

Ephesians 4 - 6

W. Kelly.

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Part 2 of Lectures on the Epistle of Paul, the Apostle, to the Ephesians with a new translation.

Ephesians 4.

Before entering upon the subject of ministerial gifts, which is brought before us later on in the chapter, the Holy Ghost dwells upon the unity that belongs to the saints of God in Christ now. It was necessary that this should be laid down as a grand platform upon and in connection with which ministry takes its course. For ministry rather brings into prominence individual members of Christ and not so much the entire body. For although it is a common statement that the Church teaches, it is really and entirely unfounded. Indeed the notion leads to the pretence of infallibility; and this finds its most open expression in Romanism. The truth is, the Church never teaches, but, on the contrary, is the body that is taught. There is no such thing as a body that teaches. The Church, no doubt, contains within itself the husbandmen that are employed of the Lord; but itself is God's husbandry, or the scene on which God labours to produce fruit unto Himself. This is an important truth practically; because it destroys all pretension on the Church's part to create or even define doctrines. The Church is called to be the pillar and ground of the truth; it is bound to take care by holy discipline that nothing contrary to the truth should be tolerated within it: God's assembly cannot relieve itself from this responsibility. But while this attaches to the entire christian community, that it should be that body which on earth holds out the truth before men and within which we must come if the truth, having been believed, is to be acted on at all; yet the way in which God has been pleased to work for the spread of His truth upon consciences is by individual members of His Church who are qualified for this particular purpose. Power to teach depends upon the gift conferred by sovereign grace. It is no question of an abstract right that any man can teach or preach if he likes. There is no such license in the Church of God. The Lord Jesus has a right to call and to communicate power in the Holy Ghost as He pleases. The Church is not a society of men who hold particular views on this or that: still less is it the gathering into one of the world. It is the assembly *of God*, of those He calls and wherein He dwells. And as this is true with regard to the whole — that it all belongs to God — that it is God who forms, and guards it, and maintains His own holiness and glory in it, so is it in respect of ministry, which is one very important function that is maintained in particular members of the Church. That is, there is the unity which the believers now have in Christ Jesus by virtue of which there is the assembly of God — the common unity of blessing in which all believers now stand and which is the groundwork, if I may so say, of everything. But in connection with it you have ministry at work, which pertains to particular members rather than to the whole Church. The gifts are in and of some for the good of all.

This divides the earlier portion into two parts. In the opening verses, to the end of verse 6, we

find rather the unity of the Spirit; from verse 7 the diversity of the members of Christ. First of all, observe that the Holy Ghost has brought us now to the ground of exhortation. We have doctrine in the first three chapters; now we come to practice. "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called." This vocation consists of two parts more particularly. First, the saints, all who know the Lord Jesus now, compose one body in Him; secondly, they are the habitation of God through the Spirit. Thus, although the assembly of God is a body existing upon earth, yet it is founded upon heavenly privileges, the body of Christ showing us our corporate blessedness, the habitation of God through the Spirit rather bringing before us our responsibility as having God dwelling in the midst of us. It is too clear that these two things are very feebly entered into even by true children of God. When they hear of the body of Christ, the idea is scarcely more than that they are forgiven, are children of God, and are going to heaven. How very little all this is a measure of what is implied in the body of Christ! Many true believers suppose it to mean the aggregate of those who are reconciled to God — the objects of His favour who are not left to die in their sins. But one might have all these privileges without any of the characteristic features of Christ's body, or God's habitation through the Spirit. It would have been quite possible, if God had been so pleased to order it, that Christians should have been children of God, conscious of their redemption, knowing their sonship, fully expecting to be glorified with Christ in heaven, and yet never have been joined together as one body in Christ, with God dwelling among them by a special presence of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. This was a superadded privilege over and above redemption through the blood of Christ. And this is so true, that if you search all the Old Testament through, you will find that never are the saints of God spoken of there as members of Christ's body, the habitation of God through the Spirit.

