, nor a matter of opinion; for plainly in every instance of each soul, of whom Scripture speaks, there is an interval however short. The gift of the Holy Ghost follows faith, and is in no way at the same instant, still less is it the same act. It supposes faith already existing, not unbelief; for the Holy Ghost, though He may quicken, is never *given* to an unbeliever. The Holy Ghost is said to seal the believer; but it is a seal of faith, and not of unbelief. The heart is opened by faith, and the Holy Ghost is given by the grace of God to those that believe, not in order to their believing. There is no such thing as the Holy Ghost given in order to believe. He quickens the unbeliever, and is given to the believer. Although we do not hear of faith in the passage, yet from the fact that the converted only were called on to repent, we know that they must have believed. True believing necessarily goes along with true repentance. The two things are invariably found together; but the gift of the Holy Ghost is consequent on them both.

And so the apostle explains. He says, "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." His words seem to carry a sense beyond Israel: how far he entered into the force of them himself it is not perhaps for any of us to say.

We know that afterwards, when Peter was called upon to go to the Gentiles, he found difficulties. It is hard to suppose, therefore, that he fully understood his own words. However, this may be, the words were according to God, whether or not fully appreciated by Peter when he uttered them. God was going to gather out of the Jews themselves and their children, but, more than that, "those that were afar off, as many as the Lord our God should call."

And then we have the beautiful picture that the Spirit of God gives us of the scene that was now formed by His own presence here below, "Then they that [gladly]* received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." They were added to the original nucleus of disciples, and "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, [and] in breaking of bread and prayers."

* It appears to me that ἄσμενως, "gladly," was inserted in the commonly received text against the best testimony, as well as internal reasons. For the great uncials (M, A, B, C, D, etc.), supported by the Vulgate and Aethiopic, omit the word, which was probably suggested by Acts 21: 17, where it falls in as admirably as here it sounds somewhat out of season. Nearly the same authorities concur in omitting καὶ, "and," between "the fellowship" and "the breaking of bread." This serves to strengthen the view that "the fellowship" goes with "the teaching of the apostles," though put as two objects instead of being combined by a single article in one idea; and it would throw the breaking of bread and the prayers similarly together.

Thus, after being brought into the new association, there arose a need of instruction; and the apostles were pre-eminently those that God vouchsafed in the infant days of His assembly. Inasmuch as it was of the utmost importance that all should be thoroughly established in the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ, they had a place peculiar to themselves, as above all others chosen of the Lord to lay the foundation of His house, and to direct and administer in His name, as we see through the New Testament. And then as the fruit of it, and specially connected, there was "the fellowship" of which we next read. Next followed the breaking of bread, the formal expression of Christian fellowship, and the special outward sign of remembering Him to whose death they owed all. Finally, but closely following the Lord's supper, come "the prayers," which still showed that, however great might be the grace of God, they were in the place of danger, and needed dependence here below.

"And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common." This peculiar feature is found in Jerusalem, beautiful and blessed in its season, but, I have no doubt, special to the Jerusalem condition of the church of God. We can easily understand it. In the first place all that composed the church were at that time in the same place. We can feel readily, therefore, that there would be a real and strong family feeling, but I doubt whether their mutual affections then rose higher than the sense of their being God's family. They really did constitute the body of Christ; they were baptized by one Spirit into one body; but to be that one body, and to know that such they were, are two very different things. The development was reserved for another and still weightier witness of the glory of the Lord Jesus. But having in its strength the sense of family relationship, the wonderful victory of grace over selfish interests was the fruit of it. If he or she belonged to the household of God, this was the governing thought — not one's own possessions. Grace gives without seeking a return; but grace on the other side seeks not its own things, but those of Christ.

Another trait is, that all savoured of divine as well as family life. The breaking of bread every day, for instance, was clearly a striking witness of Christ ever before their hearts, though also a kindred effect of the same feeling. Thus they sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, as one

might have need.

And they "continued daily with one accord in the temple." This is another peculiarity. There was by no means as yet a manifest severance of the tie with Judaism, at least with the circumstances of its worship. We know that in principle the cross does make a breach, and an irreparable one, with all that is of the first man; but the power of old habits with the joy that overflowed their souls made them for the moment to be, I may say, better Jews. There was that now within which was far stronger liquor than had ever filled the old skins of the law, and these were sure to be broken in no long time. But for the present nothing was farther from the disciples' minds: they continued daily with one accord in the temple. Along with it was joined this new element — breaking bread at home; not "from house to house," as if it were a migratory service. There is no real ground to infer that they shifted the scene of the Lord's supper from one place to another. This is not the meaning. The margin is correct. They broke bread at home, in contrast with the temple. It might be the very same house in which the breaking of bread always took place. They would naturally choose the most suitable quarters, which combined convenience as to distance with commodiousness in receiving as many brethren and sisters as possible.

Thus these two features were seen to meet together in the Pentecostal church — the retaining of Jewish religious habits in going up to the temple for prayer, and at the same time the observance of that which was properly Christian — the breaking of bread at home. No wonder the new-found joy overflowed, and they were found "eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." There is no reason to confound the breaking of bread with eating their meat. They are two different things. We find the religious life, so to speak, expressed in their going up to the temple, and in their breaking bread at home. We find the effect upon their natural life in their "eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people." There is the same double character.

"And the Lord added to the church," or "*together*," (for there is a fair question that may be raised as to the text in this last clause) "daily such as should be saved," or those that God was about to separate from the destruction that was impending over the Jewish nation, and, further, to bring by a blessed deliverance into the new Christian estate. The word σωζομένους does not express the full character of Christian salvation which was afterwards known. Of course we know that they were saved; but this is not what the word in itself means. It is simply that the Lord was separating those that were to be saved. The English version gives it on the whole very justly. Carefully remember that the meaning is not that they were saved then. The phrase in Luke has nothing to do with that question; it refers simply to persons destined to salvation without saying anything farther.

In the next chapter (Acts 3) a miracle is related in detail, which brought out the feelings of the people, especially as represented by their leaders (Acts 4). In going up to the temple, (for the apostles themselves went there,) Peter and John met with a man that was lame; and as he asked for alms Peter gave him something better (as grace, poor in this world's resources and estimate, always loves to do so). He tells the expecting man, "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have given thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." The man instantly rises, according to the power of God, and is found with them, "walking, and leaping, and praising God; and all the people saw him."

This arrests universal attention, and Peter preaches a new discourse — that which has been justly enough called a Jewish sermon. It is thus evident that his indication of the Christian place of blessing in the chapter before (Acts 2) does not hinder him from setting before the men of Israel (for so he addressed them here), first, their awful position by the rejection of Jesus, and, next, the terms that God in His grace sets before them in answer to the intercession of Christ. "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his" — not "son," but "*servant* Jesus." We

know Him (and the Spirit of God, who wrote this book, infinitely better knew Him) to be the Son of God. But we must always hold to what God says; and the testimony of God did not yet — and especially in dealing with the Jews — set forth all the glory of Christ. It was gradually brought out; and the more that man's unbelief grew, so much the more God's maintenance of the Lord's glory was manifested. And so, if they had with scorn refused Him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go, — if they had denied the Holy One and Just, and desired a murderer to be granted, — if they had killed the Prince [leader, originator] of life, whom God raised from the dead, they had simply shown out what they were. On the other hand, His name, through faith in His name, (and they were witnesses of its power,) had made this man strong, whom they saw and knew: "Yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled."

And then he calls upon them to repent, and be converted, that their sins might be blotted out, so that times of refreshing might come from the presence of the Lord. "And he shall send Jesus Christ, who was fore-appointed for you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." God has accomplished His word by Moses the prophet; for Moses in no way took the place of being the deliverer of Israel, but only a witness of it, a partial exemplification of God's power then, but looking onward to the great Prophet and Deliverer that was coming. Now He was come; and so Peter sets before them, not only the coming, the Blessor's arrival and rejection in their midst, but the awfulness of trifling with it. Whoever would not bow to Him was to be cut off by their own Moses's declaration: "Every soul who will not hear that prophet shall be destroyed from among the people." And so it was that all the prophets had testified of those days: and they were the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with their fathers, saying unto Abraham, "And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed." The Seed was now come. It was for them, therefore, to declare themselves. Alas! they had already set up their will against Him; but at His intercession (what grace!) God was willing to pardon it all, did they but repent and be converted for the blotting out of their sins.

Thus we have here an appeal to the nation as such; for in all this it will be observed he does not speak a word to them of the Lord Jesus as Head of the church. We have no hint of this truth yet to anybody. Nay, we have not Jesus spoken of even in the same height as in the preceding chapter 2. We have Him in heaven, it is true, but about to return and bring in earthly power, blessing, and glory, if Israel only turned with repentance to Him. Such was the testimony of Peter. It was a true word; and it remains true. When Israel shall turn in heart to the Lord, He who secretly works this in grace will return publicly to them. When they shall say "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of Jehovah," the Messiah will come in fulness of blessing. The heavens will retain Him no more, but give Him up who will fill earth as well as heaven with glory. No word of God perishes: all abides perfectly true.

Meanwhile other and deeper counsels have been brought to light by the unbelief of Israel. This unbelief comes out in no small measure in the next chapter, which follows but might properly have formed a part of Acts 3; for in sense it is a continuous subject. "And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide. Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand." Then, on the morrow, we have the council; and Peter, being by the chiefs demanded by what power or name they had wrought the deed, filled with the Holy Ghost, answers, "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," (he is throughout bold and uncompromising) "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. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner." Thus again reference is made to their own testimonies. "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

Unscrupulous as they were, they were thus confounded by the calm confidence with which the truth armed the apostles; and the more so, because their tone and language gave evidence that, whatever the power of the Holy Ghost wrought, it did not set aside their condition as illiterate men. Their words, etc., bore no polish of the schools; and truth spurns, as it needs not, dialectic subtlety. This magnified, therefore, the power of God so much the more, as man's skill was null. But at the same time there was the witness of the miracle that had been done. In presence, then, of the apostles clothed with the irresistible might of the Lord, and of the man whose healing silently attested it even as to the body, they could only command them to go aside, while they conferred together. A guilty conscience betrays its conscious weakness, however wilful. God invariably gives sufficient testimony to condemn man. He will prove this in the day of judgment; but it is certain to our faith now. He is God, and cannot act below Himself when it is a question of His own revelation.

On such occasions even those who profess most are apt to speak together, as if there were no God, or as if He did not hear them saying, "What shall we do to these men? for 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 would, if they could. Their will was engaged (sad to say!) against God, against the truth, against Jehovah and His anointed. "But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they may speak henceforth to no man in this name." Thus their lack of conscience could not be hid: witness their opposition to facts that they knew, and to truth that they could not deny. The apostles cannot but take the real seat of judgment, searching the hearts of their judges: "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. And being let go, they went to their own [company]." It is seen in this passage how truly it has been said that we have a new family. They went to their own [company], and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them." Accordingly we find them speaking to God in a new manner, and suitably to the occasion: "Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together in this city [these last words being wrongly omitted in the received text] against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy servant [again it is *servant*] Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy *servant* Jesus." And God answered. "When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost." They had received the Holy Ghost before; but to be "filled" with Him goes farther, and supposes that no room was left for the action of nature, that the power of the Holy Ghost absorbed all for the time being. "They were filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness." Such was the effect. They were to be

witnesses of Him.

"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things in common." The Spirit of God repeated this, I suppose, as having a further proof of His action on their souls at this time, because many more had been brought in. "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet," — a slightly different development from the second chapter. There we find that there was what might seem a greater freeness, and perhaps to some eyes a more striking simplicity. But all is in season, and it seems to me that, while the devotedness was the same (and the Spirit of God takes pains to show that it was the same, spite of largely increased numbers, by the continued mighty action of the Holy Ghost), still with this advance of numbers simplicity could not be kept up in the same apparent manner. The distribution made to each before was more direct and immediate; now it takes effect through the apostles. The possessions were laid at the apostles' feet, and distribution was made to every one according as he had need. Among the rest one man was conspicuous for the heartiness of his love. It was Barnabas, of whom we are afterwards to hear much in other ways of still more lasting moment.

But there is rarely a manifestation of God in the church without a dark shadow that accompanies it from the evil one. And farther we find this immediately. We are not to be alarmed by the presence of evil, but rather to be sure that where God works Satan will follow, seeking to turn the very good in which the Spirit acts into a means for introducing his own counterfeit to the dishonour of the Lord. Thus in the present instance Ananias and Sapphira sell some of their property, but keep back part of the price; and this was done deliberately by concert for the purpose of gaining the character of devotedness without its cost. In principle they made the church their world, in which they sought to give the impression of a faith that confided in the Lord absolutely, while at the same time there was a secret reserve for themselves. Now the manifest point of that which was then wrought by the Spirit of God was grace in faith: there was in no way a demand. Nothing could more falsify the fruit of the Spirit of God here than converting it into a tacit rule: there was no compulsion whatever in the case. Nobody was asked to give anything. What was gold or silver, what houses or lands, to the Lord? The worth of it all depended on its being the power of the Spirit of God — the fruit of divine grace in the heart. But Satan tempted them in the manner here described; and Peter, by whatever means he arrived at the conviction of it, arraigns the husband alone first. "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost

It is a solemn thing to remember, that all sin now is against the Spirit. There may be, no doubt, the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against Him; but in truth all sin is sin against the Holy Ghost; and for this simple reason, that He has taken His place here. In Israel the sin was against the law, because the law was the testimony that God set in His sanctuary. By the law sin was measured in Israel; but it is not so for the Christian. There is now a far more serious and searching and thorough standard. Those that use the law now as a measure among Christians lower the test of judgment incomparably. Such a misuse of the law for righteous men does not at all prove that they are anxious about holiness or righteousness; it is a proof of their ignorance of the presence of the Holy Ghost, and the just and necessary effects of His presence. One has no thought, I repeat, of implying that it is not well meant. To be sure it is. It is simply that they do not understand the distinctive character of Christianity.

But this is a most serious error; and I doubt much whether all who in appearance and by profession take the place of owning the presence of the Spirit of God have by any means an adequate

sense either of the privileges which are theirs or of the gravity of their responsibility. Now, Peter had. The days were early. There was much truth that had yet to be communicated and learnt; but the power of the presence of the Holy Ghost made itself felt. He at least seems to have realised the bearing of all, and so he deals with the sin of Ananias as one who had lied to the Holy Ghost. He had kept back part of the price of the land. "Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?" It was still his own. "Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God."

Forthwith Ananias comes under the judgment of the Lord. He fell asleep, and great fear came upon all them that heard these Words. "And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter said to her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?" Thus there was an appeal to her conscience, without an atom of harshness in it. She had longer time to weigh what they were about; but in truth it was a conspiracy; not so much to injure others as to exalt themselves; but the end was as bad as the means were evil and odious in the sight of God. Christ entered into none of their thoughts or desires. Many a thing has been said untruly since, which was not so judged of God. But there was an especial offence at this time, in that, He having wrought so wondrously in blessing man with the best blessings through Christ our Lord, the practical denial of the presence of the Spirit should have so deliberately and quickly manifested itself for the express purpose of exalting the flesh which Christianity has set aside for ever. Hence Peter says, "How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and they shall carry thee out And great fear came upon all the church."

Then we find the Lord accomplishing His word: greater works were to be done by them than even He Himself had wrought: never do we hear of the Lord's shadow curing the sick. And believers were the more added to the Lord. The unbelievers were warned, "and of the rest durst no man join himself unto them." Souls that bowed to the word were attracted, multitudes both of men and women; and the enemy was awed, in some quarters alarmed, and irritated in others. "The high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, and were filled with indignation. They laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison."

But the angel of the Lord shows his power; for this chapter is remarkable in giving us a picture not merely of the sweet activity of grace, but of divine power in presence of evil. We have seen the positive interference of the Spirit of God. At the end of the chapter before we had the second witness of it, after the foundation laid, and first witness given, in chapter 2. But here we have the proofs of His presence in other ways — power in dealing with the evil, and judging it within the church of God; next, power by angelic deliverance; thirdly, power by men in providence. Gamaliel in council is just as truly the effect of God's power working by man, as the angel in opening the doors of the prison and bringing the apostles out, — not, of course, so wonderful, but as real a part of God's working in behalf of His assembly and servants.

But there is another case. The very same men who were delivered by divine power are allowed to be beaten by man. Nay, not only do they take it quietly — these men about whom all the power of God was thus seen in action in one form or another; but they rejoice that they were counted worthy to suffer. Are we prepared for the same thing? Be assured, brethren, if we have any tie with Christ by grace, we belong to the same company: it is our own company; it is a part of our own heritage of blessing. It is not, I admit, according to the spirit of the age to deal with us after the same sort; but there is no real change for the better in the world to hinder the outbreak of its violence at any time. Is it not well therefore for us to realize to what we belong, and what the Lord looks for from us, and what it is He has

recorded for our instruction as well as comfort?

After all this then we find that "they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." It is impossible that a human authority could be entitled to set aside the direct command of the Lord Jesus. The Lord had commanded them to go and preach the gospel to every creature. Men had forbidden this. It is very clear that the apostle Peter gives the prohibition only a human place now (Acts 5: 29). If men had told them to be silent, and the Lord bid them preach, the highest authority must be paramount.

Another form of evil betrays itself in the next chapter (Acts 6); and here again we find in the very good that God had wrought evil murmuring is found. It is not merely individuals as before; in some respects it is a more serious case: there are complaints heard in the church — the murmuring of Grecians against the Hebrews (that is, of the foreign speaking. Jews against the Jews, proper of the Holy Land), because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. This forms the occasion for the provisional wisdom of the Spirit of God.

We have already seen with abundant evidence how truly the church is a divine institution, founded upon a divine person (even the Holy Ghost) coming down and, making it, since redemption, His dwelling-place here below. Besides, we may now learn the working of this living power that is drawn out by the circumstances which call it forth. It is not a system of rules; nothing is more destructive of the very nature of the church of God. It is not a human society, with either the leaders of it or the mass choosing for themselves what or whom they think best, but the Spirit of God who is there meets in His wisdom whatever may be necessary for the glory of Christ. All this is preserved in the written word for our instruction and guidance now.

Here we have the institution of seven men to look after the poor who were in danger of being forgotten, or in some way neglected — at any rate, so they had complained. To cut off the appearance of it, and at the same time to leave the apostles free for their own proper work of a more spiritual kind, "the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

Thus we find two things: not only the apostles formally appointing, but the multitude of the believers left to choose, where it was a question that concerned the distribution of their gifts. On the part of that governed the church of God, there ought not to be the appearance of coveting the property of God's people, or the disposal of it. At the same time the apostles do appoint those who were thus chosen over this matter. They were called of God to act, and so they do. "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word."

The principle of the choice too is striking; for all these names, it would appear, were Grecian. What gracious wisdom! This was clearly to stop the mouths of the complainants. The Hellenists, or Grecians, were jealous of the Palestinian Jews. The persons appointed were, judging from their names, every one of them Hellenists, or foreign-speaking Jews. The troublers ought to have been not only satisfied but somewhat ashamed. Thus it is that grace, while it discerns, knows how to rise above evil; for murmuring against others is not the way to correct anything that is wrong, even if it be real. But the grace of the Lord always meets circumstances, and turns them to a profitable account, by a manifestation of wisdom from above. The field was about to be enlarged; and although it was but a poor root of man's complaints which led to this fresh line of action, God was moving over all, could use these seven, and would give some of them a good degree, as we find in Stephen soon and in Philip

later. But He marked it in another way too, which showed His approbation. "The word of God increased," spite of murmuring; "and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly;" and a new feature appears — "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith."

Stephen then, full of grace and power (but One could be said to be full of grace and truth), is found doing great wonders. This draws out the opposition of the leaders of the Jews, who "were not able to resist the spirit and the wisdom with which he spake. Then they suborned men, who said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us."

Accordingly, thus accused, Stephen answers the appeal of the high priest, "Are these things so?" And in his wonderful discourse (Acts 7), on which I can but touch, he sets before them the prominent facts of their history, which bear on God's question with the Jews at this moment. God had brought out their forefather Abraham, but He never gave him actually to possess this land. Why, then, boast of it so much? Those who, according to nature, vaunted loudly of Abraham and of God's dealings, were clearly not in communion with God, or even with Abraham. Spite of the love and honour that God had for their forefathers, he never possessed the land. Why, then, set such stress on that land?

But more than this. There was one of the descendants of the fathers who stands out most especially, and above all of the family of Abraham, in the book of Genesis — one man who, more than any other, was the type of the Messiah. Need I say it was Joseph? And how did he fare? Sold by his brethren to the Gentiles. The application was not difficult. They knew how they had treated Jesus of Nazareth. Their consciences could not fail to remind them how the Gentiles would have willingly let Him go, and how their voices and will had prevailed against even that hardened governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate. Thus it was manifest that the leading points of Joseph's tale, as far as the wickedness of the Jews, and the selling to the Gentiles, were rehearsed again in Jesus of Nazareth.

But, coming down later still, another man fills the history of the second book of the Bible, and indeed has to do with all the remaining books of the Pentateuch. It was Moses. What about him? Substantially the same story again: the rejected of Israel, whose pride would not hear when he sought to bring about peace between a contending Israelite and his oppressor, Moses was compelled to fly from Israel, and then found his hiding-place among the Gentiles. How far Stephen entered intelligently into the bearing of these types it is not for one to say; but we can easily see the wisdom of God; we can see the power of the Holy Ghost with which he spake.

But there was another element also. He comes down next to their temple; for this was an important point. It was not only that he had spoken of Jesus of Nazareth, but they had also charged him with saying that He would destroy this place, and change their customs. What did their own prophets say? "But Solomon built him a house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in [places] made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?" In short, he shows that Israel had sinned against God in every ground of relationship. They had broken the law; they had slain the prophets; they had killed the Messiah; and they had always resisted the Holy Ghost. What an awful position! and the more awful, because it was the simple, truth.

This brought out the frenzied rage of Israel, and they gnashed on him with their teeth; and he that charged them with always resisting the Holy Ghost, as their fathers did, full of the Holy Ghost looks up

into heaven, and sees the Son of man, and bears witness that he sees Him standing at the right hand of God. And thus we have what I began with: we have the manifestation of the character of Christianity, and the perception of its power, and the effect produced upon him that appreciated it. We have not merely the Lord going up to heaven, but His servant, who saw heaven, open, and Jesus, the Son of man, standing at the right hand of God.

But there is more: for while they rushed now to silence the mouth which so completely proved their nation's habitual sin against the Spirit, they stoned him indeed, but they stoned him praying, and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." They could not silence the words that told how deeply he had drunk into the grace of the Lord Jesus. They could not silence his confidence, his peaceful entrance into his place with Christ, associated consciously with Him as he was. And then we learn (it may be without a thought on his part) how grace conforms to the words of Jesus on the cross, and certainly without the smallest imitation of it, but so much the more evincing the power of God. For Jesus could say, and He alone could say rightly, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Jesus alone fittingly could say, "I *commend* my spirit." He who could lay down His life, and could take it again, could so speak to the Father. But the servant of the Lord could say, and rightly and blessedly, "Lord Jesus, *receive* my spirit." Nor was this all; the same heart that thus confided absolutely in the Lord, and knew his own heavenly portion with Jesus, kneels down and cries with a loud voice. This was not directed to Jesus only: no loud voice was needed there: a whisper would be enough for Him. The loud voice was for man, for his dull ears and unfeeling heart. With a loud voice he cries, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." What simplicity, but what fulness of communion with Jesus! The same who had prayed for them reproduced His own feelings in the heart of His servant.

I shall not now develop this subject more than other scenes of the deepest interest, but just simply and shortly commend to all that are here the beautiful witness that it affords us of the true place, power, and grace of a Christian.