But more than that. The prophets are full of a glorious scene yet to be enacted on this earth, when the Lord will put down Satan's power. There is a time coming when evil will no longer be permitted to go unpunished, nor good to suffer here below; and when that day comes, Scripture is plain that although God will have a people for Himself upon earth, they will not be joined together as one body, nor will they form His habitation through the Spirit. It is between the two advents of Christ, between the grace which has appeared, and the glory which is going to appear (Titus 2: 11-13,) that we hear of the special vocation wherewith we are called. For let us consider what the body of Christ is — His body, of course, I mean, not as predicated of Himself personally, but as composed of and applied to those who believe in Christ now, that spiritual corporation to which belong all true saints of God now found upon the earth and ever since Pentecost. What are the blessings which constitute it? What does the Holy Ghost mean by membership of this body? I answer, the cross, being the witness and expression of the guilt of the Jews more especially (the guilt, doubtless, of all men in general, but pre-eminently of the Jews), gave occasion for God to dissolve completely, for the time being, the peculiar place of favour which the Jewish people had previously possessed. God Himself blotted out the landmark which separated Israel from the Gentiles; and instead of making Israel to be the one channel of His promise, on the contrary, the tide of blessing turns decidedly and conspicuously towards the Gentiles. He gathers out of Jews and Gentiles a people for His name, and joins together this election out of them both, who believe in Christ, in order to the possession of new privileges that never had been tasted in like mode or measure before.

One most remarkable feature of the blessing is, that the distinction between Jew and Gentile is gone. In the cross *they* united in wickedness before God. But what does *God* use it for? He says, as it were, I will take that very cross which man has made the scene of his outrageous rebellion against Me — which proved that My ancient people were grown violent in hostility against Me in the person of My Son; and I will make the cross to be the pivot on which will turn fuller, richer blessing than had

even been hoped for by believing men in this world before. Thus, as the cross was the rallying point of Satan to gather men in an unholy union against God and His Son, so God makes it to be the precious centre where He forms the Jews and Gentiles that believe in His Son into a new body, where all such distinctions are blotted out for ever. And if God is pleased to call out a people for the purpose of giving a practical testimony to this new display of His love, who is to gainsay it? The law is righteous; and it would be an outrage upon God to put the smallest stigma upon the ten words. But while the commandment is holy, just, and good, grace brings in what is higher and better still. It is right, of course, if I do well, that I should be rewarded for it; but is it not more blessed, if I do well, suffer for it, and take it patiently? This is grace, acceptable with God, and the practical principle on which He is calling His children now to act. It was not the public rule of government in Old Testament times, but the contrast of it. Does God, then, contradict Himself? Far from it. God may have one way of dealing with the Jewish people; and then He may lay down another mode of action with Christians. Indeed, who can deny that He has? The Jew would have been guilty of a grievous sin if he had not been circumcised; and I believe that, as far as the earth is concerned, even in the bright day that is coming, the Jew will have his land, city, priest, and temple, etc. The will of God for the Jews will remain substantially unchanged. I find in the prophecies a state of things not yet accomplished, when all these outward ordinances of God will be fulfilled. Am I not to believe God till I see the prophecies thus realized? It is not thus we treat the word of a good man. But if we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. And for a man to receive Samuel and Kings, and not to believe Ezekiel or Hosea, is to treat God as you would not treat an ordinary man. But if I believe all that He has said, there are peculiar principles of God for the Jews which are still to be carried out by the Messiah reigning in power when the devil is bound. God will accomplish all that He has spoken of in the prophets in the days of heaven upon the earth. But meanwhile the Messiah that was promised to bring in the glory came, and has been rejected. Instead of having a throne, He had the cross; and far from taking the earth for His inheritance, He was cast out of it and went up to heaven. A new state of things consequently was opened; and for this order, altogether different from that contemplated generally in the prophecies, we have the New Testament revelation. Therein we find what meets little intimations here and there in the Old Testament, but at the same time introduces, as a whole, a scene without precedent or successor, where God unfolds privileges that were never tasted before, and looks for a walk that He did in no way demand even from saints of old.

There are, of course, certain plain, fixed principles always obligatory. God never sanctioned a lie, or covetousness, or malice: no dispensation can neutralize or weaken the grand moral distinctions between right and wrong. But the God who wrought in earthly power to protect His people, and would have protected them had they been faithful under the law, now, on the contrary, calls His people to suffer in grace. The same God who shielded them and brought them through the Red Sea, and who would not allow any power to gain universal supremacy in the earth till Israel had proved themselves unfaithful, then, when they did manifest themselves altogether unworthy, permitted Babylon, the very worst of the Gentile powers, to overthrow them; and then one empire succeeded another, till finally, under the Romans, both Jews and Gentiles united in crucifying the Lord of glory. Then the world's doom was sealed; the knell of its judgment sounded from the cross of Jesus. You might have expected, had God been then acting upon principles of righteousness, that at once the universe of God would have been convulsed, at least Jerusalem and Rome destroyed in His fiery indignation. Far otherwise. Heaven opens, but it is to receive the crucified Jesus, not to judge His murderers: it is furthermore to send down the Holy Ghost on earth, to form by grace this new body the Church of God; it is to bring those vile murderers of Jesus, if they only received Him, into a place of blessing, whose breadth, and length, and depth, and height never had been enjoyed or known before. And this is grace. "The law

was given by Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." The gospel of God's grace goes out; but it does not merely save souls — it gathers them, unites them to Christ, makes them members of Him and one of another. The Old Jewish vantage-ground has disappeared; the Levitical privileges are completely eclipsed as far as the Church is concerned. The Gentiles were sunk in idolatry, and the Jews self-complacent under God's law which they kept not; but both are brought through the Spirit, by faith in Christ, into this one body, and worship God on the same common ground of grace. They are "buildd together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." This is "the vocation wherewith we are called."

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord," etc. He again points to that honourable scar from the world's enmity, because he is bringing out in a practical way what the consequence was in this world even to the greatest servant of God that ever lived (next to Christ). After all, he was the Lord's prisoner. What a wonderful honour? There were no fiery chariots to surround him, as with Elijah; no power put forth to preserve him. He is suffering from the same empire that crucified the Lord of glory; and out of his prison he is cheering the saints to walk worthy of that same calling! Even now the world is overmatched: what will it be when Christ comes?

Nevertheless, the word is, "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love." There was a danger of the contrary: spiritual privilege might be misused to puff up the saints. He therefore meets this, and shows them the only proper tone that becomes the Christian. "With all lowliness and meekness." It is a blessed thing to find zeal; but what can redeem the walk of a Christian which fails in lowliness and meekness? There is a time to be firm and a time to be yielding, but neither gift nor position can justify those who seem to think that in their case the exhortation to meekness and lowliness has no place. We must take care, on the other hand, that it is not meekness in manner or lowliness in word only, for God looks in us for what is real. Too often, such humility but covers the deepest pride, as love and the spirit of Christ are most talked of where they least exist. Let us beware of this vain show.

But supposing there is that in others which you cannot overlook, as being contrary to the mind of God, how are we to act? No doubt there should be the fitly spoken word of reproof, if needful; but there is to be "long-suffering" also; and if in any place long-suffering be specially called for, it is where evil touches ourselves. We are not to tolerate evil against the Lord; but wherever it is that which injures us, long-suffering is the word, "forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Here it is not only the lowly grace and patience which the Christian has to cherish, but the spiritual diligence with which he is called to hold fast what is most precious and divine here below.

"Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." How perfect is Scripture! It does not say, "the unity of the body," although including it. But had it been said, "the unity of the body," people might have built up (as indeed they have) an outward institution and made it a point of life and death not to separate from that. But what the Holy Ghost lays upon those belonging to Christ is, "endeavouring" — showing all needed earnestness — not to *make*, but "to *keep* the unity of the Spirit." It is something already made by the Spirit which we have to maintain or observe. It is not merely that we are to have feelings of love towards our fellow-christians. This might be in a thousand different bodies; but if ever so well heeded, this would not be keeping "the unity of the Spirit." What is meant then? The unity of the Holy Ghost, which is already formed, embraces all the members of Christ. And where are the members of Christ to be found? In one sense, thank God, everywhere: in another, alas! anywhere. Wherever Christ is preached and souls have received Him, there are His members. And what have we to do? Diligently to maintain the unity that embraces everyone

belonging to Christ — "in the bond of peace." Here we find peace spoken of, not so much for our own souls with God, but rather for enjoying and furthering practically union among saints of God. The flesh is anxious and restless: a peaceful spirit is the fruit of the Holy Ghost, and mightily contributes to the binding together of hearts in practice. God's Spirit is not occupied with merely giving right opinions about points: deeper purposes are His. He is bowing souls to Christ, and exalting Him in their eyes. But to bring one soul out of darkness into light, or out of a little into deeper light, is surely precious; and this is what God Himself is now engaged with. We do well, while holding fast our liberty for Christ, not to allow the barriers that men have brought in, but to treat them as null and void.

But, then, it will be, as is often, said that every man has a right of private judgment. I deny it totally. No man has a right to an opinion in divine things; God only and absolutely is entitled to communicate His mind. What one has to do is to get out of the way, that God's light may shine into the hearts of His children. Men, in their self-importance, only cause their dark shadows to pass over themselves and each other: they thus hinder instead of helping the communication of divine truth. Whereas, when the desire of Christ's servant is, that God may lead on and strengthen His children, is it in vain? Never. The moment you begin to gather people round a particular person, view, or system, you are only forming a sect. For this is a party, though it may contain many members of Christ, which forms its basis of union, not on Christ, but on points of difference, which thus become a special badge and means of separating between the children of God. The apostolic Church never challenged a convert's faith as to an establishment or dissent — never asked, Do you believe in episcopacy, voluntaryism, or even the Church of God? The true and God-glorifying enquiry ever was and is, Do you believe in the Christ of God? It is true that in early days, if a man confessed Christ, he was cast off by Jews and Gentiles, and became an object of enmity to all the world; and this was no slight a guard then against people confessing Christ, unless they really believed in Him. But if a man had received the Holy Ghost, through the hearing of faith, he was at once a member of the one body, and acknowledged as such.

Why should this not rule now? Am I not content with the wisdom of God? Would I then supplement His word, or do without or against it? It is no sect if you act upon the mind of God; it is a sect if you depart from it. The question, therefore, is, what is God's intention about His Church? How would He have us to meet? Am I willing to receive all real Christians — persons whom all believe to be converted? Doubtless there is such a thing as putting them out if they prove not to be so; for there is no possible case of evil but what the word of God applies to, so that there is not the smallest need for any rules or regulations of men. Unless men are spiritual, they will not keep the unity of the Spirit long; they will soon find abundant ground for fault-finding. But those who hold fast and firm to Christ as the centre of the Spirit's unity, as they are no sect, so they never can become one, whatever be the schisms, divisions, heresies, of their adversaries. It is very sorrowful that any souls should go away in self-condemnation, but it is the more blessed for those who, spite of all, have faith and patience and grace to stay. The apostle said, in writing to the Corinthians, "There must needs be heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest." These were the men who in that day clave to the Lord with full purpose of heart. May the same thing be true of us now! I deny that the word of God is made of none effect, or that I am in any way bound to sin now more than then. The unity of the Spirit which the Ephesians had to keep, is the unity which God lays upon all His children. If the word has regenerated my soul through the Holy Ghost; if through it I know my Saviour and my Father; if to it I am indebted as the means God uses for cleansing my soul from day to day, am I to say that I need not follow His word as a member of Christ's body in the assembly of God, where He dwells in the Spirit? Surely, if my soul owns its divine authority, woe is me if I do not seek to follow it in all things. God calls on us to be diligent in maintaining "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." It is not the

unity of our spirits, but the unity of *the* Spirit.