Acts 8 - 12.

We are now arrived at a turning-point in the history, not merely of the church, but of the unfolding of the truth of God, and the manifestation of His ways. The death of Stephen, therefore, has in various points of view a great significance. And no wonder. His was the first spirit that departed to be with Christ after the Holy Ghost was given. But it was not merely one who departed to be with the Lord, which was far better; it was by the act of the Jews in the infuriate spirit of persecution. The very same people had done it who had so lately received with the utmost favour (not the truth, nor the grace of God, which is inseparable from His truth, but), at any rate, the mighty impress of the grace as well as of the truth which had produced unwonted largeness of heart, unselfishness of spirit, and joy and liberty, that struck the minds of the Jews accustomed to the coldness of death in their own system.

But now all was changed. What was most sweet soon became bitter, as it often is in the things of God. And when they understood the bearing of that which God had wrought here below — that it judged man; that it gave no countenance to the religiousness in which they boasted; that it showed most convincingly, and so much the more bitterly because convincingly, what God all through His testimony with them had expressly intimated, by the prophets as well as in the types of the law itself, that He had deeper purposes; that nothing on earth could satisfy Him; that it was in His mind, on the proved ruin of Israel, to bring in heaven and its things for a heavenly people even while here below: — now that this was made manifest, above all, in the testimony that Stephen had rendered to the very man that they had rejected and crucified, seen in glory at the right hand of God, it was unbearable. Could it be otherwise,

when, spite of proud unbelief and conceit of distinctive privilege, they were forced to feel that they were none the less the constant resisters of the Holy Ghost like their fathers, who had been guilty themselves, and suffered the consequence of their guilt in their prostration to the Gentiles; to feel now that they themselves were no better, but rather worse; that there was the same unbelief bringing out its effects even more tremendously; that they were guilty of the blood of their own Messiah, who was now risen and exalted in the highest seat of heaven? All these things were pressed home by Stephen; indeed, I have simply touched on a very small part of his most telling address.

But the close lets us see more than this. There was the revelation now of Christ as an object for the Christian in heaven, and the revelation of Him too in a way entirely outside the narrow boundaries of Judaism. Stephen speaks of Him as Son of man. This is an essential feature of Christianity. Unlike the law, it addresses all; there is no narrowness in a rejected heavenly Christ. By the Holy Ghost there is imparted all the firmness of a divine bond, and all the intimacy of a real living relationship of the nearest kind. At the same time, along with this is seen universality in the going out of both the truth and grace of God, which could not but be foreign to the law. And although its character had to be yet more brought out by another and far greater witness of divine things who was still in the blindness of Jewish unbelief — at this very moment himself taking his own miserable part, though with a good natural conscience, in the death of Stephen, — all told powerfully upon the Jews, but lacerated their feelings to the utmost.

I have already touched upon the practical effects, and therefore will not enlarge on these now. My object, of course, is simply to give a sketch of the important book now before us, endeavouring to connect (as, indeed, evidently the chapter does connect) what was coming with what was past. Saul was consenting unto Stephen's death, and Saul was the expression of Jewish feeling in its best aspect. It was now guilty of resisting unto blood, not merely as their fathers had done, but the heavenly testimony of Jesus. Nevertheless the God that vindicated the honour of the crucified Jesus did not forget the martyred Stephen; and though there was an outburst of persecution, which scattered abroad throughout the region of Judea and Samaria all the believers that were in Jerusalem except the apostles, devout men were not wanting who carried Stephen to his burial. Clearly they were not Christians; but God has all hearts in His keeping. And they "made great lamentation over him." This was suitable to them. Theirs was not the joy that saw into the presence of God. They felt in a measure, and justly, the tremendous deed that had been done. And as there was reality at least in their feeling, they made suitable lamentation. But "as for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and dragging off men and women, committed them to prison." Religious persecution is invariably ruthless and blind even to the commonest feelings of humanity.

"Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word;" for the God who not only has hearts at His command, but controls all circumstances, was now about to accomplish that which He had always at heart, making the disciples to be witnesses of Jesus to the very ends of the earth, though first of all to Judea and Samaria. Accordingly we find, as the testimony had gone forth throughout Jerusalem at least, so now the old rival of Jerusalem comes within the dealings of God. Philip, who had been appointed by the apostles at the choice of the multitude of the disciples to care for the distribution to the poor, goes down to the cities of Samaria preaching Christ. This did not at all flow from his ordination. His appointment was to take care of the tables. His preaching Christ was the fruit of the Lord's call. Where man chooses for human things, we have the Lord recognising it. He would have His people, where they give, to have a voice. He would meet them in grace, stopping complaints, and showing that He honours and confides in their suitable choice. But not so in the ministry of the word or testimony of the Lord. Here the Lord alone gives, alone calls, alone sends forth. Philip, besides

being one of the seven, was an "evangelist," as we are told expressly in another part of this very book (Acts 21: 8). It is important to distinguish between the two things — one, the charge to which man appointed him; the other, the gift which the Lord conferred. (Eph. 4) I merely make the remark in passing; though it will not be needed for most here, it may be for some.

Philip goes down, then, preaching Christ; "and the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did." But the testimony of miracles is apt to act upon the flesh. They are, indeed, a sign to unbelievers, and that such is the result we find shown us by the Spirit of God in the chapter before us. However graciously given of the Lord as a token to attract the careless minds of men, they are dangerous when they are made the resting-place and the object of the mind; and this was the fatal mistake made then, and not merely there but by many millions of souls from that day to this. Faith never rests on any other ground than God's word. All else is vain, and apt to accredit, as well as entice man. There was indeed the unmistakable action of the Spirit of God on this occasion — the power that cast out unclean spirits and healed the sick, as well as the means of spreading joy throughout that city for the souls of men. Evidently it was power in external display, then so richly manifested, which acted on the fleshly mind of Simon, himself having the reputation of a great one, and before this the vessel of some kind of demoniacal power — the miserable power of Satan, with which he dazzled the eyes of men. But now finding himself eclipsed, like a wily man, his object was to avail himself of this superior energy if it were possible. His aim was not Christ; it was all for himself. He wished to gain fresh influence, not to lose his old: why not, by this new method, if possible, turn things to his own account?

Accordingly, among the train of those that received the gospel and were baptized, Simon is found. Philip had not the discernment to see through him: evangelists are apt to be sanguine. It may be that the Lord had not allowed the true character of Simon to be manifested to every eye at that moment. It did not escape the discerning eyes of Peter a little afterward. But as we are told here, "When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women; and Simon himself believed also." Scripture does show, though it does not sanction as divine, a faith that is founded on evidence. And it continues still. So John often speaks of it; and the very one that tells us most of the divinely given character of true faith — who most of all lets us into its secret power and blessedness, even eternal life as bound up with it, — that same John is the one who more than any other furnishes instances of a mere humanly produced faith. Such was the faith of Simon. The gospel of Luke also describes what is similar; that is to say, a faith not insincere but human, not wrought of the Spirit but founded on the mind yielding to reasons, proofs, evidences, which are to it overpowering; but there is nothing of God in it: there is no meeting between the soul and God. Without this, faith is good for nothing, nor is God Himself honoured in His own word. Power was what struck Simon's mind — himself a devotee of power, who in times past had sunk indeed low, even to the enemy of God and man in order from any source to be the vessel of a power beyond man. He could not deny the might that proved itself without effort superior to anything he had ever wielded. This was what attracted him; and, as it is said here, "he continued with Philip" (there was no other bond of connection), "and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done." A believer would have wondered more at the grace of God, and bowed in adoration before Him. Conscience would have been searched by the truth of God; and the heart would have been filled with praise at the grace of God. Neither one nor other ever entered into the thoughts or feelings of Simon.

And "when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John." It was of the greatest importance that unity should be kept up practically, not merely that there should be proclaimed the truth that there is unity, but that there

should be the maintenance of it in practice. Accordingly Peter and John, two of the chiefs among the apostles, come down from Jerusalem. But there was another reason too. It was so ordered of God that the Holy Ghost should not at first be conferred on the disciples at Samaria: I do not mean merely on such as Simon or false brethren, but even on those that were true. Undoubtedly they could not have believed the gospel, had there not been the quickening operation of the Holy Ghost; but we must distinguish between the Holy Ghost giving life and the Holy Ghost Himself given.

Another thing too let me again and again remark: the gift of the Holy Ghost never means those mighty wonders of power which had acted on the greedy and ambitious mind of Simon Magus. The gift of the Spirit is not at all the same thing as the gifts. These gifts, at least such as were of an extraordinary sort, were the outward signs of that gift in early days; and it was of great importance that there should be a decisive palpable testimony to it. The presence of the Holy Ghost was a new and quite unexampled thing even among believers. Hence it is there were mighty powers that wrought by those who were employed by the Holy Ghost; as, for instance, by Philip himself; afterwards also by the disciples, when Peter and John came down and laid their hands upon them with prayer. The Holy Ghost came upon them, not merely, it will be observed, certain spiritual powers, but the Holy Ghost Himself. They had not those powers only, but this divine person given to them. Scripture is clear and unequivocal as to the truth of the case. I can understand difficulties in the minds of believers; and no one would wish to force or hurry the convictions of any; nor would it be of the slightest value to receive even a truth without the faith that is produced, and exercised, and cleared by the word of God. But at the same time to my own mind it seems to be only homage to God's word to affirm positively that of which I am sure.

I therefore must say that the gift of the Holy Ghost here is, in my judgment, clearly distinct from anything in the way of either a spiritual gift for souls or a miraculous power, as it is called. There followed also such signs, or outward powers; but the Holy Ghost was given Himself, according to the Lord's word — the promise of the Father, a promise which, as all know, was in the first instance assured to those who were already believers, and which was made good to them because they were believers, not to make them so. When redemption was accomplished, it was the seal of the faith and the life which they already had. There can be no doubt that the facts at Samaria were analogous; but this remarkable feature is to be noticed, that the Holy Ghost was here conferred by (not, as at Jerusalem, apart from) the laying on of the hands of the apostles. Of this we heard nothing in the divine history of the day of Pentecost; and I think that scripture is abundantly plain that there could have been nothing of the kind then and there. First of all, the apostles and the disciples themselves received it as they were waiting. The Holy Ghost came down upon them suddenly, with no previous sign whatever, except that which was suitable to the Holy Ghost when sent down from heaven — the mighty rushing wind, and then the tokens of His presence upon each were manifested. Yet there was no such requirement as imposition of hands in order to be the medium of it. But it would seem that special reasons operated at Samaria to make it necessary there. It was of all moment to keep up the links practically between a work which might have looked to many there, as now, not a little irregular. It was wrought not by those that had previously been always the great spiritual witnesses; for we hear of none ministering but the apostles, and indeed not even of all the apostles speaking, though it may be that they did. But here we have clearly a man who had been chosen for another and an external purpose by the church, but whom the Lord uses elsewhere for a new and higher purpose, for which He had qualified him by the Holy Ghost.

Nevertheless, care was taken to hinder all appearance of independence or indifference to unity. There was the freest action of the Holy Ghost, — sovereignly free, — and it is impossible to maintain

this too stringently; and there was the utmost care that all should be left open for the Holy Ghost to act according to His own will, not only within the church, but also by evangelizing outside. For all that God took precaution to bind up together the work at Samaria with that which He had wrought at Jerusalem. Hence though Philip might preach and they receive the gospel, the apostles come down, and with prayer lay their hands upon them, and then they receive the Holy Ghost. To a reflecting believer it will be plain that the reasons for this do not hold at the present time. I merely make this remark lest any should draw from this the inference that there is a necessity for men commissioned from God to lay on hands now in order to confer such a spiritual blessing.

The fact is, that the notion of imposition of hands being a universal medium of conveying the Holy Ghost is certainly a mistake. On the greatest occasions, when the Holy Ghost was given, we have no ground to believe that hands were laid on any. There were two exceptional occasions on which one or more of the apostles so acted, but at times of more general interest and importance nothing of the sort was heard of. Take, as the most solemn moment of all, the day of Pentecost. Who that honours scripture can pretend that hands were laid on any then? Yet the Holy Ghost was given in especial power on that day. But what is more to the purpose for us Gentiles, when Cornelius and his household were brought in, not only no appearance of it is visible, but positive proof to the contrary. Peter was present, but he certainly laid no hand of his on a single soul that day before the Holy Ghost was given. So far from it, as we shall find by and by in Acts 10, the Holy Ghost was given while he was yet speaking, before they were so much as baptized. On the day of Pentecost they were baptized first, and then they received the gift of the Holy Ghost. At Samaria they had been baptized for some time, as we know. On believing they were baptized, as we are told in Acts 8; but they received the Holy Ghost after an interval, through the action of the apostles.

I refer to this just to show how far scripture is from countenancing the cramped ideas of men, and that the only way of truth is to believe all the word of God, searching out the special principle of God by which He instructs us in the different characters of His action. Surely He is always wise and consistent with Himself. It is we who by confounding matters lose consequently the blessedness and beauty of the truth of God.

Now the reason, as it appears to me, why divine wisdom led to this striking difference at Samaria, was the necessity of hindering that independence to which even Christians are so liable. There was special exposure to this evil which called for so much the greater guard against it at Samaria. How painful must it be to the Spirit of God if the old pride of Samaria were to rise up against Jerusalem! God would cut off the very appearance of this. There was the free action of His Spirit towards Samaria without the apostles, but the Holy Ghost was given by the laying on of their hands. This solemn act was not merely an ancient sign of divine blessing, but of identification also. Such, I suppose, therefore, was the principle that lay at the bottom of the difference of the divine action on these two occasions.

Then we find Simon struck not so much by an individual's endowment with miraculous power, as by the fact that others received it by the apostles' laying on of hands. At once, with the instinct of flesh, he sees a good 'opportunity for himself, and, judging of others' hearts by his own, presents money as the means of acquiring the coveted power. But this detects the man. How often our words show where we are! How continually too where we least think they do! It is not only in cases of our judgment (for there is nothing that so often judges a man as his own judgment of another); but also where the desire goes out after that which we have not got. How all-important for our souls that we should have Christ before us, and that we should have no desire but for His glory! Not a ray of the light of Christ had entered the heart of Simon, and so Peter at once detects the false heart. With that energy which characterized him he says, "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." At the same time there is the pity that belongs to one who knew the grace of God, and saw the end of all in His judgment. "Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray God if, perhaps, the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee; for I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." God has no pleasure in the death of a sinner. Simon can only answer, "Pray ye to the Lord for me." He had no confidence in the Lord for himself — not a particle; for just as those who have confidence in the Lord have not an atom in man, his sole hope of blessing for his soul lay in the influence of another man, not in Christ's grace. "Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of those things which ye have spoken come upon me."

The apostles then, after preaching in the various villages of the Samaritans, return to Jerusalem. But not so the word of God. The gospel goes forth elsewhere; it is in no way bound to Jerusalem. On the contrary, the grand bearing of this chapter is that now the tide of blessing is flowing away from Jerusalem. The holy city had rejected the gospel. It was not enough that they had rejected the Messiah, nor even that He was made Lord and Christ on high. They refused utterly the Holy Ghost's testimony to the Son of man glorified in heaven, and slew or scattered the witnesses, Who then was specially used as the instrument of the free action of the Holy Ghost elsewhere, without plan, without thought of man, and apparently the simple result of circumstances, but in truth God's hand directing all? Philip is told by the angel of the Lord to arise and go towards the south — towards "Gaza, which is desert." "And he arose and went." Strikingly, beautiful it is to see the devoted simplicity with which he answers to the call of his Master. I will not pretend to say that it cost him little, but am sure it would have been a heavy trial to many a man of God to leave that which was so bright, where He had wrought powerfully in using himself for His own glory. But he is truly a bondman, and at once is ready to go at the bidding of the Lord, who had given him to reap in joy where He had Himself tasted the firstfruits in the days of His own ministry here below. Samaria, which had held out against the truth, was now yielding the harvest that a greater than Philip had sown; and there was joy in that very Samaria where greater works were now done according to His own word.

But this was not enough for God. A man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the queen of the Ethiopians, was returning after having gone up to Jerusalem to worship. He was going, back without the blessing that his earnest heart yearned after. He had gone up to the great city of solemnities, but the blessing was no longer to be found there. Jehovah's house had been left doubly desolate; Jerusalem had this added to her other sins that, when the blessing had come down from heaven, she would not have it. She despised the Holy Ghost as she had despised the Messiah; and no wonder therefore that he who had gone up to Jerusalem to worship was returning with the yearnings of his heart still unsatisfied. And not the angel but the Spirit guides now. The angel had to do with providential circumstances, but the Spirit with that which directly deals with spiritual need and blessing. So says the Spirit to Philip, "Go near and join thyself to this chariot." Philip acts at once, with alacrity hears the eunuch read the prophet Isaiah, and puts the question whether he understood what was read. The answer is, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" Thereon Philip is invited to come up and sit with him, Isaiah 53 being, as we know, the portion in question; and the eunuch asks of whom the prophet spoke these words — "of himself or some other man?" so gross was his darkness even as to the general point of the chapter. "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the very same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." It was enough. That one name, through faith in it, what could it not accomplish? The facts were notorious; but of this we may be sure, that never had they been put together before the mind of the Ethiopian as then, never connected with the living Word and His grace. They were now put in contact with his wants, and all was instantly light in his soul. Oh, what a blessing it is to have and know such a Saviour! What a joy to be warranted to proclaim Him to others without

stint, even to a soul as dark as the Ethiopian, who was then and there baptized!

Remember that verse 37 is only an imaginary conversation between him and Philip. The man just now so ignorant is not the channel that God was about to use for bringing out the remarkable confession that is introduced prematurely here. It was reserved for another of whom we shall read in the next chapter. This scene does show the stranger discovering the predicted Messiah in Jesus of Nazareth — the Messiah suffering, no doubt, but accomplishing atonement. Certainly the Ethiopian received the truth; but verse 37 had better be passed by in your minds, at least in this connection. All who are informed in these matters are aware that the best authorities reject the entire verse.

"He went on his way rejoicing." Though the Spirit of the Lord catches away Philip, so full is his heart of the truth that we may be sure all that occurred confirmed it in his eyes. How could anything seem too great and good to him whose heart had just made the acquaintance of Jesus? Did he not feel so much the more settled in Jesus as there was no other object now before his soul? It was the Lord that had brought Philip, and it was His Spirit that had taken him away; but it was He too who had given him and left him Jesus for ever. Philip is found at Azotus, and passing through he preaches elsewhere.

At this point we come to the history of the call of another and yet more honoured witness of divine grace and Christ's glory. Saul of Tarsus was yet breathing out his threats and slaughter when the Lord was pursuing His onward gracious work among the Samaritans and strangers. The returning treasurer of Queen Candace was a proselyte, I suppose, from the Gentiles, living among them, not as a Gentile himself, but practically a Jew, whatever the place of his birth and residence. The time for the call of the Gentiles strictly was not yet come, though the way is being prepared. The Samaritans, as you know, were a mongrel race; the stranger may have been possibly a proselyte from among the Gentiles; but the apostle of the Gentiles is now to be called. Such is the unfolding of the ways of God at this point.

Acts 9. Saul in his zeal had desired letters giving him authority to punish the Christian Jews, and was found on his way journeying near the Gentile city that he sought. "Suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord?" All depended upon this. "And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." What a revolution this word caused in that mighty heart! Confidence in man, in self, was overthrown to its foundations — all that his life had been zealously building up. "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." It was the Lord undoubtedly, and the Lord declared He was Jesus, and Jesus was Jehovah. He dared not doubt longer: to him it was self-evident. If Jesus was Jehovah, what then had his religion been? what had high priest or Sanhedrim done for him? Was it not then God's high priest, God's law? Unquestionably it was. How then could so fatal an error have been committed? It was the fact. Man, Israel, not merely Saul, was altogether blinded: the flesh never knows God. The despised and hated name of Jesus is the only hope for man, Jesus is the only Saviour and Lord. His glory burst on the astonished eyes of Saul, who surrenders immediately. It was not without the deepest searching of heart, though smitten down at once; for how could there be a question as to the divine power? How could its reality be doubted? As little could there be a question as to the grace exercised toward him, though the manner was not after that of man. The light that shone suddenly on him was from heaven. But it was God's way. The voice that said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" was from Jesus. "Who art thou, Lord?" he cried, and hears, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." How could he resist the heavenly vision?

Observe that, although the next words are beyond a question scriptural, and so far the case differs from verse 37 referred to in the last chapter, the last clause of verse 5 and the first of verse 6 belong

properly speaking to two other chapters (Acts 22, Acts 26) rather than to this. I do not therefore comment upon these additions here: they will remain for their own real and suitable places. But Saul does arise from the earth. "And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man." But *he* had heard the voice of His mouth, and His words were spirit and life, eternal life, to his soul. Three days and nights he neither eats nor drinks. The profound moral work of God proceeded in that converted heart. Nevertheless even he, apostle though he were, must enter by the same lowly gate as another. And so we have the story of Ananias, and the ways of the Lord, — not of some great apostle, nor even of Philip, but a disciple at Damascus named Ananias, to whom the Lord spoke in a vision. And he goes, the Lord communicating another vision to the apostle himself, in which he sees Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him that he might receive his sight.

The Spirit puts us in presence of the freedom of the servant, as he pleads with the Lord, for neither man nor even the child of God ever reaches up to the height of His grace. Ananias, wholly unprepared for the call of such an enemy of the gospel, slow of heart to believe all, expostulates, as it were, with the Saviour. "Lord," says he, "I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name." But the Lord said unto him, "Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel."

Even here the intimation is sufficiently plain that the Gentiles were in the foreground of the work designed for Saul of Tarsus. But this was not all. It was to be emphatically a witness of grace in suffering for Christ's name: "For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." And so it was. Ananias goes, puts his hand on him, addresses him by the sweet title of relationship Christ began, consecrated, and has given, telling him how the Lord, even Jesus, had appeared unto him. How confirmatory it must have been to the apostle's heart to learn that Ananias was now sent by the same Lord Jesus, without the slightest intimation from without, whether of Saul himself or any other man! "The Lord hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost." And every word was made good. "Saul arose and was baptized, and when he had received meat he was strengthened, and remained with the disciples for some time."

In due time follows the further development of the truth as to Christ in testimony. "He preached in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God." Such was the emphatic and characteristic presentation of His person assigned to the apostle, and this at once. It was not that Peter did not know the same, we are all aware how blessedly he confessed Him to be (not Messiah only, but) the Son of the living God while Jesus was here below. Nor is it that the other disciples had not the same faith. Surely it was true of all who really believed and knew His glory. Nevertheless "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh;" and he who loves to present the Lord in the depth of His personal grace, and the height of His glory, has surely a spiritual fitness for the expression of the heart's joy in that which faith has created within. Thus, although the others no doubt had the same Saviour taught them by the Holy Ghost, still there was not in every case the same measure of entrance or appreciation. Paul had it not more suddenly than with a heavenly splendour which was peculiar to himself; and thus there was a vast work soon wrought. There was a bringing out of that which belonged to Christ, not merely the place which Christ took, but that which He is from all eternity, — consequently that which is most of all intrinsically precious. He preached Him, and this boldly in the synagogue too, "that he is the Son of God." All that heard were amazed. "But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews that dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ." The doctrine of His Sonship did not in the smallest degree, of course, set aside the Messiahship. This remained; but he preached Him rather in His own personal glory, — not as the Son of David, the servant, which was the great burden of Peter's

preaching, *made* Lord and Christ; — not that He was the Son of man in heaven, as Stephen witnessed; but that this Jesus, the Christ, is the Son of God, — clearly therefore more particularly bound up with the divine nature, or godhead glory of Himself.

After this comes no slight discipline for Saul. As the Jews watched the gates to kill him, the disciples took him by night and let him down the wall in a basket. Thus we find the utmost simplicity and quietness. There is no show of doing great things; nor do we read of daring in any way: what is there of Christ in the one or the other? Contrariwise, we see that which outwardly looks exceedingly weak; but this was the man that was in another day to say that he gloried in his infirmities. He acts on that of which he afterwards wrote. He was led of God.

Then we learn another important lesson. "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." God did not clothe him with such overwhelming influence that doors were thrown open to him though the greatest of the apostles. Oh why should any confessor of Christ — why should any child of God — shrink from rendering godly satisfaction to those that seek it? Why so much haste and impatience? Why should there be unwillingness to meet and submit to others when it is a question of reception? What earnest desire should there not be to bow to all that which is. due to the church of God? Here we find not even the apostle Paul was above it.

Not on the other hand that there ought to be a spirit of suspicion or distrust in the church or any Christian. I am far from saying that it was comely on their part to indulge in hesitation touching this wondrous display of divine grace. But what I want to press for our profit, beloved brethren, is that at any rate he who is the object of grace can afford to be gracious. Nor is there a more painful want of it than that kind of restiveness which is so ready to take offence at the smallest fear or anxiety on the part of others. Surely to shrink from their enquiries is nothing but self on our part. If Christ were the object of our souls, we should bow as one did called of God with incomparably better tokens of the Lord's favour than any other, — this blessed man, Saul of Tarsus. But if the church were distrustful, the Lord was not unmindful, and knew how to give courage to the heart of His servant. There was among them a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, of whom we have had a happy report before, as we shall hear many (though not altogether unmingled) good tidings to the end. For indeed he was but man. Nevertheless, being a good man and full of the Holy Ghost, he seeks out and takes Saul to the apostles when others stood aloof, and declared unto them "how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus; and he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem." Grace can credit grace easily, understands the ways of the Lord, and disarms suspicion. it is beautiful to see how the Lord thus, even in the history of that which was unprecedented and might seem to lie outside Christian wants, provides in His blessed word for the every day difficulties we have to prove in such a day of weakness as ours.

After this wonderful working of God the church had rest. I say, "the *church*;" for there need be no doubt, I think, that such is the true form* of what is given us in verse 31. The common text and translations have "the *churches*;" but I believe that this faulty form crept in here, because the sense of the oneness of the church so speedily passed away. Hence people could not understand that it was one and the same church throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria. It was plain enough to see the Christian assembly in a city, even if it were as numerous as in Jerusalem, where it must have met in not a few different localities and chambers. The church, not merely in a city but in a province or country, is intelligible enough to man; but it soon became more difficult to see its unity in various and differing provinces. The change of reading here seems to prove it was too much for the copyists of this book. The reading sanctioned by the best and most ancient authorities is the singular — not the churches, but

"the church." "Then had the church rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria." Undoubtedly throughout these districts *churches* existed; but it was all one and the same *church* too, and not different bodies.

* The external authority is very decidedly for the singular against the plural. Thus all the first-rate Uncials, the Sinai, Vatican, Alexandrian, and Palimpsest of Paris, supported by some of the best cursives and all the best ancient versions, oppose the vulgar reading.

The following extract from the late Dr. Carson's Letters in reply to Dr. John Brown's Vindication of Presbyterianism will show how far an able and excellent man went astray in defending Congregationalism through not knowing that his argument was based, not on God's word, but on man's corruption of it. I quote from the original edition (Edinburgh, 1807): "Acts 11: 31. 'Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria,' etc.

Here I would be glad to know how this can be interpreted upon any other principle than that *church* in the single number was solely appropriated to a single congregation, when applied to an assembly of Christ's disciples. It is not the church of Judea, the church of Galilee, and the church of Samaria, but the churches of Judea, etc. Way, more, had these been Presbyterians, all under the same government, the phraseology would not have been even the church of Judea, and the church of Galilee, and the church of Samaria, but all these would have been in one church, and even then but a small part of a church. This phraseology would have been somewhat like this, 'The church had rest throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria,' — i.e., the part of the church that lies in these countries." (p. 378.) How startled this good man but excessively keen controversialist must have been, had he learnt that, beyond all just question, the only tenable text here is destructive of the notion of independent churches, and in reality gives the appellation to the entire body of the disciples throughout these regions, as standing on one common ground, and enjoying full intercommunion, though in these different districts. But that branch of criticism which consists in a full knowledge of the sources, a nice discrimination of the various readings, and a sound judgment in deciding the preferable text, as it is rarely found, so it certainly was not the forte of Dr. C. One hundred and fifty years ago, Dr. E. Wells, in his "Help for the more easy and clear understanding of the Scriptures" (Oxford, 1718), not only adopted the singular in his Greek text and his English paraphrase, but pointed out in his Annotations the great weakness of the argument drawn by dissenters from the plural ἐκκλησίαι, as if it favoured their system of separate churches.

The end of the chapter shows us the progress of Peter. He visits round about. It was no longer a question of Jerusalem only even for Peter, but without being called to the same largeness of work practically as the apostle Paul, he nevertheless passes throughout "all quarters" of Palestine, and comes down to the saints at Lydda, and is seen by those of Saron. At Joppa too was wrought a still more striking miracle of the Lord in Tabitha's case, already dead, than in that of Eneas, who had been paralysed for years. On these I need only remark how grace used them for the spread of the testimony. "All that dwelt in Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord." "It was known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord." But at this point a still more important step was about to be taken; and the Lord enters on it with due solemnity, as we shall see in the following chapter. (Acts 10)

Little did the great apostle of the circumcision anticipate what was before him as he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner. For hence the Lord called him to a new sphere — a task which, to a Jewish mind, was beyond measure strange. It would be a mistake to suppose that God had not wrought on the heart of Gentiles. We see such in the gospels. Cornelius was one of those who, among the Gentiles, had abandoned idolatry; but more than this was sometimes found. There were Gentiles

who truly looked to the Lord, and not to self or man; who had been taught of Him to look for a coming Saviour, though they quite rightly connected that Saviour with Israel; for such was the burden of the promise. As there was a Job in the Old Testament, independent of the law and perhaps before it, so we find a Cornelius before the glad tidings in the New Testament had been formally sent to the nations. All know that there were Jews waiting for the Saviour. It is of interest to see, and should be better known, that among the Gentiles were not wanting such as worshipped no idols but served the true and living God. No doubt their spiritual condition was defective, and their outward position must have seemed anomalous; but Scripture is decisive that such godly Gentiles there were.

It is a fallacy then to suppose that Cornelius had no better than merely natural religion. He was assuredly, before Peter went, a converted man. To regard him as unawakened at that time is to mistake a great deal of the teaching of the chapter. Not that one would deny that a mighty work was then wrought in Cornelius. We must not limit, as ignorant people do, the operation of the Holy Spirit to the new birth. No man in his natural state could pray, nor serve God acceptably, as Cornelius did. One must be born again; but, like many others who had really been quickened in those days (and it may be even now, I presume), a soul might be born again, and yet far from resting in peace on redemption, far indeed from a sense of deliverance from all questions as to his soul. There is this difference, no doubt, between such cases now and that of Cornelius then, — that, before the mission of Peter, it would have been presumptuous for a Gentile to have pretended to salvation; now it is the fruit of unbelief for a believer to question it. A soul that now looks to Jesus ought to rest without question on redemption; but we must remember that at this time Jesus was not yet publicly preached to the Gentiles — not yet freely and fully proclaimed according to the riches of grace. Therefore, the more godly Cornelius was, the less would he dare to put forth his hand for the blessing before the Lord told him to stretch it out. He did what, I have no doubt, was the right thing. He was truly in earnest before God. As we are told here — and the Spirit delights to give such an account — "he was a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway."

Such was the man to whom God was about to send the gospel by Peter. Thus we must carefully remember that the gospel brings more than conversion to God. It is the message of life, but it is also the means of peace. Before the gospel was preached to every creature, a new nature was communicated to many a soul; but till then there was not and could not be peace. The two things are both brought us in the gospel — life brought to light, and the peace preached that was made by the blood of the cross. At the same time scripture shows there might be and often was an interval after the gospel did go forth. So from experience we know there is many a man that you cannot doubt to be truly looking to the Lord, yet far from resting in the peace of God. Cornelius, I apprehend, was just in this case. He would no more have perished, had it pleased God to have taken him away in this state, than any Old Testament saint, whether Jew or Gentile. No believer could be so ignorant of God and His ways of old as to imagine there ought to be any doubt about those who nevertheless were full of anxieties and troubles, and through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Even now, although it is the gospel that God sends out, we know well how many, through a misuse of Old Testament teaching, plunge themselves into distress and doubt. God does not suggest a doubt of His own grace to them, or of the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice for them: unbelief does. It was not so with Cornelius. He was not entitled to take the peace of the gospel till God warranted Peter to bring it to him. This was precisely what God was now doing; and the remarkable fact appears, that God did not wait for the apostle of the Gentiles to bring the good news to Cornelius. Is not this interlacing after a divine sort? It was not to be done by mere systematic rule of a human pattern. But just as the great apostle of the Gentiles was the one that wrote the final word of testimony to the Christian Jews in

the epistle to the Hebrews, so the great apostle of the Jews was the one sent to fling open the door to the Gentile. It was Peter, not Paul, who was sent to Cornelius. The chapter itself proves that he had to be forced to go. He seems to have lost sight of the words of the Lord Jesus — that he was told by Jesus risen from the dead to preach the gospel to every creature. There was to be a testimony to an the nations. The promise was not merely to them and to their children, but to all "afar off, as many as the Lord their God should call." At any rate, the Lord now graciously interferes, and as he gives Cornelius to see a vision most instructive to him, so next day also there is to Peter another vision from the Lord.

Answering to the vision, messengers bring the apostle to the household of Cornelius, and Peter opens his mouth to the following effect: — "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) that word, I say, ye know." I call your attention to this. Cornelius was not in ignorance of the gospel going out to the children of Israel, but it was precisely *because* he was a lowly-minded believer that he did not therefore arrogate the blessing to himself. The very essence of faith is that you do not run before God, but receive what and as He sends to you. God had published it already to the sons of Israel, and the good man rejoiced in it. But for himself and his household, what could he do but pray till the rich blessing came? He valued the ancient people of God; nor is he indeed the only centurion that loved their nation. We are told of another who also built for the Jews their synagogue. Thus Cornelius was aware that God had sent the gospel to the Jews; but there was precisely where he necessarily stopped short. Was that word for him?

"That word ye know," says Peter, "which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him . . . whom they slew and hanged on a tree: him God raised up the third day, 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. And he commanded us to preach unto the people." Clearly the Jew is meant. "He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name *whosoever*," etc.

Here comes the telling word for him that feared the Lord and bowed to His word, though he was a Gentile. "Whosoever believeth on him shall receive remission of sins." Peter had not long learnt it himself. Had he not read or heard those words in the prophets? No doubt he had read them many a time, but no better than we have read them, and many other words likewise; and how little we understood any of them to profit until the mighty power of God gave it efficacy in our souls! In this case Peter had God's own direct warrant in the vision, not of the church (for this was not the meaning of the sheet let down from heaven), but decidedly of the call of the Gentiles. It was the obliterating of mere fleshly distinction between Jew and Gentile. God was meeting sinners as such, whatever they might be, giving no doubt a heavenly character to what had a heavenly source with a heavenly result. But there is not yet the revealed truth of the body, though involved in the word of the Lord to Saul of Tarsus when he said, "Why persecutest thou me?" Here it is not this, but simply the indiscriminate. grace of God to sinners of the Gentiles as certainly as to the Jews — to those who, in the judgment of the Jews, were nothing but refuse, vile, and unclean.

Peter then, with this new-born conviction in his soul, reads the prophets with entirely fresh light and other eyes. Full of the truth himself, he speaks with the utmost simplicity to Cornelius, who with his household hears the blessed word. "To him give all the prophets witness." It was one concurrent

evidence. "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name *whosoever* believeth in him." There is no question of a Jew, but "Whosoever believeth in him." Alas! the Jews did not believe in Him; but whosoever did, let him be Jew or Gentile, "shall receive remission of sins." This precisely Cornelius had not known, nor could any one have known it till the work of redemption was done. The Old Testament saints were just as safe before the work of Christ as they were afterwards, but this work put them on a ground of conscious salvation before God. It was not a question of being saved in the day of judgment; nor is this the meaning of the term "salvation" in the New Testament. Salvation means that the heart enters into deliverance by grace as a present known public standing in the world. Nobody could have this till the gospel, and even after its publication God Himself sent specifically to the Gentiles; for He has His ways, as well as His times and seasons. God will always be Himself, and cannot be other than Sovereign.

Thus we see God had allowed things apparently to take their course. Israel had the truth presented to them as it was afterwards to all. It was their responsibility now as ever to accept the gracious offer of God. If Israel would have received, the Lord would have given. It was even, and urgently, pressed on them, but they refused with disdain the message, and rejected the messengers to blood. Accordingly the rejection of the very witness of Christ, speaking by the Holy Ghost — the rejection of Him to heaven — becomes the turning-point; and then by the Lord from heaven is now called forth the witness of grace as well as of the glory of Christ. Finally, after the call of Saul of Tarsus, Peter himself (as well for other reasons as in order to cut off the semblance of discord in the various instruments of His grace) is brought in to show the perfect balance of divine truth and the wonderful harmony of His ways. Thus the church would still retain its substantial character, and the testimony of God still bear the same common likeness, while room was left for whatever speciality of form God might be pleased to give the truth, and the unfolding of the ways in which God might employ one or another. Peter was the one then, not Paul, that announced the gospel to Cornelius, who by the Holy Ghost received it, and was not merely safe but *saved*. It was no longer simply a cleaving to a God of goodness who could not deceive and would not disappoint the soul that hoped in His mercy, "but the conscious joy of knowing his sins all one, and himself distinctly put on the ground of accomplished redemption as a known present thing for his own soul in this world. Such is salvation.

"While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost." Thus on the great Gentile occasion, as before on the Jewish at Pentecost, the medium of man completely disappears. It was as thoroughly according to God that the apostle *should not lay* his hands on any this day, as it was according to His wisdom that they *should lay* their hands on the Samaritans. It is granted that man sees difficulty in this: there is what he cannot reconcile; but be assured that the great point is, first, to believe. Settle it invariably that God is wiser than we. Is this too much to ask? After all, though it seems so simple as to be a truism, though nothing can well be conceived more certain; nevertheless, practically it is not always the plainest and surest truth that carries all before it in our souls. But to believe is the secret of real growth in the revealed wisdom of God.

On this occasion they of the circumcision see that the Gentiles receive the gift of the Holy Ghost; for they hear them speak with tongues and magnify God, and they were astonished. Then Peter says to them, "Can any man forbid water?" It was a public privilege he was warranted to confer on the Gentiles thus baptized of the Spirit. Water baptism is neither slighted nor is it put forward as a command or condition. The previous gift of the Spirit without the intervention of any human hand was the most effectual stopper on the mouths of the brethren of the circumcision who were ever prone to object, and

would surely have forbidden water, if God had not undeniably given them the unspeakable gift of the Spirit. But this manifestation and fruit of gracious power silenced even the unruly and hard spirits of the circumcision. "And he commanded them to be baptized."

It may be observed passingly, that thus plainly baptizing is in no way a necessarily ministerial act. It may be all right and in perfect keeping that one preaching the gospel should baptize; but occasion might well arise where he who preached would avoid it himself. We know that Paul thanked God that so it was with himself at Corinth; and we see that Peter here did not baptize, but simply "commanded them to be baptized." God is always wise. It is too familiar how soon human superstition perverted this blessed institution of the Lord into a sacramental means of grace, duly administered by one in the line of succession.

The next chapter (Acts 11) shows us Peter having to give an account of himself before those who had not witnessed the effects of the mighty power of God in the house of Cornelius. When the matter is rehearsed, the great argument is this, — "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?" This brought the question to a simple issue; but here again, let it be noticed that the gift of the Holy Ghost belongs to those that believe. It is not His operation in enabling souls to believe, but a precious boon given to such as believed. "When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." The Spirit of God alone quickens a person by faith in Christ. Without the action of the Holy Ghost faith is impossible; but this capacitating power and the gift of the Holy Ghost are two very different things, and the latter consequent on the former. If God had given them the Holy Ghost, as was manifest in sensible results, it was very evident that they must have by God's grace had repentance unto life. The Spirit given to the believer was a privilege over and above faith, and supposed, therefore, their repentance unto life.

Then follows another grave fact. It appears that the scattered men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who had gone in consequence of the persecution everywhere, and among other places to Antioch, preaching the word to none but the Jews, took courage now and spoke (not to the *Grecians* - for this had been done long ago, but) unto the Greeks, preaching the Lord Jesus." Those to whom they addressed themselves were really Gentiles. The word "Grecians" does not mean "Greeks," but rather Greek-speaking Jews; to whom the gospel had been preached long before, as the cases of Stephen, for instance, and Philip clearly testify. Acts 6 shows us the party in question murmuring. They were in the church already. But the point here is lost in our English version. There is a mistake, not only in our vernacular Bible, but also in the common Greek text which is equally faulty as the authorized version. The true text,* which has sufficient if not the most ancient authority, tells us that they spoke to Greeks or Gentiles. Thus we see the Lord was working, and, as so constantly happens, it was not only that He called out Paul for the Gentiles; it was not only that He sent Peter to a Gentile; but now these men, who might have been despised as irregular labourers, were in the current of the same work of God, even if they knew nothing of it, save by divine instinct.

*The copyists of old seem to have confounded in writing, as the Latin and most other ancient translators did in rendering, Ἕλληνας (Greeks) and Ἕλληνιστᾶς (Hellenists), here and elsewhere. Thus it might seem incredible, if it were not the notorious fact, that the only two known manuscripts in favour of that which is here most certainly requisite are the Alexandrian and the Cambridge Graeco-Latin of Beza. The Vatican and all others, uncial and cursive (as far as collated and known), support the error. Of the fathers, Eusebius among the Greek, and Cassiodorus among the Latins, are in favour of the true; others are in strange conflict, their text having the wrong reading (perhaps through mistaken scribes), and their comment correcting it. The reading of the Sinai MS. (εὐαγγελιστᾶς) is a mere

blunder, not uncommon in that most ancient but not very accurate document, arising from confusion through a contiguous word; it would give the sense of "unto the *preachers*, preaching the Lord Jesus." But the correction confirms the true reading.

The importance of closer attention to the text is well shown by Calvin's remarks on this verse. He was led into no small perplexity by the reading current in his day, and, to the shame of Christendom, still tolerated as the received reading. Yet his masculine good sense held to the truth, though he did not know the solid basis on which it here stands. I cite from the Calvin Tr. Society's edition of his Comm. on the Acts, i. pp. 466, 467. "Luke doth at length declare that certain of them brought this treasure even unto the Gentiles. And Luke calleth these Grecians not Ἕλληνες but Ἕλληνοῖσι [?]. Therefore some say that those came of the Jews, yet did they inhabit Greece [and these would be right if the reading had been really Ἕλληνοῖσι and not Ἕλληνας]; which I do not allow. For seeing the Jews, whom he mentioned a little before, were partly of Cyprus, they must needs be reckoned in that number, because the Jews count Cyprus a part of Greece. But Luke distinguisheth them from those, whom he calleth afterward Ἕλληνοῖσι [this is precisely where he is mistaken; his reasoning is sound, but his knowledge defective]. Furthermore, forasmuch as he had said that the word was preached at the beginning only by the Jews, and he meant those who, being banished out of their own country, did live in Cyprus and Phenice, correcting this exception, he saith that some of them did teach the Grecians. This contrariety doth cause me to expound it of the Gentiles." Quite right: only the true text delivers from the need of wresting the force of a word, and is as simply as possible Greeks, not Grecians, and means Gentiles without the smallest difficulty or discussion.

But it is still more strange as evidence of the slipshod criticism of the Reformers that Beza, who was more of a scholar than his predecessors, uniformly edits Ἕλληνοῖσι, and writes a blundering note to the effect that it is here used in the sense of Ἕλληνας. And yet he had in his possession that famous Graeco-Latin Uncial (D) which he presented to the University of Cambridge in 1581, which MS. supports the Alexandrian.

How blessed it is to see the free activity of the Holy Ghost without any kind of communication of man! It is always thus in the ways of God. It is not only that God uses one and another: this He does and we may bless Him that so He does; but the God who employs means is also above them, and He needs now only to draw out by circumstances the souls of some simple Christian men who had faith and love to seek the Gentiles without requiring the same vigorous and extraordinary means, under His mighty hand, as even the apostle did. Great workman as Peter was, he required the intervention of God in a vision to send him to do a work that these unnamed brethren undertook in their confidence of His grace, without any vision or sign whatsoever. It seems to have been the working of divine grace in their souls, and nothing else. At first they were more timid; they spoke only to Jews. By and by the power of the gospel and the action of the Holy Ghost fill their souls with desires as to the need of others. The Gentiles were sinners: why should they not dare to speak to the Gentiles? "And the hand of the Lord was with them," as we are told, "and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord." But what a rebuke is this to those that would make the church to be merely a creature of government, or in any wise to be of man's will, which is still worse, How blessed to see that it is a real organic whole, not only a living thing, but that He who is the spring of its life is the Holy Ghost Himself — a divine person, who cannot but answer to the grace of the Lord Jesus whom He is come down to glorify.

Next we find Barnabas stirred up to another and a characteristic enterprise. He had before this delivered Saul from the effects of undue anxiety and distrust in the minds of the disciples. He would have Saul to return good for what I may venture to call a measure of evil towards him. As there was need in the church at Antioch, he goes and finds him. He had a conviction that this was the instrument

the Lord would use for good. Thus we see that, while we have the angel of the Lord in certain cases, the Spirit of the Lord expressly in others, we have also simply the holy judgment of the gracious heart. This is all quite right. It is not to be treated as mere human arrangement. It was not only right, but recorded of God that we might see and profit by it. Barnabas was quite justified in seeking Saul. "And it came to pass that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." The place once so famous for its nicknames was now to give a name that will never perish — a name of incalculable sweetness and blessing, connecting Christ as it does with those that are His. It was, no doubt, a Gentile title. There would be no particular force in giving it to Jews, for all Jews professed to be looking for Christ. What a wonderful change for these poor Gentiles to know Christ for themselves, and to be called after Christ! All was ordered of God.

Then we find that if the church at Jerusalem had become impoverished, the Gentiles minister of their carnal things to them. Saul (as he is still called) and Barnabas are made the channels of bringing the contributions to the elders not named before. How these elders were appointed, if indeed they were so formally, does not appear. Among the Gentiles we know that they were installed, as we shall see a little later, by apostolic choice. Whether this was the ease among the Jews scripture does not say; but that there were persons who had this responsible place among them, as among the Gentile churches afterwards, we see clearly.

Finally, and in few words (for I do not intend to say more on Acts 12 tonight), we have the completing of this second part of our narrative in this chapter. We are given a striking prefiguration of the evil king that will be found in the latter day; he that will reign over the Jews under the shadow and support of the Gentiles as Herod was, and not less but more than his prototype bent on the murder of the innocents, and with his heart full of evil for others who will be rescued by the goodness of the Lord.

James sheds his blood, as Stephen had before; for this Peter was destined by man, but the Lord disappointed him. The disciples gave themselves to prayer, yet they little believed their own prayers. Nevertheless we learn hence that they had prayer-meetings in those days; and so they gave themselves up to this special prayer for the servant of the Lord, who did not fail to appear by an agent of His providential power. All this confirms its having a Jewish aspect, regarded as a type, and was very natural in James and Peter, who had to do specially with the circumcision.