When we reflect that it is the Holy Ghost who forms this unity, is it not a solemn thought? Ought we not to guard against anything that would grieve Him? Our Lord attached special importance to what touched the Holy Ghost; and so should we, if wise. If the Holy Ghost is here for this purpose on earth, He becomes a divine test for souls, whether they are prepared to honour Him or not. But people might say, if you receive all Christians without requiring them to give a pledge for the future, tacitly, if not expressly, you may accept a Socinian or an Arian. But I do not acknowledge such to be Christians at all: do you? What is the Church founded on? "Whom say ye that I am," says our Lord in the very chapter in which He first notices that He was going to build the Church. "Thou art the Christ," said a disciple, "the Son of the living God." And what does our Lord reply? "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." Hence there ought to be the strongest, strictest dealing with souls, whether in deed and in truth they believe and confess the divine glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. The smallest compromise as to this allowed would be a reason for standing in doubt of any soul. You have no ground to receive as a Christian him who tampers with the purity, glory, or integrity of the person of Christ. The Church is founded on Christ the Son of God: if this rock be shaken, all is gone. "If the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do?" To touch Christ is to touch the very basis on which the Church of God rests.

But where a soul confesses Christ really and truly, confesses Him in such a way that it commends itself to your conscience as divine, receive him; for God has. He may be Baptist or Paedo-Baptist: never mind, receive him. If he is living in sin, need I say that Christ and drunkenness, etc., cannot go together? Faith in the Son of God is incompatible with walking in darkness. No matter how a man may talk about Christ, if he joins with that confession a disregard for the moral glory of God, he proves by this fact that he is not born of God. Simon Magus thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money. It was a mistake that he made, some will say. Yes, but that mistake was vital, and proved that he could not have life from God; and therefore, though baptized, he was not received as a member of the body of Christ. We have no reason to think that he broke bread at all. Baptism would be no reason, in the face of such circumstances, why the assembly should receive him whom they do not believe to be a saint.

This will show in some degree the character or limits of the unity of the Spirit. For the Holy Spirit, while He calls souls and empowers them to confess Christ, never leaves them to walk in the mire of their own wickedness. If a believer falls into sin of a certain character, he ought to be put away. What is merely personal should be dealt with in a private way; it would be monstrous to put all failures on the same ground. The first and deep feeling of the soul ought to be, in vindicating God, to get the person right. The Church is a witness of divine grace, and has to seek the blessing of the unconverted and the restoration of Christians who have gone astray. Are we endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit? How is it that Christians are formed into different associations? If the word of God be that which they at all cost seek to carry out, why do they require human rules and modern inventions? If God gives a rule, I do not want another; I do want to have His in all its strength, so as to bring forth the truth to a man's conscience, and say, That is God's will. Is it well or wise to yield this up? God has written a word that bears upon everything moral, by which He intended His children to walk: are we doing so? Some may ask, Are you, then, perfect? I answer, We are endeavouring to hold fast and in peace the Spirit's unity, we are honestly seeking subjection to the will of God: are you doing the same? This is the main question for every child of God — Am I endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit? And am I doing it in God's way or out of my own head? Have I surrendered myself to do His will? Our business is to be dutiful to Him. We have our orders, and our responsibility is to

carry them out, subject to Him whose we are, and whom we are bound to serve.

But further, this unity is to be kept in the bond of peace. God is forming His Church of all those who belong to Himself. It is not Christian persons holding particular views of this or that; but the Spirit holding to His own unity, or to what Christ is to them, not to the points in which they differ one from another. If I want to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, I must have my own soul settled upon this: the Holy Ghost is glorifying Christ alone. You cannot please the Father more than in exalting the Son; and you cannot touch Him more nearly than by slighting His Son. All is secured in maintaining Christ. This brings it to the simplest possible issue. What have we to do with forcing people to give up their views and adopt ours, let them be ever so correct? God's word furnishes a ground, in the name of Christ, on which you can embrace all saints, let them be ever so weak or prejudiced. Let us beware of being more careful of our own reputation or ease than of His will. Let us not be vain of our little knowledge, or of the point we have attained to in practice. Let us look up to the Lord for faith and patience to own every real member and servant of Christ, wherever found. Let us cleave to the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and be diligent in maintaining it, whatever the difficulties may be, and surely they are great. Faith does not see many bodies and one Spirit — it knows but one body. Bearing with others who in this see dimly or double, let us be rigid in holding fast the name of Christ, and for ourselves be careful to accredit nothing contrary to it. "There is one body and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling." This is our most essential, vital blessing in Christ; "for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." "One Spirit" is added immediately, because it is the Holy Ghost who makes it good; and what we are now, by the power of the Holy Ghost, we hope to enjoy by-and-by with Christ. We shall have it fully and perfectly in the presence of God in heaven. This is the first unity.