It is needless now to dwell on the scene, more than just to point out that which is familiar, no doubt, to many that are here — the manner in which the Lord judged the apostate; for Herod — owned shortly after by the people whom he had sought to please, disappointed in one place, but exalted in another — was hailed as a god; and at that moment the angel of the Lord deals with his pride, and he is devoured of worms — a sad image of the awful judgment of God that will fall upon one who will sit "in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."

In the portion which follows we shall see the manner of the Spirit of God's working by the great apostle of the Gentiles.

APPENDIX.

It may be interesting to many readers to read as follows from Mr. Edward A. Litton's work on "The Church of Christ in its Idea, Attributes, and Ministry; with a particular reference to the Controversy between Romanists and Protestants." There are, of course, imperfect expressions, inasmuch as the truth itself is but partially apprehended; but one is glad to see views so decidedly in advance of ordinary evangelicalism, with equal decision against more churchism.

"In the opening chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, the Christian dispensation is seen in actual operation; for that with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost that dispensation properly commences will probably be admitted by all parties. Moreover, in these chapters the Church of Christ is first spoken of as in actual existence. What in our Lord's discourses is a matter of anticipation or prophecy, here appears as a matter of fact. Though not at first fully aware of the great change which had taken place in their religious standing, still less of its ultimate consequences, the first believers at once formed a separate community in the bosom of the Jewish theocracy; a community having, for its distinctive marks, adherence to the twelve Apostles, baptism in the name of Christ, and the celebration of the Lord's Supper.* Thenceforth the Church becomes a matter of history; and its history is nothing less than that of the vicissitudes, prosperous and adverse, which the kingdom of God upon earth has in the lapse of ages passed through.

*Is it not distressing to find, in this thoughtful production of one in much above the traditions of men and the bias of party, the palpable omission of the grandest and most momentous distinction of the church, namely, the presence of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven? Unbelief here is alas! characteristic of Christendom.

"It has already been remarked that, far from intending to establish a mere invisible fellowship of the Spirit, our Lord contemplated His Church as having a visible existence, His followers as collected into societies [that society called the Church or assembly of God]. With this view He Himself instituted certain external badges of Christian profession, to come into use when they should be needed, and took measures to qualify a small and select company of believers, by attaching them constantly to His person while His earthly ministry lasted, and giving them a formal commission with extraordinary powers, when He left the world, to preside over the affairs and direct the organisation of Christian societies. These essential conditions of the existence of any regular society we find from the very first in being in the Church: the Apostles were the officers, and, collectively, the organ of the community; members were admitted into it by baptism; and they testified their continuance therein by participating in the sacrament of Christ's body and blood. As we advance farther in the inspired history, we find additions made to these simple elements of social fellowship; the organisation of the Christian society becomes more complex and systematic; questions of polity and order occupy no small portion of the apostolic epistles; and we have every reason to believe, if not from Scripture alone, yet from the unanimous voice of authentic history, that towards the close of the apostolic age Christianity had almost everywhere crystallised itself into a certain, definite, and well known form of ecclesiastical polity" (pp. 192, 193).

"St. Paul, in chap 14 of the first epistle to the Corinthians, presents us with a graphic picture of the mode in which Christians in the first age of the Church celebrated public — worship. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper constituted the visible symbol of their profession, and the pledge of their union with Christ and with each other; but the governing function in the assembly was the ministry of the Word, whether it assumed the extraordinary forms of 'tongues' or a 'revelation,' or 'prophecy,' or 'the interpretation of tongues,' or consisted of the stated instruction of regular pastors and teachers. Among the various spiritual gifts then common in the Church, the chief place was to be assigned to prophecy; 'for he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.' Of any typical or sacrificial element, St. Paul makes no mention: the whole service, with the exception of the Lord's Supper, was manifestly homiletic or verbal. That the gifts mentioned in the chapter were, for the most part, extraordinary, and in process of time were to cease, makes no difference as regards the argument; for it is the essential character of Christian worship, not the particular vehicle of its expression, that is the point now under consideration" (pp. 256, 257),

"The Church of Christ was not properly in existence before the day of Pentecost; much less did she, before that era, go forth on her mission to evangelize* the world. A body of believers indeed had been by Christ gathered out of the Jewish people to be the first recipients of the Pentecostal effusion; but before that event, this body could not be called distinctively His Church. It is, then, nothing but the fact, that the invisible Church, or rather that which in the Church is invisible, preceded that which is visible. The spiritual power which wrought so wonderful a change in the Apostles must first descend from heaven, and give to the Church its inner form as its spiritual characteristic! afterwards the Apostles preach and organize. First, there are saints, or men in whom Christ is formed by an invisible operation of His Spirit, whose origin, however, is not unknown; then these saints proceed to execute their appointed mission" (p. 272).

* It is well to avoid a figure which churchism has ever turned to its own aggrandisement and the Lord's dishonour. The Church neither preaches nor teaches, but Christ sends those who evangelize the world and teach the Church.

"Were the question put to a person of plain understanding, unacquainted with the controversies which have arisen on the subject, What, according to the Apostolic Epistles, is a Christian Church, or, how is it to be defined? he would probably, without hesitation or difficulty, reply, that a Christian Church — as it appears, for example, in St. Paul's epistles — is a congregation or society of faithful men or believers, whose unseen faith in Christ is visibly manifested by their profession of certain fundamental doctrines, by the administration and reception of the two sacraments, and by the exercise of discipline. He would direct attention to the fact, that the ordinary greeting of St. Paul, at the beginning of each epistle, is to the 'saints and faithful brethren' constituting the Church of such a place, fellow-heirs with himself of eternal life; and that throughout these compositions, the members of the Church are presumed to be in living union with Christ, reasonings and exhortations being addressed to them, the force of which cannot be supposed to be admitted, except by those who are led by the Spirit of God; in short, that the members of the Corinthian or the Ephesian Church are addressed as Christians; and a Christian is one who is in saving union with Christ."

"In proportion to the apparent simplicity of the question, would be his surprise to hear it affirmed that he is mistaken, and that, in addressing a Christian society as a congregation of Christians, St. Paul merely regards it as a society of men professing the same faith, and participating outwardly in the same sacraments (it being immaterial to the idea whether they possess saving faith or not); a society invested with spiritual privileges, but not necessarily realizing those privileges, and that, consequently, we must lower the import of the terms, 'saints' and 'faithful in Christ Jesus,' to signify outwardly dedicated to God, and professing with the lips the doctrines of Christianity That the mode of interpretation alluded to involves a deviation from the obvious meaning of the New Testament phraseology is not, indeed, sufficient reason for at once rejecting it; but it does warrant us in requiring that the necessity for such deviation shall be clearly made out. And in the present case this requirement is the more reasonable from the circumstance that the Apostles uniformly identify themselves, as regards their Christian standing and hopes, with those to whom they write. 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ;' 'that I may be comforted by the mutual faith both of you and me;' did St. Paul, when he thus wrote, regard himself as but nominally interested in the blessings of redemption? Was his faith nothing more than a profession of Christian doctrine? If he must have meant something more than this; if his own faith and his own sanctity were living and real, the effect of the Holy Spirit's operation; then, inasmuch as he makes no distinction as regards this point between himself and those whom he addresses, we must suppose that he looked upon them also as real saints and believers. The language of the inspired writers of the New

Testament is the expression of that Christian experience, or conscious participation in the blessings vouchsafed through Christ, which the Holy Ghost had shed abroad in their hearts: their idea therefore of a saint, or a believer, being derived from their own spiritual consciousness, must have been the highest of which the words will admit. But in the sense in which they supposed themselves to be Christians, do they, to all appearance, apply that title to those to whom they write" (pp. 280-283).

To the argument drawn from the use of similar terms under the Mosaic covenant in a merely national and external sense to prove that they mean the same, and nothing more, under the gospel., our author answers, "Here, in fact, is the real source of the error. While the typical character of the Mosaic institution in general is recognised, it has not been sufficiently borne in mind that the Jewish nation itself in its external or political aspect, was a type, and nothing more, of the Christian Israel We have only to extend this undoubted principle of interpretation to the Jewish people itself in its national — that is, its legal-character, to perceive that the terms by which, in the Old Testament, its privileges are expressed, assume, when applied to Christians, a different meaning, or rather betoken the spiritual realities of which the former were but the types" (pp. 286, 287).

"To all this, however, it will be replied, that the nature of a visible church, which we know must in all cases be a body of mixed character, as well as the actual state of several of the churches to whom St. Paul addressed his epistles, forbid the supposition that, in terming them communities of saints and believers, he could have used these words in their highest signification. This is the second difficulty which it is conceived lies in the way of our interpreting the apostle's language literally. But a moment's reflection will show that the difficulty is only imaginary. We must recollect that in the Apostolic Church an effective discipline — the very idea of which seems to be lost amongst us — existed. By means of this discipline, they having been separated from the society whose overt acts were contrary to their Christian profession, the apostle, not being endowed with the divine prerogative of inspecting the heart, was compelled to take the rest at their profession, and to deal with them as real Christians so long as there was no visible, tangible proof to the contrary Without pronouncing upon the state of individuals in the sight of God, he assumed the whole body to be what they professed to be — a body of real Christians. For it must be remembered that, however far his profession may be from being a true one, every professor of Christianity professes to be a true, not a mere nominal, Christian. Except on this assumption the apostle could not have proceeded to enforce Christian duties by Christian motives" (pp. 298, 299).

"Nor is there any weight in the objection that many of these primitive Churches were very defective in doctrine or in, practice, or in both; that St. Paul speaks of the Corinthians as being, on account of their divisions, 'carnal,' and not 'spiritual,' as 'babes in Christ,' and sharply reproveth them for their laxity of discipline in the case of the incestuous person, and their want of discipline in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. For it is not maintained that the first Christians, any more than those of our own day, were or could be perfect; and all that can be fairly gathered from what St. Paul says of the Corinthians is, that they were imperfect and inconsistent. In the remarks sometimes made upon this subject it seems to be assumed that there is no medium between our affirming of persons that they are not perfect Christians, and that they are not Christians at all; whereas in fact there is no Christian, however holy, who comes up to the ideal of Christian practice. . . . To return to the case of the Corinthians: — on what principle, let us ask, did St. Paul reprove them for their inconsistencies? Did he address them as absolutely destitute of the vital principle of grace, or as possessing it, but needing exhortation to walk conformably thereto? The latter is, unquestionably, the ground which he takes" (pp. 302, 303).

"Christianity, as it appears in the New Testament, knows nothing of the atomistic theory of

modern independentism. There can be little doubt that, even in the apostolic age, the church of each considerable city — such as Rome or Ephesus — consisted, not of one congregation, but of several, who were collectively styled the church of that place; certain it is that such was the case towards the close of the first century. It could not be otherwise. The expansive power of Christianity called it to break forth on all sides; and speedily the original congregation, or in modern language the mother church, of each city gave birth to other societies of Christians in the surrounding neighbourhood. . . . No notion is more at variance with the spirit of apostolic Christianity than that of societies of Christians existing in the same neighbourhood, but not in communion with each other, and not under 'common government'" (pp. 449, 450).

It is a perilous mode of reasoning and likely to lead to universal scepticism, to maintain, for the sake of theoretical consistency, that the visible fruits of the Spirit do not possess a sufficiently distinctive character to enable us to pronounce where they are and where they are not: not to mention that the sin of denying the evident operation of the Holy Spirit is spoken of by our Lord in terms far too awful not to make us tremble at the thought of verging towards it. The fruits of the Spirit, whether they be produced within our own inclosure or beyond it, are always the same, and always to be recognized; otherwise our Lord would never have given us the simple test whereby we are to distinguish false from true prophets — 'by their fruits ye shall know them.' If men profess themselves not to be able to do so, they simply profess that they have neither consciences nor moral sense." [Alas! the power of the Spirit to this end is lost sight of.] . . .

"One visible manifestation, then, of the sanctity of the Church is the holy walk and conversation of individual Christians; but there is another, and more formal, mode in which she professes herself to be holy, and that is, by the exercise of discipline. The personal holiness of the Christian is a property of the individual, not of the society as such; hence a professing Christian society, however large a proportion of holy men it may contain, does not predicate of itself that it is a part of Christ's holy Church as long as it exercises no formal official act implying that assumption. The exercise of discipline is the true and legitimate expression of the sanctity of a visible Church considered as a society. Hence the great importance of discipline. It is not merely that the absence of it operates injuriously upon the tone and standard of piety within the Church; it affects the claims of the society as such to be a legitimate member of the visible Church Catholic. A Christian society which should openly profess to dispense with discipline, and tolerate on principle open and notorious evil doers [or still worse heretics, Antichrists, or their abettors] within its pale, would thereby renounce its title to one of the essential attributes of the Church; it would sever all ostensible connection between itself and the true Church [or rather Christ and His sacrifice: see 1 Cor. 5], of which sanctity is an inseparable property; in short, it would unchurch itself. For every particular church is so, called on the supposition of its being a manifestation, more or less true, of the one holy Church — the body of Christ. . . . How essential to the idea of a Church the exercise of discipline is, may be seen from the embarrassing contrarieties between theory and practice which the virtual suspension of it in the Church of England is constantly occasioning" (pp. 515-517).

Acts 13-20.

We now enter on the missionary journeys, as they are called, of the apostle Paul. The work, under the Spirit, opens to the glory of the Lord. Not merely are Gentiles met in grace and brought into the house of God: He had already wrought in their souls individually — this we have seen before, in Peter's mission to Cornelius and his household; but grace goes out henceforth in quest not of Jews only but of Gentiles, as the special sphere which was assigned to Paul by God, and this also in co-operation with

the other apostles; for thus they had agreed.

But there are preliminary circumstances of no little interest and moment, which the Spirit of God has been pleased to give us before the record of these journeys. I have read at the beginning, of chapter 13 the principal scene of this kind. Saul of Tarsus had already been called, but here we have a formal act of separation. This is the true description of it in scripture. It was in no way what men call "ordination." This he takes particular pains to deny in explicit terms. It was not only that man was in no sense the source of ministry; for this would be, no doubt, disavowed by the godly everywhere; but he employs the strongest words in showing that it was not by men as the channel. As there are cases where man is the channel of conveying both a gift and authority, we can see how artfulness or ignorance can readily enough embroil the entire subject, and thus prepare the way for the building up of the clerical system. There is no ground for it in scripture. Ministry there is, and as a distinct though connected thing, an official charge: both are beyond question. These two things are clearly recognized by the Holy Ghost. Here we have nothing of official charge. So far as the apostle Paul had both a gift and a charge, and he had both (and the apostleship differs from the gift of a prophet as well as the rest in this, that it is not a gift only but a charge), all had been settled between the Lord and His servant. But now it pleased God at this particular epoch to call forth Barnabas, who was a kind of transition link between the twelve, with Jerusalem for their centre and the circumcision for their sphere, and the free and unfettered service of Paul among the Gentiles. It pleased Him to separate these two chosen vessels of His grace for the work to which He was calling them.

Let us look for a moment at the state of things at Antioch before we pass on. "And there were in the church" (or assembly) "that was at Antioch [certain]* prophets and teachers." What is commonly called a stated ministry was there. All should give full weight to facts which if denied or overlooked would only weaken the testimony which God has given.

* The best uncials, cursives, and ancient versions, omit τινῶν, "certain."

It is the continual effort of those who oppose the truth of the church, and who deny the present ruined condition of it, to insinuate against such as have learnt from God to act on His own word, that they set aside ministry, and more particularly what they call "stated ministry." They do nothing of the kind. They deny an *exclusive* or one-man ministry. They deny that abuse of ministry which would shut out of its own circle the operation of all gifts but one, which is jealous of every other save by its own will or leave, which has no sufficient confidence in the Lord's call or in the power of the Holy Ghost given for profit, which consequently makes a duty of both narrowness and self-importance through a total misunderstanding of scripture and the power and grace of God. Not for a moment do I deny that all who are in any definite measure taught of God as to His will in the service of Christ must disavow clericalism in every shape and degree as a principle essentially and irreconcilably opposed to the action of the Holy Ghost in the church.

But it is important to affirm that none understand the action of the Spirit who expose themselves and the truth (which is still more serious) to the deserved stigma of denying the real abiding-place of ministry. This is not in anywise the question. All Christians who have light from God on these matters acknowledge ministry to be a divine and permanent institution. It is therefore of very great importance to have scriptural views of its source, functions, and limits. The truth of scripture, if summed up as to its character, amounts to this — that ministry is the exercise of a spiritual gift. This I believe to be a true definition of it. The minds of most Christians are encumbered with the notion of a particular local charge. Such a charge is altogether distinct from ministry: it is only confusion to suppose that they are the same thing, or inseparable. Ministry in itself has nothing to do with a local charge. The same

person, of course, may have both: this might or might not be.

A man, for instance, as we find in the case of Philip and others might have a local charge at Jerusalem, and there we saw the church choosing, because it was that kind of office which had to do with the distribution of the church's bounty. This is the principle of it. What the church gives the church has a voice in. But the Lord gave Philip a spiritual gift, and there the church bows and accepts, instead of choosing. In point of fact the particular gift that Philip received from the Lord was not one that properly finds its exercise within the assembly, but rather without: he was an evangelist. But this establishes what I have been asserting; that is, that you may have a person without a charge who has a very special gift, and this for public ministry.

The elders or bishops, of whom we shall hear more by-and-by, had a still more important charge. It was the office of oversight, or of a bishop, that was found in every fully-constituted assembly where there could be time for the development of that which was requisite in order to it. But whether there were charges or none, whether the due appointment was or was not, the Lord did not fail to give gifts for the carrying on of His own work. Now those persons who possessed gifts exercised them, as they were bound to do; for *here* was no question of appointment, and indeed their exercise had nothing, whatever to do with the leave, permission, or authority of any, but solely flowed from the Lord's own gift. This was properly ministry in the word. But there never was such an idea broached, still less acted on, as the exclusive ministry which in modern times has been set up, as if it were the only right thing in theory or practice. In point of fact it is thoroughly wrong, not only not defensible by the word of God, but flagrantly opposed to it.

Here, for example, we have the picture of an assembly drawn by the Spirit. It is the more instructive, because it cannot be pretended that here, as in the church at Jerusalem, there were elements which savoured of the anterior or Jewish state of things. It was among the Gentiles. It was where Saul himself laboured; but then there were other servants of the Lord beside Saul, — as Barnabas, and Simeon, and Lucius, and Manaen. Nor are these mentioned as if they were the only persons who there exercised the gifts of prophecy and teaching: no doubt they were the more important men. "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul" (for he is still called Saul, which was his Hebrew name) "for the work whereunto I have called them." It was the Lord that called them.

But there is more than this: the Holy Ghost can also set apart among the servants to a peculiar service. This is emphatically brought in when it was a question of Barnabas and Saul. Not, of course, but that the Holy Ghost had to do with the action of a Peter, or a John, or of any others that have come before us in the previous accounts of this book; but it is expressly said here — and not without an admirable reason, and of the deepest interest to us, because God is here preparing the road and instructing His servants as to His ways, more particularly in the church among the Gentiles. Hence, the Holy Ghost comes into a very decided and defined prominence here: "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." The Holy Ghost is in the church; He is personally acting, and not merely as giving power, but in distinct and special call. It is, no doubt, subordinate to the glory of the Lord Jesus, but, nevertheless, as a divine person must who does not abnegate His own sovereignty, so it is said "as he will."

"And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." This was not to confer authority, which would set one scripture against another. Galatians 1: 1 denies such an inference. We shall find, before we have done with the history, what the character of this action was, and wherefore hands were laid upon them: the end of Acts 14 explains it to us. It is said there (verse

26) that they sailed to Antioch (which was the starting-point), from whence "they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled." Such, then, was the object and meaning of the hands laid on Barnabas and Saul. It was not the presumptuous thought that men, who were really inferior to themselves spiritually, could confer upon the apostles what they did not themselves possess to the same extent; it was but a fraternal recommendation to the grace of God, which is always sweet and desirable in the practical service of the Lord. "So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost:" nothing can be more distinct than the place that the Spirit of God has assigned Him, nothing more emphatic than the manner in which the inspired writer draws attention to the fact in these commencing verses. All now depends upon His power: He is on earth, the directing power of all that is carried on. That power does not belong to the church, which has indeed responsibility in the last resort in the judgment of evil, but otherwise never can meddle with ministry except to the dishonour of the Lord, its own hurt, and the hindrance of ministry. On the the other hand, ministry never can meddle with what properly belongs to the church. They are two distinct spheres. The same person, of course, may be a minister while he has his place as a member in the body of Christ. But as he is not permitted to use his ministry to override the church in any respect, but rather to subserve its right action, helping it on as far as may be in his power by the Holy Ghost, so on the other hand the church can in nowise rightly control that ministry which flows not from the church, but directly from the Lord.

The present state in nowise alters or modifies the principle: on the contrary, it is an immense comfort that as ministry never did flow from the church, so the present broken state of the church cannot overthrow the place and responsibility of those who minister in the word. The fact is they are quite distinct, although co-ordinate, spheres of blessing.

Barnabas and Saul go forth, then, to Cyprus, the native place of Barnabas; and coming there they preach the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. There is great care, and so much the more because Saul was apostle of the Gentiles, to go to the Jews; and it is lovely to see the ways of God in this respect. Above all others Luke, as we know, brings out the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in His grace towards the Gentiles. Nevertheless there is no gospel so eminently Jewish as Luke's in its commencement, — not even Matthew's. We have no such scene in the gospel of Matthew, and still less in Mark's or John's, — no such scene of the temple both of the exterior and interior. We have no such account of the godly Jewish remnant. We have no such care in showing the obedience of Joseph and Mary to the requisitions of the law as in the first two chapters of the gospel of Luke. The fact is, that what is shown first in the gospel, then in the Acts, is "to the Jew first and also to the Gentile." And so we find in the service of these blessed men who now go forth.

They had, by the way, also, we are told, John to their minister. We must not make an ecclesiastical institution out of this. No doubt the expression might to ignorant minds convey some such notion. Nor do I pretend to say what might have been the motives of those who translated it so as to give such a colour to the passage. Manifestly, however, the thing were absurd; because it would be, not a ministry to others, but to Paul and Barnabas. Clearly therefore Mark's service lay here, I suppose, in searching out proper lodgings, and getting people to hear the apostles preach, and that kind of care which a young man would be expected to bestow on those whom he was privileged to accompany and attend in the work of the Lord.

On this occasion they met with the deputy of the island, Sergius Paulus, who was besieged by the efforts of a certain sorcerer that sought to exercise and retain influence over the mind of the great man. But the time was come for falsehood to fall before the truth. When he therefore attempted to turn his old arts against the gospel, and those that were the instruments of bringing it to the island, God asserted His own mighty power. For when Elymas withstood Barnabas and Saul, Saul, "who also is called Paul"

(the Spirit of God taking this opportunity of bringing forward his Gentile name in a mission that was to be pre-eminently among the Gentiles, although beginning with the Jew according to the ways of God), being then filled with the Holy Ghost, sets his eyes on the evil worker, gives him his true character, searches him through and through, and, more than this, pronounced a sentence, a judicial sentence, from the Lord, which was at once accomplished. As we are told, "Immediately there fell upon him a mist and a darkness, and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand." It was the sad sign of his guilty race, the Jews, who, by their opposition to the gospel of the grace of God, and more particularly among the Gentiles, are now doomed to the same blindness after a spiritual sort. "Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord." Beautiful contrast with Simon Magus! What astonished Simon Magus was the power displayed; what astonished the deputy was the truth. The admiration of Power is natural to man, and particularly to fallen man. He, conscious of his weakness, covets the power that he would like to wield, having still the consciousness of the place to which he was called, but from which he has fallen; for God put every creature under him, and although through sin he is fallen from his estate, he has in nowise abandoned his pretensions, and he would fain have the power that would enable him not to hold up only, but to reverse if possible the sad consequences of the fall. Delight in the truth, a heart for that which God reveals, flows only from the Holy Ghost; and this was the happy portion of the deputy. He believed, and believed after a very different sort, with a divinely exercised conscience by the power of the Spirit, instead of a merely intellectual credit receiving upon evidence that which approved itself to the judgment of his mind.

Next we read of Paul and his company, for from this moment he takes the chief place, and others are designated because of their companionship with him. Was this place in anywise contrary to the will of the Lord? Was it not thoroughly according to it? We all know that there is sometimes a little jealousy of any such spiritual influence. I cannot but think, however, that the feeling is owing more to the natural independence of the mind, than the simplicity that delights in the working of the Holy Ghost and the sanctioned expression of God's holy word. I say, then, that Paul and his company "loosed from Paphos, and came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John, departing from them (for he was not at all in faith up to the level of the work — at any rate of Paul), returned to Jerusalem," his natural home.

The others proceed on their way to Antioch in Pisidia, and there they are found on the sabbath-day in the synagogue. "And after the reading of the law and the prophets, the ruler of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on." What a painful contrast with that which is found in Christendom! Even among the poor Jews, spite of all the coldness and narrowness of their system, there was then a greater openness of heart, and a simplicity to receive whatever could be communicated than one sees where there ought to be the rivers of living water, — where there should reign the cherished desire among all that belong to the Lord, that the best help at all cost be rendered to every saint of God, as well as to every poor perishing sinner. However, here among these Jews, the rulers were anxious to get all the help possible from others for the understanding of the word of God, and for its just application. Although they knew nothing whatever of Paul and Barnabas (except, of course, that they were Jews, or looked like them), they called on them forthwith to address all. "And Paul beckoning, with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God."

There were proselytes as well as children of Jacob. Many Gentiles had renounced idolatry in all the great cities where Jews were found at this time. Undoubtedly, so far, Judaism had prepared the way for the Lord among the nations of the earth, in whose midst Jews were scattered. Disgust had grown up in the Gentile mind. The abominations of Paganism had risen up to a fearful height. At this very time there were not a few who though Gentiles were not idolaters (and you must bear this in mind), and

really did fear God.

To all these Paul addresses himself: "The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it." The history is pursued until he comes to David, as the object, of course, was to bring in the Son of David; for the apostle, led of the Lord, speaks with that considerate skill which love does not fail to use, formed under the Spirit of God. Thus having brought in the Messiah, we are shown how He had been announced by the Baptist. There was no collusion about it. John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. As he fulfilled his course, he acknowledged that he was not the Messiah. Thus God gave an admirable witness of the Messiah that was just at hand. It was no question of a great man, or great deeds, but of God's accomplishing His purpose. Had a particle of ambition influenced John, he, with an immense following among the people, might readily have set up to be the Messiah himself. The truth was, that he was not the Bridegroom but His friend, and the fear of God shut out these base desires, and he felt it his joy and his duty to do the will of God, and be the witness of Him that was coming.

Thus Paul announces the Messiah himself. "Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent." Next he brings boldly forward the awful position in which the Jews had put themselves. "They that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him." Along with spiritual blindness there was as usual the grossest want of common righteousness. "And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre." God was against them, and as for the man whom they had crucified, He "raised him from the dead: and he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people. And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus."

It is not warrantable to say "raised up *Jesus again*." You may read it either "raised up *Jesus*," or "raised *Jesus again*;" but you cannot give both. The word cannot at the same time include both, though it may in certain cases, according to the context, mean either. The proper rendering here is "raised up *Jesus*." This is the meaning required by the facts. It refers to Jesus given to the Jews as the Messiah according to the prophets. It is also the commonest thing possible for the word to apply to resurrection. But then in itself it takes in a much wider range than simply resurrection. The word "raised up" requires "*from the dead*" to make it definitely mean resurrection. But this is not the case here, till we come to verse 34. I therefore believe that resurrection is not meant in the earlier text at all, but raising up Jesus as the Messiah, as it is also written in the second Psalm: "Thou art my Son: this day have I begotten thee." This is confirmed, and I think proved by the next verse, where we have the additional statement. "And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead." Thus we have two distinct steps: — verse 33 affirms that God had fulfilled the promise in raising up the Messiah in the earth for His people; verse 34 adds that, besides this, He raised Him up from the dead. This is important, because it serves as a key to the true application of the second Psalm, which is often, and I believe mistakenly, applied to the resurrection. The reference is to the Messiah, without raising the question of actual bodily resurrection, which is first introduced distinctly in Psalm 16, though implied in Psalm 8. So, in the Apostle's discourse, the resurrection from the dead is founded not upon the second Psalm, but on a well known passage in the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 55: 3), and also in the sixteenth Psalm already referred to.

But here the apostle (instead of pointing out that God had made the rejected Jesus to be Lord and

Christ, which was Peter's doctrine, and, of course, perfectly true) uses it according to his own blessed line of truth, and urges on their souls, that "through this man is preached unto, you the forgiveness of sins; and by him" (not the Jew alone, but) "all that believe are justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses." Thus early, vigorously, and plainly did the apostle proclaim this great truth — no doubt for all among the Jews who bowed to it, but stated also in terms that should embrace a Gentile believer even as an Israelite. The law of Moses could justify from nothing. "All that believe are justified from all things," The whole is wound up by a solemn warning to such as despise the word of the Lord, and this founded on or rather cited from more than one of their own prophets. (Compare Isaiah 29 and Hab. 1)

"And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God." This stirred up the Jews: it was a new element, and kindled their jealousy at once. We have had the irritation and the murderous opposition of the Jews in Jerusalem. We can understand that they disliked what they considered a new religion, which claimed to come with the highest sanction of the God of Israel, more particularly as it made them feel to the very quick their own sins, their present and past resistance of the Holy Ghost, as well as their recent slaughter of their Messiah. But a new feature comes out here which the Spirit of God lets us see henceforth in all the journeys and labours of the apostle Paul; that is, the hatred which the unbelieving Jews felt at the preaching of the truth to the Gentiles. "When the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy." The scene now lay outside among the nations whom they despised, If the gospel were a lie, why feel so acutely? It was not love or respect for Gentiles. But Satan stirred up, not now simply their religious pride but their envy, and, filled with it, they "spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming."

The law had never wrought such a change among men. It might correct the grossness of idolatry and condemn its folly, thereby some here and there might fear God; but it never did win hearts after such a sort. Thus the evil of their own hearts was brought out among the Jews, and the more in proportion as the might of the grace of God proved itself in attracting souls to the Lord. "Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you." How wondrous and how beautiful the ways of divine love! "But seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life" — how solemn to judge oneself unworthy of everlasting life, as every unbeliever does! — "lo, we turn to the Gentiles."

This was spiritual wisdom; but was it simply instinct? It was not. There may have been those that turned to the Gentiles from no deeper or more defined reason, as we saw last night. There were those who perceived that the gospel was too great a boon to be confined to the ancient people of God, that it was adapted to the universal need of men, and that it became God's grace to let it forth to the Gentiles; and they acted on their conviction, and the Lord was with them, and many believed. But it was not spiritual instinct here: it was a still holier and lowlier thing, yet higher and more blessed. It was intelligent obedience, where it might not be supposed that one could find a sufficiently clear direction. But the eye of love can discern; it is ever on the alert to obey from the heart.

"For so," says he, "hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles." What had this to do with Paul and Barnabas? Everything. Beyond controversy Christ is directly in view of the prophet, and perhaps some would be disposed to shut up the words only to Christ; but not so the Holy Spirit, who *therefore* extends its bearing to Paul and Barnabas. Did not Paul afterwards write "to me to live is Christ"? Christ was all to them. Christian faith appropriates to itself

what was said to Him. What a place is this! what a power in His name! No doubt it was heretofore a hidden mystery that man should be so associated with a Christ rejected by (and so separated from) the ancient people of God. But what said He to the man despised and set at naught by them? This was the very time when the Messiah, lost to Israel, becomes, in a new and intimate way, the centre for God to associate fully in grace with Him. Thus what belongs to Him belongs to them, and what God says about Him is direction for them. "I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth."

There was no rashness or presumption, but the soundest wisdom in this. Was it only for the Apostles? Is there no principle in this of all importance for us, my brethren? Does it not prove distinctly that it is not merely where we get a literal command that we may and ought to discern a call to obedience? The apostles, as men of faith, were bold about it: "For so hath the Lord commanded us." Yet, I suppose, not two souls besides in the whole earth would have seen a command to them. Unbelief would have asked proof, and have been ill-satisfied; but faith, as evermore, is happy and makes happy. "And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the name of the Lord was published throughout all the region." But the Jews were not to give up their envy. The greater the blessing, the more their hearts were vexed with it. "The Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women." They were more open, doubtless, to their efforts; and so were "the chief men of the city." As faith looks to God and the truth, unbelief flies to influence of one kind or another, — of females on the one side, and of great men on the other. Thus they raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. "But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost." As the enemy makes good the occasion of evil, so God turns the wickedness of the adversary to the blessing of His own.

The apostles pass thence into another place; they are, as ever, unwearied in their love. There is, perhaps, no feature more noticeable and instructive than the fact, that nothing turns away the heart of Paul from the poor Jews. He loved them with an unrequited affection; he loved them spite of all their hatred and their envy. Into the synagogue he went again here (as in each new place that he visits), and so spake, "that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews". (they were generally just the same to Paul in one place as in another) "stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, they were ware of it, and fled." They thus bowed to the storm. Nothing at all of what men call heroism marked the apostles; there was what is very much better — the simplicity of grace: patience is the true wisdom, but God only can give it.

They go accordingly elsewhere, and there preach the gospel. At Lystra, which they visited, the case came before them of a man crippled in his feet, "impotent in his feet," who had never walked. Paul, perceiving that he had faith to be healed, beholds him steadfastly, and bids him stand upright on his feet. The Lord at once answering to the call, the man leaped and walked. "And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men." Accordingly they called Barnabas (who, it is evident, had the more imposing presence) Jupiter; and Paul, because he was the more eloquent of the two, they designated Mercury. "Then the priest of Jupiter", — for the city was famous for its devotedness to the so-called father of gods and men, — "brought oxen and garlands into the gates and would have done sacrifice."

"Which when the apostles,* Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? we also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein."

* So the Spirit of God calls them both; and it is an important point to observe; it is not restricted to the twelve. Here we find the Holy Ghost acted in this manner. We have apostleship entirely apart from the twelve tribes of Israel. And not merely is Paul apostle, but Barnabas was recognized also.

What is notable, I think, especially for all those engaged in the work of the Lord, is the variety in the character of the apostolic addresses. There was no such stiffness as we are apt to find in our day in the preaching of the gospel. Oh, what monotony! what sameness of routine, no matter who may be addressed! We find in scripture people dealt with as they were, and there is that kind of appeal to the conscience which was adapted to their peculiar state. The discourse in the synagogue was founded on the Jewish scriptures; here to these men of Lycaonia there is no allusion to the Old Testament whatever, but a plain reference to what all see and know — the heavens above them, and the seasons that God was pleased from of old to assign round about them, and that continual supply of the fruits of His natural bounty of which the most callous can scarce be insensible. Thus we see there was the ministration of suited truth, as far as it went, of what God is, and what is worthy of Him, opening the way for the glad tidings of His grace. How different from the vileness of a Jupiter or of a Mercury, a god devoted to corruption and self-will, and another god devoted to stealing! Was this the best religion and morality of the heathen, making gods just like themselves? Such certainly is not the true God. Who can deny all to be vanity even in the minds of the most civilized and refined of the Gentiles? The true God, although He had suffered all nations to walk in their own ways in times past, nevertheless did not "leave himself without witness in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." This was no more than an introduction for that which the apostle had to say; it was the truth so far rebuking the folly of idolatry. It was in no way the good news of eternal life and remission of sins in Christ; but it was that which either vindicated God, or at least set aside what was undeniable and before all eyes the debasing depravity of their false gods and pagan religion.

"And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead." "And having stoned Paul" — how like his Master! How sudden the change! About to be worshipped as a god, and the next thing after it to be stoned and left for dead! Alas! here also the Jews instigated the Gentiles. "Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe." Such is the victory that overcomes the world; such the power and perseverance of faith. They go on undaunted, yea, confirming the souls of the disciples in various places, "exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." Impossible for the world to overthrow those who bear the worst it can do, give God thanks, and wait for His kingdom.

But here take note of another part of their service — the confirmation of the souls of those who had already believed. It is not simply bringing souls in, and then leaving them to other people; the apostles would stablish them in the faith as they were taught. But this was not all. "When they had ordained them." Let me take the liberty of saying that "ordained" is a very misleading term, which conveys an ecclesiastical idea without any warrant whatever. Not that "ordained" is an interpolation here as in the first chapter of Acts, but certainly the meaning given is fictitious. The true force of the phrase is simply this, "they chose them elders." In more ways than one it is important; because, as a

simple choice takes away "ordination," and with it that mysterious ritual which the greater bodies like, so on the other hand the apostles' choosing for them elders takes away all that gives self-importance to the little churches. For it is neither the smaller bodies choosing for themselves, nor an imposing authority vested in their great rivals, but a choice exercised by apostles; that is, they chose for the disciples "elders in every church."

I am well aware that persons of respectability have not been wanting who have tried to make out that the Greek word means that the apostles chose them by taking the sense of the assembly. But this is mere etymological trifling. There is not the slightest warrant for it in the usage of scripture. It is not requisite for a man to be a scholar in order to reject the thought as false. Thus the word "*them*" refutes it for any intelligent reader of the English Bible. It is not merely that apostles chose. If it be said that the people must have chosen for them to ordain, the answer is, that the people did not choose at all. This is proved by the simple declaration that the apostles chose for the disciples. Such is the way to fill up the sentence — "They chose them elders."* To make out the meaning of what Presbyterians or Congregationalists have contended for, it should have been said that they chose by them, or some phrase meaning that they chose by the votes of the assembly. Here there is no ground whatever for such a sense, but on the contrary that the apostles chose elders for the rest. "They chose them elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, commending them to the Lord, on whom they believed."

* It is scarcely necessary to refute at length the notion of the fathers, and of some moderns like Bishop Bilson (*Perpetual Government of Christ's Church*, p. 13, Eden's edition, Oxford, 1842), that χειροτονήσαντες here means ordaining by imposition of hands. That the word was so used in later times by ecclesiastical writers is true; that this is its meaning in scripture is palpable error. It is to confound χειροτονία with χειροθεσία (or its equivalent, ἡ ἐπιθεσις τῶν χειρῶν). On the other hand the idea that χειρονομήσαντες means that the apostles conceded to the disciples the power of selecting by vote, whilst they reserved to themselves the right of approval and institution, is still harsher and in short unexampled in all Greek writings profane or sacred, ancient or medieval. In the earlier Greek authors who write of their public affairs, the word often occurs in the sense of choosing by suffrage (as opposed to lots); later on it meant appointment irrespective of votes. But it is never used, so far as I know, to express that *some* appointed on the ground of election by others. And I am glad to say not merely that a candid Presbyterian like Prof. G. Campbell treats Beza's version (*per suffragia creassent*) with the utmost severity as "a more interpolation for the sake of answering a particular purpose," but that the Presbyterian divines of 1645 in the "*Jus Divinum*" point out the flagrant inconsistency of such an interpretation with the express language of the text. None but Paul and Barnabas chose (whatever the manner); and they chose for the disciples, not by their votes, which would be incompatible with their own choice. Compare Acts 10: 41, 2 Cor. 8: 19. In the former case God chose beforehand the witnesses, but others gave no votes; in the latter the churches chose brethren to be their confidential messengers, but they never thought of collecting the suffrages of other people. Scriptural usage in every instance is simply choice.

It is vain to deny or parry the importance of this decision of scripture on the subject of presbyters. Not infrequently there is an attack made on those who really desire to follow the word of God, by men who ask, "Where are your elders? You profess to follow scripture faithfully: how is it that you have not elders?" To such I would answer, "When you provide apostles to choose elders for us, we shall be exceedingly obliged for both." How can we have elders appointed according to scripture unless we have apostles or their delegates? Where are the men now who stand in the same position before God and the assembly as Paul and Barnabas? You must either have apostles, or at the very least apostolic men such as Timothy and Titus; for it is quite evident that merely to call people elders does not make

them such. Nothing would be easier than to bestow the title of elders within a sect, or for the law of the land to sanction it. Any of us could set ourselves up, and do the work in name, no doubt; but whether there would be any value in the assumption, or whether it would not be really great sin, presumption, and folly, I must leave to the consciences of all to judge.

Thus we know with divine certainty that the elders were chosen for the disciples by the apostles in every church. Such is the doctrine of scripture, and the fact as here described. It is evident therefore, that unless there be duly qualified persons whom the Lord has authorised for the purpose, and in virtue of their most singular relation to the assembly, — unless there be such persons as apostles, or persons representing apostles in this particular, there is no authority for such appointment: it is mere imitation. And in questions of authority it must be evident that imitation is just as foolish as where it is a question of power. You cannot imitate the energy of the Spirit except by sin, neither can you arrogate the authority of the Lord without rebellion against Him. Notwithstanding, I do not doubt that this is often done with comparatively good — let us conceive the best — intentions on the part of many, but with very great rashness and inattention to the word of God. Hence those are really wrong, not to say inexcusable, who assume to do the work that apostles or their delegates alone could do, not such as content themselves with doing their own duty, and refuse a delicate and authoritative task to which they are not called of the Lord.

What, then, is the right thing? All that we can say is, that God has not been pleased, in the present broken state of the church, to provide all that is desirable and requisite for perpetuating everything in due order. Is this ever His way when things are morally ruined? Does He make provision to continue what dishonoured Him? So far from contrariety in this to the analogy of His dealings, it seems to me quite according to them. There was no such state of things in Israel in the days of the returned captives, as in the days of the Exodus, but Nehemiah was just as truly raised up of God for the return from Babylon, as Moses was for the march out of Egypt. Still the two conditions were quite different, and the mere doing by Nehemiah what Moses did would have been ignorance of his own proper place. Such imitation would have possessed no power, and would have secured no blessing.

It is a precisely similar course that becomes us now. Our wisdom is to use what God has given us, not to pretend to the same authority as Barnabas and Paul had. Let us follow their faith. God has continued everything, not that is needful only, but far over and above it for the blessing, if not for the pristine power and order, of the church of God. There is not the slightest cause but want of faith, and consequent failure in obedience, that hinders the children of God from being blessed overflowing even in this evil day. At the same time God has so ordered it, that no boast is more vain than that of possessing all the outward apparatus of the church of God. In fact, the louder the vaunt, the less real is the claim to ornaments of which God stripped His guilty people. None can show a display of order and charge so settled and regular, as to bear a comparison with the state of the church as it was founded and governed by the apostles.*

*"But it is a characteristic of the Church system" (says Mr. Litton in his "Church of Christ," p. 636, speaking of sacramentalists) "to be most peremptory and exclusive in its decisions where Scripture supplies the slenderest foundation for them."

Far from thinking that it is not good and wise, I admire the ways of the Lord even in this deprivation of ground for boasting. I believe that all on His part is thoroughly as it should be, and really best for us as we are. Nor is it that we should not feel the want of the godly order as of old; but I need not say that if we feel the want of elders, the value of apostles was incomparably greater. Apostles were far more important than elders, and very much more the means of blessing to the church of God. But

the right appointment of elders necessarily lapses with the departure of the apostles from the earth. It is not so with gifts, nor therefore with ministry; for all this is essentially independent of the presence of the apostles, and bound up with the living action of Christ the head of the church, who carries out His will by the Holy Ghost here below.

Now we enter upon another and an important chapter in its way, that is to say, the efforts of the Judaisers, who were now beginning (not to hinder the apostle's work merely, but) to spoil the doctrine which he preached. This is the particular point we may see in Acts 15. Accordingly the source of this trouble lay not among unbelieving Jews, but among such as professed the name of the Lord Jesus. "Certain men which came down from Judea, saying, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When, therefore, Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem." Jerusalem, alas! was now the fountain of the evil: it was from the assembly in Jerusalem that this pest emanated. Satan's effort was to pollute the doctrine of the grace of God, who allowed that the authority and the power too of Paul and Barnabas should be entirely ineffectual to stop the evil. This was turned to good account, because it was far more important to stem the tidal in Jerusalem, and to have the sentence of the apostles, elders, and all thoroughly against these evil doers, than simply the censure of Paul and Barnabas. It could not but be that Paul and Barnabas should oppose those that set aside their doctrines; but the question for the Judaisers was, What about the twelve? Thus, the carrying of the question to Jerusalem was a most suitable and wise act. It may not be that Paul and Barnabas at all designed it as such — I do not suppose they did: no doubt they endeavoured to put it down among the Gentiles, but they could not do so. The consequence was that perforce the question was reserved for Jerusalem, where Paul and Barnabas go up for what Paul knew involved the truth of the gospel. "And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy unto all the brethren." Thus, you see, going upon this painful controversy, their hearts were filled with the grace of God. It was not the question they were full of, but His grace.

"And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things which God had done with them." There again is uttered what filled their hearts with joy, — an important thing. For I am sure that often, where there is any duty of a painful kind, and where the heart of any servant of the Lord, no matter how rightly, gets filled with it, this very earnest pressure becomes really a hindrance. Because such is man, that, if you become thus over-occupied with it, others will infallibly put it down to some wrong object on your part; whereas on the contrary, others do not so oppose where you trust the Lord simply, only dealing with the matter when it is your duty to deal with it and passing on. Meanwhile, your heart goes out to that which is according to His own grace; and there is so much the more power, when you must speak on that which is a matter of pain.

It was thus according to the grace and wisdom given to these beloved servants of the Lord. When the question came before them, "there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed." This is a new feature, it will be observed; that is, it is not merely the envious unbelieving Jews, but the working of legalism in the believing Jews. This is the serious evil that now begins to show itself. They insist "that it was needful to be circumcised, and to command them to keep the law of Moses." In fact they thought that Christians would be all the better for being good Jews. This was their object and their doctrine, if such it can be called. "And the apostles and elders came together to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing," etc.

All this leads us into the interior of those days, and proves that the idea of everything being

settled just by a word is only imagination; it never was so, not even when the whole apostolic college were there. We find the liveliest discussions among them. "And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, 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." Peter we hear on this occasion preaching Paul's doctrine, just as we saw that Paul might among the Jews preach somewhat like Peter: — God it 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" — not "they shall be saved," nor "*they* shall be saved even as *we*." This is probably what we might have said, but it is not what Peter said. "We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ *we* shall be saved, — we Jews shall be saved — even as they [the uncircumcised Gentiles]."

How sweet is the grace of God, and what an unexpected blow to the pretensions of the Pharisees that believed! And this too from Peter! If Paul had said it, there would have been less to wonder at. The apostle of the Gentiles (so they were prone to think) would naturally speak up for the Gentiles, but how about Peter? what induced the great apostle of the circumcision so to speak? and this in the presence of the twelve in Jerusalem itself? How was it that without the plan of man, and contrary no doubt to the desires of the wisest, the failure of Paul and Barnabas to settle the matter, conciliatory and gracious as they were, only turned to the glory of the Lord? It was the evident hand of God to the more magnificent vindication of His grace.

"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. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying (for he now takes the place of proposing or giving a judgment), "Men [and] brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: so that the residue of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord who doeth these things known from eternity."