There is a difference between this and the following verses. The fourth verse is one character of unity, the fifth another, and the sixth a third; and these concentric unities enlarge respectively. "There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." Nobody enters into this who is not born and baptized of the Holy Ghost. This one body is on earth, no doubt; but then it is a real thing and of God now, whatever may be the glory proper to it hereafter. But in verse 5 you have a more outside unity, an area of profession, larger than that of real spiritual power. Here "the Lord" is made prominent; and there are many who will say in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?"

Hence we hear next of "one faith," by which is meant the christian faith. If I talk about faith in the sense of its being the medium by which we lay hold of Christ, and are saved in the grace of God, it is never called *one* faith. By the phrase is meant the common faith that all Christians profess, in contradistinction to the religion or law of Jews and the idolatry of Gentiles. Accordingly, "one Lord, one faith," is followed by "one baptism;" because whoever professed to believe in Christ was baptized with water. Simon Magus received Christ nominally, and was baptized, though he soon proved to be no Christian. Thus, verse 5 gives us, not the unity which is real, and holy, and enduring, but that of the christian profession.

Last of all, we have "one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all." (Ver. 6.) Evidently in this we stand before a still vaster compass. There is an immense mass of mankind that does not profess Christ at all. The bulk of men have gone on with their idols, spite of law and gospel. Are there no claims there? We own "one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all." That is, it is a personal God: not at all the idea that everything is God, which is infidelity in its worst shape, or Pantheism. We own "one God," not a number of divinities, like the Gentiles, but "one God and Father of all." The Jew did not believe that He was the Father of

all, nor even properly Father for the chosen nation, but rather their Governor, even Jehovah. The Christian revelation brings out God in an infinitely larger, as well as for us more intimate, character; but larger, too, as embracing all creaturehood — "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all" (His supremacy and providence, but more than these), "and in you all." There is His near connection with some, and not with all. For it is not said, "in all," but "in you all." The Holy Ghost is speaking of the Father's peculiar relationship to the Christian. Thus nothing can be more full, and beautiful, and orderly than these unfoldings of unity in and around Christ our Lord.

We have now closed the statement which the apostle has given us of the unity of the Spirit, the common place which pertains to all the children of God who are being called through His grace by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. We enter now the special ways in which the Lord calls upon the various members of His body to serve Him — not so much the common position which all must have who belong to Him, but the peculiar privileges and responsibilities of each individual member of Christ. And thus the seventh verse opens: "but unto every (or each) one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." This is the basis. Christ, according to His own good pleasure, as Head and Lord, is giving certain gifts. It is important to observe that this is the point of view in which the Holy Ghost presents ministry in Ephesians. There is no one brought, I need hardly say, into such unequivocal prominence as Christ. In Corinthians, on the contrary, the Holy Ghost is more prominent than Christ. Both aspects are necessary to God's glory and equally perfect in their place; but they are not the same thing. There is the wisdom of God in each epistle suited to the special object that God Himself aims at.