Thus we see that in James's mind what Peter and Paul and Barnabas had pressed was according to the declarations of the prophets, not in conflict but agreement with them. He does not say more than this; he does not mean that such was their fulfilment; nor is any special application set before us. They teach that the Lord's name should be called on the Gentiles, not when they become Jews. That they should be blessed and recognized, therefore, was in accordance with prophecy. There were Gentiles as such owned of God, without becoming practical Jews by being circumcised, — Gentiles upon whom the name of the Lord was called.

This was the argument or proof from Amos; and it was conclusive. "Wherefore my sentence is (or, I judge), that we trouble not them which from among the Gentiles are turning to God: but that we write to them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from the thing strangled, and from blood." This, in the latter part of it, is simply the precepts of Noah, the injunctions that were laid down before the call of Abram, and, again, that which was evidently due to God Himself in regard to the human corruption that accompanies idolatry; so that things were then left in a manner alike simple and wise. There could be no right-minded Gentiles who would not acknowledge the propriety and necessity of that which the decree insists on.

"Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, having chosen to send men from among them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren."

It will be observed, by the way, that there were leading men among the brethren. Some seem jealous of this; others of hostile mind talk as if it contradicts brotherhood; but according to scripture, as in the nature of things, it is manifestly right. It is only crotchety people who have made a mistake. There must not be any allowance of jealousy where God speaks so plainly. This would be indeed to quarrel with the mercies of God among us. The letter was written, if I may so say, under the seal of the Spirit of God, from "the apostles, and elders, and* brethren," to the brethren of the Gentiles in Antioch, and Syria, and Cilicia. On its contents I need not enlarge: they are familiar to all.

*There is very grave authority (, A, B, C, D, etc.) for dropping καὶ, "and," and so throwing together οἱ πρ. ἄδ. "the elder brethren" (in the sense, however, of "the elders").

"Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren (*i.e.*, at Antioch) with many words, and confirmed (*i.e.*, strengthened) them. And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto those that sent them." (I give more exactly than in the common text.)

It was important to have the presence of men who were themselves competent witnesses of what had been debated and decided at Jerusalem. This was far more than being the mere and cold bearers of a letter. They knew the motives of the adversaries; they were familiar with the spiritual interests at stake, beside knowing the feeling of the apostles, and of the church at large. These men accordingly accompanied Paul and Barnabas. But this led also, in the wisdom of God, to an important point in the journeyings of the great apostle; for Paul and Barnabas, it is said, "continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also." (What largeness and love! How different from the days when an exclusive title protects unfit or haughty men, and money difficulties hamper both teachers and taught!) "And some days after Paul said to Barnabas" (the younger takes the lead), "Let us go again and visit the brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do."

Paul loved the church; he was not only a great preacher of the gospel, but he was deeply interested in the state of the brethren, and he valued their edification. Barnabas proposed to take with them John, who was also called Mark; Paul, however, would not agree to it. "But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other." The Spirit of God takes good care to record this; it was needful that it should be noted. It should act as a warning; and, on the other hand, it would also prepare the minds of the children of God for the fact, that even the most blessed men may have their difficulties and differences. We must not be too much cast down if we meet with anything of the kind. I do not make this remark in any wise to make light of such disagreements, but alas! we know that these things do arise.

But there is more for our instruction "Paul chose Silas." This is a weighty practical consideration. There are persons, I am aware, who think that in the work of the Lord all must be left absolutely without thought of one's own or concert to the Lord Himself. Now I do not find this in the word of God. I do believe in simple-hearted subjection to the Lord. Assuredly faith in the action of the Holy Ghost is of all importance, both in the church, and also in the service of Christ. Yet there is not liberty alone but a duty of conferring together on the part of those who labour. There may be spiritual wisdom in what is often called "arrangement." So far from regarding it as an infringement of scripture, or of

what is due to the Holy Ghost, I believe there are cases in which not to do so would be independence, and a total mistake as to the ways of the Lord. It is quite true that Paul would not have an improper person forced on him in the work. He had come to the conclusion that, though Mark might be a servant of the Lord and of course have his own right sphere, he was not exactly the labourer that was suited for the mission to which the Lord was calling himself. Consequently his mind was made up not to take Mark with him. Barnabas, on the contrary, would have Mark with them, and at length so strongly urged this as to make it the necessary condition of his own association with the apostle. The consequence was that the apostle preferred even to forego the presence of his beloved friend and brother and fellow-servant, Barnabas, rather than have an unsuitable person forced upon him.

I have little doubt that the brethren in general judged, and this spiritually, that Paul was in the right and Barnabas therefore wrong. For the apostle chose Silas and departed, as we are told, "recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God," without a word about the brethren recommending Barnabas and John. Not that one would in the least doubt that Barnabas continued to be blessed of God. And as for John (Mark), we are expressly informed of his ability in the ministry at a later day. The apostle takes particular pains to show his respect and love for Barnabas after this in an inspired epistle (1 Cor. 9); and what is yet more to the purpose, he makes the most honourable mention of Mark in more than one of his later epistles. (Col. 4 and 2 Tim. 4) How good of the Lord thus to let us see the triumph of His grace in the end! And what a joy to the loving heart of the apostle to record it!

At the same time the entire history furnishes a most important principle in the practical service of the Lord. We ought not to be in anywise bound by an *esprit de corps*; where His testimony is concerned, we must be prepared to break with flesh and blood — to say to a father and mother, I have not seen them, neither to acknowledge one's brethren, nor to know one's own children. Nor must we think overmuch about the trial; for beyond a doubt many will be grieved by that measure of faithfulness to the Lord which condemns themselves. This we must bear as a part of the burden of His work. On the other hand, need it be said that nothing is more uncomely than a rudely personal and slashing habit with others in carrying out the will of the Lord? There is in it neither grace, nor righteousness, nor wisdom, but self and self-deception; for it looks like zeal — this fire of Jehu. At the same time there is such a thing as looking to God to have an exercised judgment, as to your associates no less than your work. The Lord alone can give the single eye with self-judgment which enables us in the Spirit to discern aright whom we ought to decline, and whom to choose, if companions offer or should be sought in the work.

In Acts 16 we enter on some fresh points of interest. We have before us the first appearance of Timothy, who was afterwards to figure so much in the history of Paul and the service of the Lord. Here too we find a principle of no small moment for our guidance, and the more so as Paul did that for which, one can conceive, a great many might judge him. It is wonderful how apt people are, and especially those who do not know much, to judge such as know far better than themselves. There is nothing so easy as to form a judgment, but whether there be adequate grounds and a sound conclusion are other questions. Here the apostle is said to have taken Timothy (whose mother was a Jewess and his father a Greek, himself a disciple of good report among the brethren) to go forth with him. But, singular to say, Paul circumcises him. What consternation this must have made amongst the brethren, especially the Gentiles! It was just after the battle of Gentile independence of circumcision had been fought and won. They surely must have thought that Paul was losing his wits himself to circumcise Timothy! Not even a Jew would have gone so far. Could it be that the apostle of the uncircumcision had at length succumbed to the adversary? or that he was swayed by his early prejudices so as to forget all his own past testimony to the cross and death and resurrection of Christ?

Now I do not hesitate to say, that so far from Paul being under legal prepossession in this act, on the contrary he never did anything in his course that showed him to be more completely above it. To circumcise Timothy was precisely what the law would not have done. It is well known that, if there was a mingled marriage (i. e., between a Jew and a Gentile), the law would have nothing to say to the offspring. Legally the Jewish father could not own his own children born of a Gentile mother, or *vice versa*. (See Ezra 10) Now Timothy being the fruit of such a marriage, there could be no claim, even if there was license, to circumcise him; and (just because there was no such claim, he being on the one side sprung of a Greek, though his mother was a Jewess, because it could not be commanded) Paul condescends out of grace to those who were on a lower ground, and stops their mouths most effectually. Grace knows how and when to bend, no less than to be as unflinching as a rock; but this is precisely what even believers in general are least able to understand. Righteousness (that is, consistency with our relationship) is not all. God is gracious, and so may we be by His grace, and thus feel how such as are really on a true and real ground of grace, and in a position according to the word of God, can have the truest sympathy with those who, though of God, are on a totally different ground, doing and saying what must astonish others possessed of little grace. Is not this a thing to be weighed? We may find, there is little doubt, the importance of it before we have got through our little career. It is a question that often comes up in various forms; but I believe there is only one means of solving it. While the heart thoroughly holds fast the truth of God, let us seek at the same time to understand the workings of that truth according to the grace of God.

This was the secret of the apostle's action here, but it did not hinder in the least his use of the decision arrived at in the recent council at Jerusalem. For "as they went through the cities, they delivered to them to keep the decrees that were ordained of the apostles and elders that were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily."

Then we find another important fact. Paul was stopped in his Asiatic journeyings, as we are told here, and "forbidden by the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia." So completely is the Spirit of God regarded as the directing person in the church. "After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit of Jesus (for such should be the text) suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us." In various ways, therefore, divine guidance was never wanting.

Accordingly they come to the first spot in Europe that was blessed with the preaching of the great apostle of the Gentiles. They came to Philippi, "which is the first* city of that part of Macedonia, a colony: and we were abiding in the city itself certain days."

* Philippi was not the "chief" city of Macedonia, but Thessalonica; and as Wieseler has shown, even if the subdivisions had been known then of Macedonia Prima, Sec. etc., Amphipolis (not Philippi) was the chief city of that part or district. The literal and correct translation therefore is "first," geographically speaking. Eckhel (iv. p. 477, ss.) copies the coin, COL. AVG. IVL. PHILIP. It was therefore probably a colony founded by C. J. Caesar, and afterwards increased by Augustus.

Here we read of Lydia's heart opened, and of her household. The action of the Spirit as to the family seems to have obtained remarkably among Gentiles; among the Jews, as far as I know, we do not hear of it. We have found already districts among the Jews, as also among the Samaritans, which were powerfully impressed (to say the least) by the gospel; but among the Gentiles families seem particularly visited by divine grace as recorded by the Spirit. Take for example Cornelius the jailor, Stephanas: indeed you find it over and over gain. This is exceedingly encouraging — especially to us.

But grace never acts in power without stirring up the enemy, and in ways calculated most to oppose and undermine. His tactics in Europe differed from those in Asia — at least in this the first place where the gospel was preached. The earliest case of any one or thing which the word of God names is, as a rule, remarkably characteristic. Applying this to what is in hand, we find that Satan's peculiar method in Europe was not so much by overt opposition but rather by affecting patronage. The maiden with the spirit of divination did not take the method of decrying the servants of the Lord but of applauding them. As it is said here, "she followed Paul and us (for Luke was now with the apostle) with the cry, These men are the servants of the Most High God, which show unto us the way of salvation." This she did many days, for at first the apostle avoided action to give no importance by any assaults of an open kind on the evil spirit. But after no notice was taken for some days, he being grieved at her boldness turns and says to the spirit, "I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." This roused the whole city.

The masters were troubled because the source of their gains was gone; and the magistrates disliked anything that produced an uproar. The result was that the multitude rose up together, the praetors rent off their clothes, and the apostle and his companion were beaten and cast into prison, with a charge to the jailor to keep them safely. There the Lord wrought marvellously. At midnight, while others slept, Paul and Silas in praying were singing the praises of God, who soon answered them. "Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened." The consequence of the truth afterwards presented was in God's grace the conversion of the jailor. It is not now the time to dwell on the details, beautiful as the scene is, and attractive to the heart as it may well be. The praetors were soon forced to acknowledge the wrong they had done in beating Romans uncondemned, contrary to the law of which they were the administrators. Thus the world was rebuked, the brethren comforted, and Paul and his companions departed to other fields of suffering and service.

The next chapter (Acts 17) sketches for us the first entrance of the gospel into Thessalonica. It may be noted how remarkably the kingdom was preached there. But those of Berea earned for themselves a still more honourable character, being distinguished not so much by the prophetic style of teaching addressed to them, as by their own earnest and simple-hearted research into the word of God.

Finally, the apostle is at Athens, and there he makes one of the most characteristic appeals preserved to us in this striking book, but an appeal by no means to the credit of human refinement and intellect. For there is no place where the apostle condescends more to the elementary forms of truth, than in that city of art, poetry, and high mental activity. His text is taken, we may say, from the well-known inscription on the altar, "To the unknown God." He would let them know what, in the midst of their boasted knowledge, they themselves confessed they knew not. His discourse was pregnant with suited truth, for he points out the one true God, who made the world and all things therein — a truth that philosophy never, acknowledged, and now denies, and would disprove if it were possible.

"God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth" — another truth that unbelief disowns — that God is not only the maker but the Lord, the master and disposer, of all — "He dwelleth not in temples made with hands." Thus the apostle finds himself at issue with both the Gentiles and the Jews. "Neither is worshipped (served) with men's hands, as though he needed anything," — contrary to all religion of nature, wherever and whatever it may be. "Seeing he giveth" (such is His character) "to all men life and breath and all things; and hath made of one blood:" here again he is at issue with man's ideas, especially with those of Hellenic polytheism, for the unity of the human race is a truth that goes with that of the true God. It was seen among men that various races had each their own national god, and thus naturally the falsehood of many gods was bound up with and

fostered the kindred pretension of many independent races of men. This was a darling idea of the pagan world. They held themselves to have sprung from the earth in some singularly foolish manner, at the same time maintaining that each was independent of the other. On the other hand, the truth which divine revelation discloses is that which man's mind never did discover, but, when propounded, at once brings conviction along with it. Is it not humbling that the most simple truth about the simplest fact should be entirely beyond the ken of the proudest intellects unaided by the Bible? One would think that man ought to know his own origin. It is just what he does not know. He must know God first, and when he does all else becomes plain. "He hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth."

Again, "He hath determined the times before-appointed" (everything is under His guidance and government); "and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after him, and find him ("God," it should be here, according to the best authorities: "The Lord" is not in keeping with the teaching in this place. He shows them that God is the Lord, but this is another matter), "though he be not far from every one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets," etc. Thus he turns the acknowledgment of their own poets against themselves, or rather against their idolatry. Strange to say that the poets, however fanciful, are wiser than the philosophers. How often they stumble in their dreams on things beyond that which they themselves would have otherwise imagined! Thus some of the poets among them (Cleanthes and Aratus) had said, "For we are also His offspring." "Forasmuch, then, as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead (the Divine) is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device." How clearly was shown the folly of their boasted reason! What can be simpler or more conclusive? Since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that God can be made by our hands. This is in effect what their practice amounted to. Gods of silver and gold were the offspring of men's art and imagination.

"And the times of this ignorance" (what a way to treat the boasting men of Athens!) "God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." Manifestly there is a thrust at conscience. This is the reason why he insists here on God's call to repent. It is no use to talk of science, literature, politics, religion. Old or new speculations in philosophy are alike vain. God is now enjoining on all everywhere to repent. Thus he puts the sage down with the savage, because God is brought in as the judge of all. It is evident that divine truth must be aggressive; it cannot but deal with every conscience that hears it throughout the world. The law might thunder its claims on a particular people; but the truth deals with everybody as he is before God. The ground of the appeal too is most serious: "Because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world." Solemn prospect! This he urges home on them, and in a manner peculiar but suitable to the moral condition of Athens.

God is about to judge the habitable earth (οἰκουμένην) in righteousness. He does not here speak of judging the dead. It is the sudden intervention of the man who, raised from the dead, is going to deal with this habitable earth. Such is the unquestionable meaning of the text. The "world" here means the scene dwelt in by man. It is in no way a question of the great-white-throne judgment. Certainly all that he put before them was admirably calculated to arouse them from their mythic dreams to the light of truth, without gratifying their love of the speculative. "He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance to all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."

The allusion to the resurrection became at once the signal for unseemly jest. "And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them." There was but little fruit even for the apostle and from

this wonderful discourse. Some, however, did cleave to him, and believed: "among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them."

Acts 18. But in the grossly voluptuous state of Corinth the gospel, strange to say, was to take a great and effectual hold on a certain part of the population. Not so at Athens: few were the souls, and comparatively feeble the work there. But in Corinth, proverbially the most corrupt of Grecian cities, how unexpected yet how good the ways of the Lord! He had much people in that city. It was an immense comfort, both in his labours there and afterwards, when the work seemed spoiled. He could still believe, and spite of all look for the recovery of those that had been turned aside. The Lord is ever kind and true; and so Paul went on with good courage, however tried and humbled on their account.

Here take note of another remarkable fact. The apostle does what is proscribed by all ecclesiastical canons, as far as I know, everywhere: that is to say, he works with his hands at the simple occupation of tent-making "And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timotheus were come" — he takes this as the occasion for testifying to the Jews fully — being "pressed" (not exactly in the spirit, as it is said in the common text, but) "in regard of the word," he testifies that Jesus was the Christ. "And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment," with the warning, "Your blood be upon your own head; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles."

Accordingly the work goes on among the Gentiles, though the Lord was not without witness among the Jews. And this leads to a vast deal of feeling and clamour: "and all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat." Here the ruler was not only unwilling to entertain the question, but supercilious, and indifferent to the general disorder.

Just at the same time another remarkable feature appears here. In Cencrea Paul shaves his head according to a vow. It is plain that, whatever might be the strength of divine grace, there was a certain concession to his old religious habits, even in the greatest of apostles, and the most blessed instrument of New Testament inspiration.

However this may be, the end of the chapter gives another remarkable witness of grace. Apollos is brought before us, taught by Aquila and Priscilla, who "took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." I doubt whether it would have been according to the will of God for a woman to have done so alone; but she, along with her husband, instructed him as they could. Now Priscilla, as I cannot doubt, knew more than her husband; it was therefore desirable that she should contribute her help. Still the Lord's ways are invariably wise; and it is very evident that it was in conjunction with her husband, not independently of him, that this grave task was carried on.

Another important fact opens Acts 19. Paul found at Ephesus a dozen disciples, who were in a very ambiguous position; for they were not exactly Jews, and they were certainly not in the true sense Christians: they were in a transition state between the two. Does this appear to you at all startling? It is likely that it may disturb those who are in the habit of thinking, or at least saying, that all persons must be in one of the two states — that it is impossible to be in a middle position between them. But this is not the fact. It is always well to face the word of God; and God has written nothing in vain.

I say, then, that these men were recognized at Ephesus as believers, but it is very evident that they were not resting on the work of the Lord Jesus. They had faith, they looked to His person; but they had not intelligently laid hold of His work for the peace of their souls. So when Paul comes there and finds these disciples, he says, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" Not the slightest doubt is started about their believing, but he *does* raise a very serious question about another thing: — "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" Why he asked this it is not for us to say for certain. It is

likely that he saw something that indicated to his penetrating eye souls not at rest and in the liberty of grace. In spirit they were still under the law. It is the state described in the latter part of Romans 7. Of course I use this description with reference to Romans 7 by anticipation, because that Epistle was not yet written. But people were in that state before it was written as well as since; and the object of the epistle was to deliver them out of it.

Paul then enquired, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost." It is not that they did not know the existence of the Spirit of God. Such is not at all the meaning of the text. All Jews had heard in the scripture of the Holy Ghost; and more particularly John's disciples were well instructed in the fact, not only of His existence, but that the Holy Ghost was about to be sent down on believers, or rather that they were going to be baptized with the Holy Ghost. This is what is referred to. Had that baptism taken place? They were not aware of it; they had not yet received the great blessing. Thus it is seen, they were believers, though they had not received the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Such is the account that scripture gives of their state.

It is well to note this, because we may find persons now in a state somewhat analogous. There are many souls who are not at all in liberty, not having yet received the Spirit of adoption. Yet are they persons that we can truly accept as born of God; they detest sin; they love holiness; they really adore the Lord Jesus, having no doubt at all as to His glory, and that He is the Saviour. For all this they are not able to — what they call — "apply" the truth to their own case and settled relationship. They cannot always appropriate the blessing. They are not at ease and at liberty in their souls. We must not put such people down as unbelievers, on the one hand; neither must we rest, on the other hand, as though they had received everything. Those are two errors to which many are prone. Scripture allows neither, perfectly providing for every case. What the apostle did was this: he was far from questioning the reality of their faith, but he showed that it was not yet exercised on the full object of faith. They had not, yet entered into the just results of redemption. Accordingly he enquires how this came to pass — to what they had been baptized. They say, To John's baptism. This explains all. John's baptism was only transitional. It was of God, but it was simply in prospect of the blessing, not in possession of it. Such too was the state of these men. The apostle then puts before them the truth. "They were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came upon them; and they spake with tongues."

This is highly important to be understood, though (I need not say) still more to be believed. We have the apostle in an exceptional way laying his hands on disciples in this condition, just as Peter and John laid their hands on the Samaritan believers who thereby received the Holy Ghost. Thus God takes particular pains to show that the apostle Paul had the same sign and voucher of his apostleship as attached to Peter and John before. We are not, however, to suppose that a man cannot receive the Holy Ghost except by such an act: this would be a false impression and a misuse of scripture. As I have said elsewhere, and sought to explain long ago, the two general cases of the gift of the Holy Ghost are entirely irrespective of any such act; the special cases, where hands were imposed, owed their existence to peculiar circumstances that do not call for detailed remarks at this late hour.

Then we hear of the mighty spread of the work, not only the power with which God clothed the apostle, but also that which rebuked the superstitious use of the name of Jesus by those who without faith pretended to it. The chapter ends with the tumult at Ephesus.

In Acts 20 we learn the definitive usage, which the Spirit sanctions and records for us, of the Lord's day, or the first day of the week, as the fitting time, for the breaking of bread. So we find it

among the Gentiles in Acts 20: 7. I am aware that there are those who seem to think there is no liberty to break bread on any other day. I cannot but differ from such a conclusion. There appears to me full liberty to break bread any day provided that some adequate or just reason call for it: Acts 2 is, to my mind, conclusive authority for this. At the same time, while there is liberty to break bread, wherever there arises a sufficient ground for it in the judgment of the spiritual on any day of the week, it is obligatory, if we may use such a term on such a theme, on all saints walking with the Lord to break bread on the Lord's day, remembering always that the obligation flows from the grace of Christ, and is perfectly consistent with the most thorough sense of liberty before the Lord. In short, then, the regularly sanctioned day for breaking bread among the Gentiles is the first day of the week (not of the month, or quarter, or year); but under special circumstances the early disciples used to break bread every day. This appears to be the true answer to questions raised on this point.

Finally, in the same chapter (without entering into particulars at present), we may note the meeting of the elders* with Paul, and the important truth that they are not thrown upon any successors to the apostle, nor does he speak of any successors in their own office, but "commends them to God and to the word of his grace." This is the more worthy of attention because he warns them of grievous wolves without, and perverse men from within. Thus there was every reason for speaking of succession, if it really possessed the place which tradition gives it, both to apostles on the one hand, and to elders on the other; but there is a marked absence of any such provision. Not only is it not pointed to, but a wholly different comfort is administered.

* It may be observed here that those whom the inspired historian calls "the elders of the church" (*i.e.*, in Ephesus) the apostle designates overseers, or bishops (ἐπισκόπους). They are not in scripture two orders of spiritual rulers but one office. It is not merely that the bishops were styled presbyters (the higher dignity including the lower), but the presbyters Paul calls bishops, which could only be because they are both descriptive of the same men and office. This is supposed also in Phil. 1: 1, 1 Tim. 3, Titus 1: 5, 7, 1 Peter 5: 1, 2. On the other hand presbyters never appointed to that office, though an apostle associated them with himself in laying hands on Timothy when he conferred on him a χάρισμα. But scripture never calls Timothy a presbyter or bishop, but an evangelist, though he was also employed of the Lord in a highly responsible place at Ephesus, and seems to have exercised a quasi-apostolic charge over the presbyters as well as the saints in general there.