It is impossible for any spiritual mind to look back upon the Epistle to the Ephesians without perceiving that the great truth of it is the fulness of blessing which belongs to the Church in virtue of its union with Christ. This, accordingly, brings Christ into relief. On the other hand, we cannot study the Epistle to the Corinthians, and particularly that part of it where the subject of spiritual manifestations is treated of, without seeing that it is not so much a question of Christ exalted at the right hand of God, as of the Holy Ghost sent down here below. The consequence is that in Corinthians we have rather the assembly upon earth and the divine person who is pleased to dwell and work in it. Thus the Holy Ghost is brought there into view; whereas, in Ephesians, it is Christ as the Head of the Church, who is regarded still as the giver of these gifts. Indeed in no part of Scripture is the Holy Ghost represented as properly the giver; and I doubt much, with another, that the expression "gifts of the Spirit" is an accurate phrase. You may find, in Hebrews 2: 4, a text which seems to imply as much; but it is the "distributions of the Spirit." Wherever giving is simply and distinctly spoken of, it is Christ who is regarded as the giver. So our Lord Himself says of that which lies at the source of all, "the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water," etc. The water here represents the Holy Ghost. Hence, He is viewed in this place as the gift and Christ is the giver. And as this is true of that great foundation-truth, namely, the presence of the Holy Ghost Himself, so is it of all the details. Christ, the Head of the Church, is dealing in the individual members according to His own gracious affection; for this is the blessed side of the truth which is held up here. "Unto each one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." He is speaking about ministerial gift; but it is called grace here because it is regarded not so much as a position of authority (though some of these gifts involve it) but of One who loves His Church and cares for each member of it; and He cannot fail to supply whatever is suitable and worthy of Himself and His love. "Unto each one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ."

And this leads to another remark of a general kind. The Epistle to the Corinthians gave you an ampler field in which the Holy Ghost is presented as working; you have miracles — tongues —

healings — the remarkable ways in which the Holy Ghost acts in outward power. All this is left out here. To what principle are we to attribute it? For God does nothing arbitrarily; but always with a love and wisdom worthy of Himself, and surely intended for our profit. What He has not revealed, it becomes us not to inquire; but what He has made known in His word, we are clearly free, nay bound, to seek to learn simply and thankfully. Why then have we also the more eternal operations of the Spirit in Corinthians? And why, in writing to the Ephesians, are the outward manifestations left out and only those spoken of which pertain to the growth of the soul, the founding of the Church, and the carrying of it on, the keeping up holy growth and fellowship and godly order among the children of God? For to these alone the statements of this chapter apply. The key, I believe, is found in what we have already hinted. In Corinthians the prominent thought is the Holy Ghost present in the Church, and whatever He does comes before us. And as the Holy Ghost may work in an extraordinary manner and is the power of that which is sensibly supernatural as well as of that which meets the wants of the soul, hence all is brought before us there. But in Ephesians, where Christ is viewed in immediate relationship to His Church, and where it is His love and the care for the members of His body which flows out of that love, it is plain that whatever merely deals with the world and is a witness to unbelievers would be not needed but superfluous: only that which has to do with the members of Christ is in place and season. Oh that we only had more patience and confidence in God and His word! We should find the answer to every difficulty in due time. God owns the heart's reliance upon Him. By examining a particular part in the light of the whole book where it occurs, how often we discern that which gives us the right clue to its meaning.

But before looking at the gifts themselves, I would just draw attention to what is of still deeper interest and importance, the basis on which the giving of these gifts by Christ depends. For we have all suffered immensely from mere traditional views of ministry, regarding it as in general an honourable profession among men, or a certain position which has a status attached to it. These things entirely falsify the nature of ministry; and the consequence is that the full blessing and meaning of the word are so far lost for the soul. Do not mistake me. I deny not that God works where much is unscriptural. He is always right, and the failure of the Church, or of ourselves individually, cannot touch His sovereign goodness, who always watches over all and each member of Christ for blessing. But then He allows failure to show itself and permits that we should suffer the consequence of it to humble us and make us feel that all the good is from Him, that all the evil is on our part. Throughout the whole history of Christendom appear these two things: — man corrupting his way upon the earth, and God showing Himself above the evil that His light judges. This is true of ministry as it is of all else.