I am sorry to add an instructive sample of the blinding influence of ecclesiastical tradition over a pious mind at an early day. It is a citation from Ireneaus' famous work against heresy (III. xiv. 2), or rather the Latin version which alone represents him here: — "In Mileto enim convocatis episcopis et presbyteris, qui erant ab Epheso et a reliquis proximis civitatibus, quoniam ipse festinaret," etc. Undeniably there is a double misstatement here: (1) the bishops and presbyters must be regarded as at least contrary to fact; (2) they were expressly of the church in Ephesus, not from other neighbouring cities. We cannot wonder that later writers of less integrity and singleness of eye than the martyr bishop of Lyons went farther and without scruple in the effort to justify the growing departure from the normal state of the church, its doctrines, ministry, and discipline, as laid down in God's word. I could not but consider the note of Massuet, the Benedictine editor, a disgrace to a Christian scholar, or even to an honest man, if one did not bear in mind that the eyes of such persons are useless spiritually when they read the Fathers.

Acts 21-28.

The closing chapters from 21 to the end of the book are devoted to an episode full of interest and

profit — Paul's course from Jerusalem to Rome. And here we find ourselves in an atmosphere considerably different from what we have had before. It is no longer the mighty power of the Holy Ghost, either inaugurating the great work of God on the earth at Jerusalem, nor His equally wonderful energy in breaking through the old bottles of Judaism, when grace flowed freely, first to Samaria, then to the Gentiles, and in principle, as we know, in due time to the ends of the earth. Neither have we the apostle separated, as it is said, unto the gospel of God. These were the three great divisions and the main contents of the book up to the point we are arrived at. But now the apostle is about to become a prisoner, nor this without warning. The Holy Ghost, as we may see on the surface of the verses I have read, admonished the apostle time after time; but the apostle shows us the most striking combination of what was truly heavenly in faith and life with the strongest clinging of heart to his brethren after the flesh. This is what makes the difficulty of appreciating his history by no means small. But one may say that what was infirmity must be allowed to be infirmity on the noblest side (if any thing be so, which I do not deny,) of the human heart. Nevertheless we have the immediate effect in the lesson that even this does force us into altogether new circumstances wherein God never fails to magnify Himself. He knows how to turn even that which may have been in itself mistaken to His own glory, and then He in grace forms new channels and suited ways, not without a righteous judgment of the error even if it were in the best, and so much the more remarkably because it was in the best. And this I believe to be the prominent lesson of these later chapters of the Acts.

Let us, however, pursue the course of the divine instruction.

The apostle goes on his way and finds disciples, and tarries among them, as we are told, at Tyre for "seven days." This seems to have been a common term of stay — we can readily conceive why. One great reason, I do not doubt, was to enjoy the fellowship of the saints together, to spend with the Christians in a new place that day which has the strongest possible claim on the heart that is true to Jesus — the first day of the week. This was expressly shown in Acts 20. The Spirit of God does not repeat the same express statement here. Nevertheless I do not think we are far astray if we connect the seven days of the apostolic visit with that which was stated plainly in verses 6, 7, of that chapter. At Troas it was said that "we abode seven days; and upon the first day of the week, when the disciples (or rather, we) came together to break bread, Paul preached." Here there is no such positive affirmation, but still the mention in a similar way of seven days with the disciples may well open a question for spiritual judgment what the motive was for such a term. I do not doubt myself that it was to have the joy of meeting all saints in each locality as opportunity served, and of cheering and strengthening them on their course.

No doubt the spiritual instincts of the children of God would lead them always to desire to be together. For my own part I cannot understand a child of God who on principle could abstain from any occasion that summoned round the name of the Lord the members of the household of faith. It appears to me that, far from being a waste of time or from any other object being of the same moment, it is simply a question whether we value Christ, whether we truly are walking in the Spirit, if we live in the Spirit, whether the objects of the constant active love of God are also in measure the objects of our love in Christ's name.

I think therefore that it is according to the Lord that the children of God should if practicable be together every day. To this the power of the Spirit would lead: only the circumstances in which we are placed in this world necessarily hinder it. Therefore the true principle according to the word of God is a coming together whenever it is practicable; and we do well to cherish a real exercise of heart and conscience in judging what the practicability is, or rather whether the impracticability be real or imaginary. Very often it will turn out to be in our will, an excuse for spiritual idleness, a want of

affection to the children of God, and a want of sense of our own need. Accordingly obstacles are allowed in own minds, such as the claims of business, or the family, or even the work of the Lord. Now all these have their place. Surely God would have all His children to seek to glorify Him, whatever may be their duty. They have natural duties in this world; and the wonderful power of Christianity is seen in filling with what is divine that which without Christ would be merely of nature; and this should ramify the whole course of a man's life after he belongs to Christ. And so again the claims of children for instance, or parents, or the like, cannot be disputed; but then if they are really taken up for Christ, I do not think it will be found that it is to the loss of either parents or children, or that the little time is missed in the long run that is spent in seeking the strength of the Lord, and in communion according to our measure. We ought to be open for both; and we shall ourselves never have any power to help unless we have the sense of the need of help from others; but both will be found together.

It appears to me that through the blessed apostle the Spirit of God gives us in these passing touches, and in recounting them valuable hints as to the spirit that animated him in his course. We may know in some slight degree what it is to be long on a journey without due rest, food, or shelter; and passing from one country and continent to another was by no means then the easy thing that it is in modern times. We have all the habit of being rapidly enough in motion, and anxious to get to the end. We can understand how the apostle, with so many hindrances in the way, might feel the comfort of these repeated stays, seven days in one place, seven days in another, as we have seen, expressly showing the desire of his heart after communion as well as confirming their souls. Such is what we find in this blessed man's course: in our little measure surely it ought to be so with us.

On this occasion, however, the disciples told Paul through the Spirit that he should not go up to Jerusalem. This was serious. There is no other comment upon it. We know not what the apostle said or did, further than this, that the apostle certainly went up to Jerusalem all the same. "When we had accomplished these days, we departed and went our way." Then we have the beautiful scene of the wives and the children. This has its value. There is a marked absence of allusion to children in the Acts of the Apostles, where much is said among men and saints and servants of God. But we do hear of them in that, which is confessedly suitable. Here they are brought forward, but not as a superstitious church ere long did, among other things, to receive a portion from the table of the Lord: things were soon to change if not to arrive at that pass yet; but we do see them in the expression of the love that filled all, and the desire to reap to the very last moment the blessing of having an apostle in their midst. In short, the children were there no less in token of respectful love to him who was going, but also set in the attitude to receive whatever blessing the Lord might be pleased to bestow upon them. "And they all brought us on our way with wives and children," it is said, "till we were out of the city, and we kneeled down and prayed, and, when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship, and they returned home again."

Another means of letting us into the ways of God among His people is found at Caesarea. "We entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven." We cannot well have forgotten his labours in earlier days at Samaria, and round about. But we are told here what we had not learnt then, that "the same man had four daughters." As unmarried, they were remaining in their father's house; and they prophesied. There is no reason why a woman should not have this or most other gifts as much as a man. I do not say the same kind of gift always. Surely God is wise and gives suited gifts whether to men or women, or, it may be, I was going to say, to children. The Lord is sovereign and knows how, as putting all who now believe in the body of Christ, so also to give them a work suitable to the purposes of His own grace. Certainly He did clothe these four daughters of Philip with a very special spiritual power. They had one of the highest characters of spiritual gift — they prophesied. And

if they were invested with this power, certainly it was not to be put under a bushel but to be exercised: the only question is how.

Now scripture, if we be but subject, is quite explicit as to this. In the first place, prophecy stands confessedly in the highest rank of teaching, but it is teaching. Next, the apostle is himself the person who tells us that he does not suffer a woman to teach. This is clearly decisive; if we bow to the apostle as inspired to give us God's mind, we ought to know that it is not the place of a Christian woman to teach. He is speaking on this topic, not in 1 Cor. 11, but in 1 Cor. 14 He is drawing the line between men and women in 1 Timothy 2. The latter epistle forbids the women as a class to teach. The other and still closer word in the former epistle, commands them to be silent in the assembly. At Corinth, apparently, there was some difficulty as to godly order and the right relations of men and women, because the Corinthians, being a people of speculative habits, instead of believing, reasoned about things. It was the tendency of the Greek mind to question everything. They could not understand that, if God had given a woman as good a gift as a man, she was not equally to use it. We can all feel their difficulty. Such reasoners are not wanting now. The fault of it all was, and is, that. God is left out. His will was not in the thought of the Corinthians. There was no waiting on the Lord to ascertain what was His mind. Clearly, if He has called the church into being, it cannot but be made for His own glory. He has His own mind and will about the church, and He has therefore spread out in His word how all the gifts of His grace are to be exercised.

Now the passages in 1 Cor. 14 and in 1 Tim. 2 appear to me to be perfectly plain as to the relative place of the woman, whatever may be her gift. This may be said to decide only as to one sphere — the assembly — where the woman, according to scripture, is precluded from the exercise of her gift. I may say further, that in those days it did not occur to them that women would go forth publicly to preach the word. Bad as the state of things was in early days, they seem to me to have looked for a greater sense of modesty on the part of women. There is not the slightest doubt that many females with the best intentions have thus preached, as they do still. They, or their friends, defend their course by appeals to the blessing of God on the one hand, and on the other to the crying need of perishing sinners everywhere. But nothing can be more certain than that scripture (and this is the standard) leaves them without the slightest warrant from the Lord for their line of conduct. Public preaching of the gospel on the part of women is never contemplated in scripture. It was bad enough for the Corinthians to think that they might speak among the faithful. It might have seemed that there women had the shelter of godly men; that there they were not offensively putting themselves forward before all sorts of people in the world, as must be the case in evangelising. Among the godly they may have imagined a veil, so, to speak, drawn over them more or less. But in modern times the end is supposed to justify the means. Gross as the Corinthians were, I must confess that to my mind the plans of our own day seem even more grievous, and with less excuse for them.

However this may be, we see here that the daughters of Philip did prophesy. No doubt it was in their father's house, as already intimated: otherwise the word of God would thus be set one part against another.

While they tarried there, a certain prophet came down from Judea, who repeats the warning to the apostle. Binding his own hands and feet with Paul's girdle he declares, "So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." And thus it was accomplished to the letter. Nevertheless, spite of the tears of the saints, spite of the warning of this prophet, as of others before, Paul, with mind made up, answers, "What mean ye to weep and to break my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

After all the apostle goes accordingly, and in Jerusalem the brethren receive him gladly. "And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present." It is evident from this picture that all ecclesiastically was in due order at Jerusalem. An apostle was there who had an apparently high place of local dignity. Besides there were the ordinary overseers whom the Holy Ghost had set as guides and leaders in the assembly (that is, the local charge of elders). "And when Paul had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry." They owned the way in which the Lord had been glorified. At the same time their word to him is, "Thou seest, brother, how many thousands" (the true meaning is tens of thousands, myriads, which may probably give some a larger thought than is familiar of the vast and rapid spread of the gospel at that time among that nation) "of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law; and they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying, that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs." This was a mistake. Such was not the course of the apostle.

What Paul really taught was the impropriety of putting Gentiles under the law: he did not interfere with the Jews at this time, Later a distinct and peremptory message came from the Holy Ghost; but the process of the Lord with them was gradual — His method with His ancient people I deem of importance for us to learn and imitate. It is perfectly true that it was in the mind of God in due time to bring out fully the deliverance of both Jew and Gentile from the law; but this was not done all at once, at least as regards the Jew. What the apostle set himself decidedly against was the effort to bring the Gentiles under law; and this was precisely what Pharisaic brethren were zealous for. Whether Judaizing Christians or the Gentiles themselves took up the law, the apostle did most resolutely reject and condemn the fatal error. But as regarded the Jews themselves there was the truest forbearance, flowing from, not characteristic largeness of heart only, but tender consideration for scrupulous consciences. If God had not yet sent out the final word that told them the old covenant was ready to vanish away, how could he who so closely followed His ways be hasty? The early days were really a time of transition, where Christ was ministered first to Jew and then to Gentile. The Gentile, never having been under law, was far more simple than the Jew in appreciating the liberty of the gospel. The Jew was tolerated in his prejudices until the closing message came from God, warning them of the danger of apostasy from the gospel through their adhesion to the law.

Having dwelt on this in sketching the epistle to the Hebrews, there is the less reason to say more about it now. But that epistle was to the Hebrew believers the last trumpet which summoned them to renounce all connection with the old system. Up to that time there had been a gradual transition, the gap widening, the difference more pronounced, but still every tie was not broken till this the final call. Such a way strikes me as worthy of our God — a way which to our precipitate minds might seem somewhat difficult, because we have been mostly trained as Gentiles. Since we have entered into the truth of God more perfectly, we have seen the enormous mischief of bringing in the law and mixing it up with the gospel.

Let us remember then that, whilst the Holy Ghost always maintained liberty for the Gentile, there was unquestionably a time of waiting on the Jew. Even the apostle Paul was no exception to patience with their prejudices. As to the twelve, they seem to have feebly enough entered into this liberty from the law. Doubtless Paul, as being apostle of the Gentiles, called from heaven by the risen Jesus, and witness of sovereign grace, apprehended it after a different sort and richer measure; but we shall find that even he could warmly sympathise to a great extent with the feelings of a Jew. He is the one to whom, under God, we are indebted for knowing anything about Christianity in its full form and real strength; yet, for all that, it is quite evident that he had, if not Jewish prejudice, certainly the warmest

Jewish attachments; and, in point of fact, it was the strength of his affection to the ancient people of God that brought him into the trouble recorded in these concluding chapters of this book, the Acts of the Apostles.

This, we must remember, to a certain extent, may be viewed as an answer to the love found in our blessed Lord Himself; but then there were striking differences. In our Lord, love for Israel was, as all else, perfect: there was not, nor could be, the faintest admixture of a blemish. We know well the bare hint of such a thought would be repulsive to our faith and our love for His person. To the Christian it is impossible to conceive it for an instant. At the same time, we know His love for that people was felt and expressed up to the last. It was His persistent love which brought Him into the circumstances of utter rejection when God's time was come, and He suffered all the consequence of their hatred (though infinitely more also for sin in atonement, which was His alone). Now the apostle knew what it was to love Israel and suffer for that love. Not only among the Gentiles, but among the saints, the more he loved the less, he was loved. This was true; but, if in general true there, emphatically was it to be verified among the Jews. Thus stands the wonderful fact in the history of the apostle Paul: the very man who brought out the church distinctly, and showed its heavenly character as none other approached; the very man that proved the absolute abolition of the old ties and relations, swallowing up all in Christ exalted to the right hand of God: — he is the man whose heart retained the strongest attachment of love to the ancient people of God. And I have not the smallest doubt that God gives us in this case a grave but gracious warning of its danger. Were it an apostle, were it the greatest of the apostles, still Paul was not Christ, and what in Christ could be and was absolute perfection, in Paul was not. Yet Paul was a man who puts all that have been since that day into the shade.

If I may express my feelings here, let me say that I felt nothing a greater trial to my own spirit than touching on this very theme. I could not point out any one thing I shrink from more than having the appearance of reflecting on such a servant of Christ. Yet God has written the history of all this, and He has written it surely not for sentiment and silence, but for utterance and common profit. He has written it, no doubt, that we should feel our own great shortcomings, and that we should beware of our spirit in setting up to condemn such an one as the great apostle of the Gentiles.

Still, I repeat, the Holy Ghost has recorded here His own warnings on the one side, and on the other the refusal of the apostle to act on them, if I may venture so to say, though it were through fulness of tender love, and an ever-burning affection for his brethren after the flesh. Alas! when we think of our faults; when we reflect how little they spring from anything that is lovely; when we recollect how much they are mixed with. worldliness, and impatience, and pride, and vanity, and self; when we observe that he was so deeply chastened, and met with such a distressing stop to the world-wide work which God had given him, in what a light do our faults appear! He had a pressure of trial such as few men ever knew beside himself; and, what might embitter it to him, all this the natural effect of slighting the admonitions of the Spirit of God by yielding to his undying love for a people out of whom, after all, he had been divinely separated to the work the Lord had given him to do. God having given us the account, whatever may be one's own feelings, can it be doubted that we are bound to read, and by grace to seek to understand? Yea, not this only, but may we apply it for the present blessing of our souls, and for our progress in the path of Christ here below, whatever it may be. We may have the smallest possible sphere; but, after all, a saint is a saint, and very dear to God, who magnifies Himself in the least of those that are His.

It is assuredly for our profit and to God's own glory that the Holy Ghost has written this remarkable appendix to the history — the onward history — of the Acts of the Apostles. Here we have a check which brings in new things, the fruit of persisting in going up to Jerusalem spite of the Spirit's

testimony against it. The more blessed the man, the more serious the miss of firm footing. There is one step outside what the Spirit enjoined, whatever may be the mingling of that which is beautiful and lovely; at the same time, it was not the full height, so to speak, of the guidance of the Spirit of God. This exposed the apostle to something more, as it always does; and, indeed, so much the more, because it was such an one as Paul. The same principle is plain in David's life. The lack of energy, which might have been comparatively a little hurt to another, became the gravest snare to David; and, found out of the path of the Lord, he soon slips into the meshes of the devil. Not that I mean anything in the least degree tantamount in the apostle Paul; far from it; for, indeed, in this case the apostle was mercifully preserved from anything that gave the smallest activity to the corruption of nature. It was simply a defect, as it appears to me, of watching against his own love for Israel, and thus setting aside, consequently, the warnings that the Spirit gave. The tears and appeals seem to have rather stimulated and strengthened his desire, and accordingly this exposed him to what was a snare, not immoral but religious, through listening to others below his own measure. He took the advice of James.

"What is it, therefore? The multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee. We have four men which have a vow on them; them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads" — what a position for the apostle to find himself in! — "and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing." Without pretending that there was nothing in the previous line of Paul tending to this (compare Acts 18: 18), it is evident that the object was to give the appearance that he was a very good Jew indeed. Was this warrantable, or the whole truth? Was he not a somewhat ambiguous Jew? I believe that, as we have seen, there was an undisguised respect for what once had the sanction of God. And here was just the difference in his case from our blessed Lord's perfect ways. Up to the cross, we all know, the legal economy or first covenant had the sanction of God; after the cross, in principle it was judged. The apostle surely had weighed and appraised it all; he did not require any man to show him the truth. At the same time there was no small mingling of love for the people; and we know well how it may intercept that singleness of eye which is the safeguard of every Christian man.

The apostle then listens to his brethren about a matter in which he was incomparably more competent to form a sound judgment than any of them, Accordingly he suffers the consequence. He is found purifying himself along with the men who had a vow. He enters the temple, "to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them. And when the seven days were almost ended" — which it is well known had to do with the Nazarite vow — "the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people and laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help! This is the man that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place; and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place." The next verse shows us why. It was a mistake; nevertheless it was enough to rouse the feelings of all Israel. "All the city was moved, and the people ran together," and the issue was a frightful tumult, and the apostle was in danger of being killed by their violent hands, when the chief captain comes and rescues him. This paves the way for the remarkable address which the apostle delivers in the Hebrew tongue, given in the next chapter. Acts 22.

The mention of the Hebrew tongue appears to confirm the true key to the difference between this account of the apostle's conversion and others. It is not precisely in this book as in the gospels, where a different way of presenting the same fact or discourse of our Lord Jesus obtains, according to the character of the design in hand; yet is it the same principle at bottom. Even in the same book a difference of design may be traced. There may be observed this in the three accounts in which Paul's

conversion is given: first, the historical account; secondly, Paul's own statement to the Jews; and, thirdly, Paul's to the Jews and Gentiles as to the Roman governor and king Agrippa. This is the true reason of the difference there is in the manner in which facts are presented. We need not enter minutely into detail.

On examination you will find what is said to be correct, that here as is evident he adopts a language which was for the very purpose of arresting the attention in appealing to the affections of the Jew; he speaks in their familiar tongue, and accordingly gives an account of his conversion in such a way as he considered conciliatory to the feelings of the Jews. To these there was one thing which was unpardonable; but this was the very glory of his apostleship, the direct object for which God raised him up. Thus, with the most gracious of intentions, and with the warmest love towards his countrymen after the flesh, the apostle gives an account of his conversion and the miraculous circumstances that attended it, of his meeting with Ananias, a devout man according to the law, which he takes particular pains to state there, and of the trance into which he afterwards fell at Jerusalem in the temple whilst praying. But he tells them out that which he must easily have known (and so much the more because of his accurate understanding of the feelings of the Jews) would rouse them to the uttermost: in short, he lets them know that the Lord called him and sent him to the Gentiles.

It was quite enough. The moment the sound of "Gentiles" reached their ears, all their feelings of Jewish pride took fire, and at once they cried out, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! It is not fit that he should live." As they cried and cast off their clothes to throw dust into the air, the chiliarch commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging. There he put himself in the wrong; for Paul was not only a Jew but a citizen of Rome; and he was so by a better title than the commandant who thus ordered him to be bound. The apostle quietly states the fact. I dare not judge him, though there may be some Christians who would: he was clearly entitled to remind those that were the guardians of the law of their own transgression. He uses no means further, but merely tells them how things stood.

It appears to me that it is a morbid squeamishness rather than true spiritual wisdom that would cavil at such an act on the part of the apostle. Every one knows that it is easy to be a martyr in theory, and that those who are martyrs in theory are seldom so in practice. Here was one destined to torture, and really one of the most blessed witnesses of the Lord all through. Faith enables one to see things clearly. Should the guardians of law break the law? Faith never teaches one to court danger and difficulty, but to walk the path of Christ in peace and thankfulness. The Lord has not called His servants to desert it. I dare say some of us may have been struck with the fact that the Lord told them when they were persecuted in one city to flee to another. Assuredly this is not courting martyrdom, but the very reverse; and if the Lord Himself gave such a word to His servants in Judea and to His disciples (as is well known), it appears to me that it is at least hazardous without grave spiritual ground to face a danger so decided of condemning the guiltless who are entitled to our reverence. Here we have no sign of anything said by the Holy Ghost in the form of warning; and therefore, observe, it is not in the least degree a setting aside what is clearly laid down elsewhere. We have seen the Holy Ghost admonishing the apostle, when carried far in ardent love, and we can easily see that He had a sovereign title, both to guide and to correct — even if it were an apostle.

Nothing of the kind appears here. It was a fact which the Roman officer had overlooked illegally, and the apostle was entitled to state the fact. It was in no way a going to law. Need it be said that such a recourse to the powers that be would have little become a follower and servant of Jesus? It was in no way using such means as man would have employed; it was the simplest possible statement of a circumstance serious in the eye of the law, and it had its effect. "And as they bound him with thongs,

Paul said to the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chiliarch, saying, Take heed what thou doest; for this man is a Roman." The chiliarch enquires accordingly. You must remember that to say you were a Roman, if you were not, was a capital offence against the government, which of course they never failed to visit with the severest punishment. To claim it untrue was too dangerous to be often attempted, as it exposed a man to the imminent risk of death. The officials of the Roman empire were rarely disposed therefore to question such a claim, especially where it was made by a man who, on the face of it, was such a character as the apostle, little as he might be known to any of them.

So "straightway," it is said, "they departed from him which should have examined him, and the chiliarch also was afraid after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him." However, man strives to preserve his dignity after his own fashion. "On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands," (that is to say, he leaves him still a prisoner which he had no right to do,) "and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them." The apostle seeks no further redress, and was as far as possible from the desire or thought of punishing the man for the mistake he had made. For this evidently would have been a departure from grace: but the occasion helps to give a little insight into this wonderful man of God. For when the high priest Ananias commanded those that stood by to smite him that said he had lived in all good conscience, Paul turns quickly upon him with the words "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall" (and so He did); "for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law? And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people." Acts 23.

This is a fine instance of the most simple, and at the same time admirable, way in which grace recovers, even if there be a momentary slip of haste mingling with it. There can be no doubt at all that the high priest had acted in a way entirely contrary to the law. There was therefore an indisputable right to rebuke him. At the same time I suppose that his decided character, and his keen sense of the glaring injustice, did betray itself in his utterance. Further, it is an instance of what is found often elsewhere in Scripture. God may be with a deed which on one side of it may have haste mingling with it, but on the other real truth and righteousness. What was done here by the high priest was glaringly contrary to the law of which he was the professed administrator. Nor certainly did God permit these solemn words to fall to the ground without bearing fruit. Paul at once, however, corrects himself, and owns that had he known him to be the high priest, he would not have spoken so; that is to say, whatever might be the character of the man, Paul was not one to lower the office. He would leave it to God to judge that which was unworthy of it.

There is another thing that claims our notice. Is there not a certain peculiarity discernible in a measure in the apostle now? First of all there was haste of spirit. Is there as firm treading as before in the path where the power of the Spirit of God rested on him? Do we not find an adroitness, may I venture to say, though wishing in no way to utter a word too much, as is easily done? But still is there not a cleverness in the way in which the apostle, when he perceived that one part of the council were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, cried out, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of Pharisees;* of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question"?

*The plural form is recommended to us by the most ancient uncials, some good cursives, the Vulgate and the Syriac; the singular prevails in the great majority of copies and versions. Being more natural or customary, though far less energetic, we can understand copyists falling into it.

This does not seem according to the simple and full activity of the Spirit of God that we have seen in the apostle when he was away from Jerusalem. He had gone where he had been divinely warned not to go; and it matters not who it is, if it were even the greatest of the apostles, is there not a sensible difference when there is the smallest divergence from the peaceful guidance of the Holy Ghost? And if this is true of him, what shall we say of ourselves? Do not allow your lips to utter strong things about the apostle Paul; but let your own consciences, and let mine, take heed to our own ways, and above all beware of this — that we be not found slighting one word that comes to us from the Holy Ghost. Let us weigh and cherish every expression of God's mind. In this ease the apostle Paul could not doubt it. It was not doubt; but he strengthened himself now that the time was come to suffer. He had made up his mind for the worst that man might or could do. Was it all that was there? In truth there was more than this; but I think the comparative lack of calm, the exposure to haste, and the other features that appear in this remarkable history, are meant to be signs to our souls of the real truth of the case as it now stood.

The consequence was soon apparent on this occasion. The diversion produced was no doubt what men would call politic; that is, the apostle designed to divide and conquer. He made good use of the one party that had whatever there was of zeal and orthodoxy. There is not the smallest pandering to the Sadducees, which would have been far from the Spirit of God. Now I am very far from saying or implying any unworthy ways; but I do mean that there was a kind of availing himself of the difference that reigned between these that held to the word of God with, at any rate, an outward religious respect, and those that despised it; and this is a danger that no man is free from, particularly in circumstances of danger. The apostle yielded to it then. He stated the fact that the hope and resurrection of the dead were in question; but still the question arises, What was his motive for putting it so? What does the Spirit of God bring out before us here? Was it simply the truth? Was it only Christ? I doubt so.

It seems clear that the discerning eye of the apostle saw the horrible state of the high priest and his party, — that whatever might be the honour of the office, yet, in the defiled and defiling hands that now held it, it was only used for their own worst purposes against the truth and grace of God. Accordingly he availed himself of the strong feeling of the sounder part of the nation, and thus gained what might have seemed unexpected adherents among the Pharisees. It did not give him after all the advantage. To the believer is not this always the result? I doubt very much the weight of such a gain. Have we not learnt that the true gain is Christ? and that to take our side unqualifiedly with the Lord, by God's grace to shut our eyes to all consequences, and our ears to all censure, and just go on holding to that which we know is acceptable in His eyes and for His own glory, — is not this the only true path of service, as it certainly is the precursor of victory? In this case it would be a victory unmixedly for the Master. Such an idea as one's own victory ought not to be in a Christian man's mind. Let our desires be simply for the Lord — for His grace and truth, for His own work and glory in the church. His name is ill-served by making use even of the most reputable of His adversaries. Those zealous for the law, one cannot but know, are opposed to the gospel, — the Pharisee no less than the Sadducee. The apostle presents to the multitude "the hope and resurrection of the dead." He does not commit himself to speaking about Jesus; he does not say a word of the gospel. Had he brought in either, all would have come to nothing: the Pharisee would have resented the word just as much as the Sadducee. Leaving out what was adverse to his purpose, he puts forward that which he knew would set one part of his enemies against the other.

Yet here was vouchsafed no small comfort from the Lord to His servant. "And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into

the castle. And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." What a proof of what the Lord is, even in (yea, because of) those very circumstances when the apostle's heart might have been exceedingly cast down! He had persisted in going up to Jerusalem, and brought himself into what certainly looks like a false position, and as a fact exposed him to a number of disasters and painful oppositions. The Lord at this very time, when things looked gloomiest, appeared to His servant, and comforted him. Instead of a word of reproach, on the contrary it is all that could bid him good cheer.

How good the Lord is! How perfect in His ways! He knows how to deal with a mistake whenever there is one, while He righteously deals with it so much the more in one who ought not to have made it, a mistake in his case being a thousand times more serious than in another. Nevertheless, the Lord has nothing but comfort to administer at such a time. "Be of good cheer, for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness of me in Rome." He was not going to be killed. This was just before the conspiracy appeared. What could man do? Why should he be afraid then? The Lord meant him to go to Rome: his heart's desire was to go there. That is what his heart was set upon next to Jerusalem; and he had his way in going to Jerusalem; and now the Lord was about to take him to Rome. To Rome he was going, but he was to visit it bearing the marks of having been up to Jerusalem. He was going to Rome a prisoner; bringing the message surely of the grace of God, but not without the experience of what it cost to have yielded to his love for the ancient people of God. He was going to Rome with a deeper sense of what his true calling was. His allotted work lay among the Gentiles — pre-eminently and especially among the uncircumcision. Why did he not cleave simply and solely to his calling?

Nor were the foes of the gospel scrupulous, spite of their boasted attachment to the law of God. A conspiracy was forming among the unhappy Jews, and the Lord in His providence brings it to light by one that was kinsman of the apostle, to whose heart the ties of flesh and blood appealed with some strength, if there were no higher motive. No doubt he must have been a Jew to have been in the secrets of that portion of the nation which was bent upon the destruction of the apostle. He divulges the secret, first to Paul, subsequently to the chiliarch. Accordingly Lysias (for this was his name) gets ready a detachment of soldiers, and horsemen, and spearmen, during the night, and sends Paul to Felix the governor with a letter. Little did the Roman think that his letter was to be read by you and me; little did he know that there was an eye that looked him through and through as he wrote. That the false and the true should be proclaimed on the housetops he never counted on. "Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix, sendeth greeting. This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them; then came I with the troop and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman." He understood nothing of the sort; he was merely deceiving his superior, seeking in fact to make capital out of that which was error and fault; for, as we have seen, he began with a positive infraction of Roman law. He had bound, and this for the purpose of scourging, one no less a citizen than himself. He was guilty of claiming credit and zeal, where he had been both remiss and hasty. Oh, how little does the world think that the secrets of the most private letter, — the counsels of the cabinet, — the movements of kings, of governors, and ministers of state, of military chiefs and their men, no matter who or what, are all before One who sees all and forgets nothing.

Acts 24. Paul, however, is rescued; and now comes another scene. Ananias, the high priest, descends with the leaders to try their fortune before the governor with the captive. On this occasion they hire an orator to plead for them. If he begins with the grossest flattery and pomposity of speech, the apostle answers with as strikingly admirable and quiet dignity, exactly suited to the circumstances.

Here the apostle, then, when the governor beckoned him to speak, explains how utterly false were

all the charges of this hired rhetorician. He loved his nation too well instead of being in anywise their troubler, as he had been represented. "As thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogue, nor in the city." There was therefore no such case as Tertullus had set forth: "We have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes; who also hath gone about to profane the temple." He had only been a few days in Jerusalem, and was there worshipping, not seeking to trouble anybody. "Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: and have hope towards God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." Then he frankly states what had brought him up on this occasion. "I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings." He really did love them. "Whereupon," he says, "certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult; who ought to have been here before thee, and object what wrong they had against me." But the witnesses were not found. In point of fact, there was nothing tangible to allege against him. It was merely the outburst of priestly hatred and popular fury, followed by a conspiracy formed to murder; and when this failed, the effort was to bring about a judicial condemnation. Who could fail to see the mere will and malice of man? It had no other origin or character.

"When Felix heard these things, he adjourned them, saying, When Lysias the chiliarch shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter. And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty." His wise experienced eye at once saw how things were: there was not the slightest ground for the charges against the apostle. Hence the unusual order not of liberty only, but, that none of his acquaintance were to be forbidden to come or to minister to him. Nay, more than this: "When Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith of Christ." But there was no compromise: he heard what he did not expect. It was not the resurrection now; it was an appeal to conscience morally, or, as it is said here, "He reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." All has its season, and this was a word exactly suited to the man and the woman to whom Paul preached. It was well timed. Any one who is at all acquainted with the history of this personage — for he is an historical character — knows that he was peculiarly guilty, and that these words of the apostle were directly levelled at, and a condemnation therefore of, his moral delinquency.

Felix trembles, accordingly, and talks about hearing him at another time; but that convenient time never came. "He hoped also that money should have been given him." How truly, therefore, and how seasonably, had Paul "reasoned to him of righteousness!" "He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him." Besides, you see the character of the man in what follows. "After two years Porcius Festus came in Felix's room: and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound." There was no justice to be got out of this unjust judge. It was not that he wanted sense, or wisdom, or judgment. He had all these, and so much the worse for him; but he was willing to sacrifice everything for his own ends. He had been foiled in his desire for money; and now to please those Jews whom he heartily despised — willing to do something that would ingratiate himself with them without costing him anything — he leaves Paul bound.

Festus in due time appears to our view in the next chapter (Acts 25) He had the same desire. He was no better than his predecessor. Festus proposes in a singular way that Paul should go up to

Jerusalem. This, was an unheard of thing for a Roman governor — the chief representative of the empire — to send one who had been brought before him back to Jerusalem to be judged by the Jews. Paul at once takes his stand on the well-known principle of the Roman empire that ought to have guided Festus. He says, "I stand at Caesar's judgment-seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. But if I be an offender, and have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die; but if there be none of these things whereof they accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar." This is clearly a matter of spiritual judgment. Paul had now committed himself to this course, as later he actually went before Caesar. It was irrevocable. There was no human possibility of change now. He had uttered the word; before Caesar he must go. Nevertheless, a short time after this we find Agrippa comes down, and the Roman governor, knowing well the active mind of the king, tells him the story of Paul. He felt his own weakness in having to do with such a case, and he knew the interest of Agrippa. Agrippa accordingly tells the governor that he would like to hear the man himself.

On the next day, "when Agrippa therefore was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chiliarchs and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth." And here we find a remarkably fine contrast with all the glitter and pomp of the court. The king himself was a most capable man, but destitute of moral purpose. His wife, however she might be favoured naturally, was alas! a woman of no character whatever. Both of them were under the most painful cloud of suspicion even in the minds of the heathen themselves, not to speak of the Jews. These are the persons who, with the Roman governor, sit in judgment upon the apostle. And then comes forth the prisoner bound with chains. But oh what a chasm separated them from him! What a difference in the eyes of God! What a sight it was to Him to behold these judges dealing with such a man without one shred to cover them of what was of Himself — nay, with that which was most shameful and debasing. In all the splendour of earth's rank and dignity they sat to hear the poor but rich prisoner of the Lord. And Agrippa (Acts 26) said to him, "Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself: I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee." If we find the full peace and blessedness of this honoured man of God, what the Lord wrought, and the mighty power of His grace, we see the most dignified yet lowly courtesy towards those who listened, Agrippa especially. "Because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently."

He expounds therefore all his history, how he had been trained from his youth in the strictest sect among the Jews, and again mentions how he was judged for the hope of the promise made of God to "our" fathers. Thus he reasons on the resurrection: "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you if God raises the dead?" He at once brings in this which every Pharisee acknowledged, and which was the main test of orthodoxy among the Jews. This is applied to the history of Jesus of Nazareth. In fact, all turned on it. If it was true that God had raised Him from the dead, what was the position of the Jews, and what the glory of Jesus? All turned therefore on the resurrection.

Then he points out the facts of his own conversion. It was not favourable circumstances that had thrown him in the way of the gospel; it was the very reverse of attachment to the Christians or of any lukewarmness toward the law. All his prepossessions were for Israel, all his prejudices against the gospel. Nevertheless while he had carried this to the uttermost, while with the authority of the chief priests he had sought to persecute them to death, the grace of God surmounted all either of religious ties or religious hatred in the heart of Paul. "When I went to Damascus," he says, "with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the

brightness of the sun."

And not more surely was the heavenly light which streamed upon the apostle above all nature's light, than the grace which God showed that day completely eclipsed all that was of man in his heart and previous history. All disappeared before the all-overcoming strength of the goodness of God in Christ. "And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against goads. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." The work was done. I say not that there was all the peace and blessedness he was afterwards to enjoy, but there was effected then the entrance of that spiritual light of Christ that dealt with his conscience in all its depths. At once, down to the very roots of his moral being, all was stirred up, and the good seed, the seed of everlasting life, was sown underneath. He is bidden to rise and stand upon his feet. "For I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee."

The word is not exactly as we have it — "delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles." It is hard here to see the propriety of that term "delivering" in our common Bibles. In this connection it was not a question so much of a rescue as of taking him out from the people and from the Gentiles. The Lord was severing him from the Jew no less than the Gentile. It is also more than Peter speaks of in Acts 15 (taking out from the Gentiles a people for His name); which we have seen already, as it was of prime importance to insist on it at the great council of Jerusalem. It was of course still true that God is taking out a people for His name; but in the case of Saul of Tarsus the Lord speaks of taking him out from the Jew no less than the heathen. It is a separation therefore unto the new work of God from both Jew and Gentile. "Unto whom," speaking of the Gentiles, "now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified through faith that is in me."

Nor was Paul disobedient to the heavenly vision. He bowed to the Lord. He was right, as became a man taught of God. And he "showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they, should repent and turn to God, and do works worthy of repentance." For these were the true causes of Jewish hostility.

There was no setting himself up against the law. God forbid that this should ever be an object for a Christian man! He does not call us to a negative testimony, even if legitimate; He calls us to a task far more truly of Himself. It is not against evil so much as for good that God gives us a mission. We must hold this fact always as a fixed principle. I grant you that he who is called out to a purpose that is worthy of God does judge what is evil; nay, not merely this, but judges especially what looks ever so good. Correcting evil by power is not the present purpose of God for the Christian or the church; and be assured His will is the only true directory and the only safe ground for us in everything.

Let us then always enquire, what according to scripture does God design and desire for His people now? What is His real revealed work now? To what therefore is He calling you and me? To what did He set apart the apostle then? It was certainly not the pulling down of the Jews or their legal economy. Judgment was coming on that nation soon, but as long as God forbore Paul lingered over them in patient love; and was he not quite right? But God was calling out a people from the Gentiles as well as from the Jews, and separating him from all his antecedents, from everything that his heart was so fondly bound up in: for never was mortal man that loved Israel more than the apostle Paul did. But God took him out of all his old Jewish associations as well as the Gentiles, to whom now He sent him.

It is evident that we must be separated from human influences even of the best kind, in order to

be a fit vessel for God's purposes where the need is greatest. If you would effectually help others, you must always be above the motives and ways that sway them. Impossible to deal rightly with a person if you are merely on the same level with him. This is the reason why, if a brother be overtaken in a fault, what is wanted is a truly spiritual soul to seek his restoration. A careless Christian would spoil the case; because, if he who is in fault can put his finger on something like his own shortcoming in the one who deals with him, it gives him an excuse for his own sin, and a ground for censuring, his censor. Whereas, if there had been the true effect of the grace of God in him who appeals to his soul; if grace has both brought out from all that is evil and sustained in good, so that he can be accused of nothing against the Lord, I need not say how God honours it as His will and special provision for dealing with those who are involved in any fault. Here, in the apostle Paul, is the same principle, though in a far deeper and larger way. Indeed, it is but the assertion of grace — that mighty principle of God's goodness in power, working spite of evil according to all that is in His heart.

Paul, then, was taken clean out of everything, both Jew and Gentile, but sent to the Gentile especially. "And the bare sound of this it was that horrified the Jews; nor could they reconcile how one who had burning love to the Jew could at the same time be the prominent, untiring witness of grace to the Gentiles. In their legal pride they could not forgive it. The most hostile feelings broke out against Paul, coupled with the madness of envy and jealousy against the Gentiles. So he tells them, "For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having, therefore, obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying nothing else than those things which Moses and the prophets did say should come; whether Christ should suffer; whether he should be the first through resurrection of the dead to announce light," etc.

As he thus explains, the Roman governor interrupts him in the exclamation, that much learning had made him mad. Paul replies, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness." There is all possible respect, it will be observed; at the same time, he could not without protest allow the ignorance of a blind heathen to put such a stigma on the truth. He appeals to one beside Festus — certainly an impartial witness as far as Christianity was concerned. "For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner." The alleged facts of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus were not unknown to Herod Agrippa. They were universally talked of by all who concerned themselves with Israel.

Suddenly he turns with a direct question: "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest them. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Though I do not agree with some modern efforts as to this clause, I admit that the word "almost" hardly gives the true force. "In a little degree you are persuading me." In what spirit was this said? It seems to be a sentiment into which he was surprised, and in this sense wrung out from him. He could not deny the truth of what the apostle asserted. He would not disclaim his own prophets. He was, in point of fact, shut up in a corner as far as regarded the facts and the prophecies that spoke of them beforehand. Thus, cool a man of the world as he was, the surprise of the pointed enquiry of the apostle obliged him to acknowledge that in a little degree Paul was persuading him to be a Christian. This does not intimate, of course, that he really believed in the Lord Jesus; but the premisses of the apostle did involve the conclusion that Jewish prophecy pointed to Jesus Christ, so that Agrippa could not but own a certain impression made on his mind.

But Paul answers in a spirit truly admirable, and this not alone with wisdom, nor with loving desire only. There is another element, too, exceedingly sweet, as showing the state of the apostle at this time, and his own soul's deep present enjoyment of the Lord and of His grace. "I would to God that not

only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both in a little and in a great degree such as I am, except these bonds." I hardly know such an answer from man's lips. We have wonderful words of others as well as of Paul elsewhere; but to my mind, throughout the compass even of this blessed book, it would be hard to find an expression of grace and truth, with the condition of happiness which the Spirit vouchsafes, more admirably suited to the circumstances of all concerned — more perfectly reflecting what God gives by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul could not wish his bonds for any, however he might glory in them for himself. He boasted to be a prisoner of Jesus Christ; but he could not desire such fare then at least for such as he desired to be brought to the Lord. The time might come, no doubt, when those who proved good soldiers in that warfare might rejoice, even as he rejoiced, in his sufferings for Christ's sake and for his body's sake, as well as for the gospel. But this he could with all his heart wish, — that they might be, not only in some measure (even if it were only a little), but in a great degree such as he was. It is not merely that they might be Christians; still less that they might be converted; but "such as I am."

The wish embraces both the reality or standing and the state of the Christian; yea, such enjoyment as filled Paul's own heart at the very moment when he stood in bonds before this splendid court. Did not Paul know the dark cloud that hung over Agrippa and Bernice, not to speak of others? Grace surmounts all evil, as it overcomes and forgives the worst enemies. There is not one bitter reflection, nor a denunciatory word. Grace wishes its best even for those who are bent on the pleasures of sin for a season. We know that judgment is sure and just; but grace can rise to a higher kind of justice — not that of earth or of man, but of God, who can be just, and justify him that believes — "the righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ." This was what filled his heart, and it was the full unhindered strength of God's own grace made good and seen in Christ that was now working in his own soul. It was drawn out by his delight and enjoyment of the Christ to whom he had been bearing witness, whose glory made pale all that a Roman governor or a Jewish king could boast. It was not the surprise, but the overflowing heart of one who looked right into eternity — who recalled once more the brightness of the glory of heaven, wherein he had seen Christ Himself brighter than all that glory — the source, power, and fulness of it all, and the giver of it also to those who believe. It was this that filled him then, and strengthened him to utter such an expression of divine love.

The court breaks up, Agrippa acknowledging himself that Paul might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed to Caesar. This is to be noted.

Acts 27. The next chapter details the singularly instructive voyage of the apostle: where, instead of being a prisoner, he looks as if he was really the master of the ship; and, indeed, had his word been duly heeded in time, they would have been preserved in safety. How wonderful a thing faith is! How blessed the faithfulness that flows from faith; how completely it is the power of God in whatever position a man may be!

Here you find the apostle on his way to the Gentiles. All was clear now. He is away from that which was a charmed circle to him, where his bow did not abide in strength, but now, as before Festus and Agrippa, has returned to his old vigour. All is found in its place: no proofs are wanted where every fact proves it.

Acts 28. The last chapter shows us not only the journey to Rome, but the apostle reaching it. There, too, we find how truly the power of God is with him. He is received and no small kindness shown by the inhabitants in the island of Malta. And Paul illustrates how far any word of the Lord is in vain by accomplishing one of the peculiar promises in the disputed verses at the end of Mark. This strikes the minds of these heathen, so that afterwards we find the father of the great man in the island

with Paul, who prays and lays his hands upon him and heals him. "When this was done, others also which had diseases in the island came, and were healed: who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary."

Arrived in Italy, they taste the comfort of brotherly love. "We found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days; and so we went toward Rome. And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum, and Tres Tabernae; whom, when Paul saw, he thanked God and took courage." What a joy it is for a humble brother to be the means of inspiring the apostle Paul with fresh cheer along the road of Christ; and how we defraud ourselves as well as our brethren of so much blessing by our little faith and scanty love in identifying ourselves with the most despised and suffering for the name of the Lord! To what a work are we not called! What a wonderful mission is that which the Lord confers upon the simplest soul that names the name of Jesus! May He wake us up to feel how blessed we are, and what a spring of blessing He is! Out of them, it is said, "shall flow rivers of living water." Here, observe, it was the apostle himself; and, though it may seem strange to some, even he could find the sweetness and the power of the ministry of love.

To Rome Paul goes, and there he dwells with a soldier that keeps him; and in due time he sees the Jews, and lays before them the gospel at full length. Alas! it was the same tale; for man is everywhere the same, but God is too. "Some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive."

The sentence, the long-suspended sentence, of judicial hardening was now about to fall in all its withering strength. It had been hanging over the nation ever since the days of Isaiah the prophet; for not without ground was it uttered then. Still the patience of God pursued its way, till Jesus came and was rejected, when the clouds gathered more thickly. Now not only the Holy Ghost was come, but He had testified of the risen glorified man, from Jerusalem to Rome. But if He had testified, the Jews, instead of being, as they ought to have been, the first to receive God's testimony, were in point of fact the first to refuse — the most active and obstinate emissaries of unbelief and of Satan's power, — not only not entering in themselves, but forbidding those who would. Accordingly, then and most justly fell that pall of judgment because of unbelief under which they lie to this day. But the gospel goes to the Gentiles; and spite of all that had wrought hitherto, or might work hereafter, they were to hear, and they have heard; and we are ourselves, thanks be to God, the witnesses of it.