Hence if we turn to Scripture and see the ground on which ministry rests, we shall find that nothing can be more glorious; but, alas! nothing more contrary to that which ordinarily is its form among men. For its basis is not short of the redemption that Christ has accomplished by His blood, and of His ascension to heaven. Christian ministry flows from Christ at the right hand of God; it did not exist before. I do not deny that God had His ways of acting in Israel. But there His dealings partook more of the character of priesthood, from which ministry differs totally in character. Earthly priesthood is a caste of men who deal with God on behalf of those for whom they are priests: that is, they undertake the spiritual business of persons unable for one reason or another to transact it with God directly, and consequently dependent upon these mediators between God and them. The priest goes where the people cannot go, enters the holy place, presents the blood, burns the incense, deals with God in short for each spiritual want of those whom he represents. Ministry starts upon quite different ground, being an action, through man, from God toward men, and not from man toward God. The two are clean contrasts of each other. As to the servant of God, if truly one whom God raises up,

who has a message from Him and a work to do for Him, that message or work is by God's authority for the blessing of men. Hence, if you take an evangelist, what is he? One who, himself taught of God for his own soul's need, not only knows the way to be saved, but has a power, which he did not possess before, given him of Christ, to act upon the souls of others. Every Christian ought to be able to confess truth, to confess Christ; yet this does not make one an evangelist, but so to state the gospel as to act powerfully on souls, specially of the unconverted, and thus awaken, clear, or establish in the grace of God. The spiritual action is by the Holy Ghost; but it is from God and His beloved Son, Christ our Lord, toward man. Thus, the gift, under the Lord's hand, is exercised in love of souls to seek their good, and implies or is rather power from above to act upon them.

Take again the gift of teaching. There you have another form of the power of God. Many understand the truth for their own souls' enjoyment, but they cannot help others: they are unable to put the truth so convincingly before believers, or so to deal with the affections, as to carry home the truth with energy to the soul. Where this is done, there is the gift of teaching. But I have only referred to it for the purpose of contrasting the nature of priesthood with ministry, and of showing that the confusion of the two things is a lamentable consequence of the state of the Church. If people go to hear a sermon, they say they go to worship. Men are so habituated to confound teaching with worship that the two things are supposed each to involve the other.

I admit there is such a thing as Christian priesthood: still ministry is wholly distinct. All Christians, without exception, men, women, and children, are priests; for the priest is one who has a divine call and qualification, which gives him access to the presence of God. Priesthood, in a word, gives the title of the soul to draw near to God. This is always its distinguishing character. On the other hand, ministry in the word is a varied service; but it is only by particular members of the body that Christ thus acts for the good of all. Hence while priesthood is universal, and no person can be a Christian without being a priest, it is only a few among the many who are what Scripture calls ministers of the word or public servants of Christ. I am not speaking of the vague sense in which all ought to be serving Christ every day of their lives; but the question now is of proper ministry in the word; and it is plain that all have not the power to preach the word of God profitably for the souls of others. The great mass of God's children require to have the path of God pointed out and difficulties removed, the right handling of which things depends upon, or constitutes, ministry in one form or another.

Ministry, then, as said before, is from God to man; priesthood is from man to God. When we meet to worship God, it is an exercise not of ministry, but of priesthood. Perhaps one or more of the persons who take part in it might be ministers; but for the moment they are not ministering, but worshipping. Worship is the exercise of christian priesthood, the offering up of praise and thanksgiving. This is from man towards God — it is the direction of priesthood. Hence where there is an outflow of praise and thanksgiving, you have the highest character of priesthood. Intercession and prayer are a lower form, though intercession be blessed indeed, because it takes up the wants of others. But, strictly speaking, worship rather consists of praise and thanksgiving. Hence it is that the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, forms so central a part of christian worship. It is that which most powerfully, and in solemn joy, calls out our souls in the remembrance of Jesus and thanksgiving to God. And hence, though, of course, the taking the bread and wine cannot be regarded as in itself worship, yet it is that which acts upon the soul and draws out the heart, by the Holy Ghost, in the worship of God. Where the Lord's Supper is regarded as a means of grace, persons repair to it for comfort, or at least the hope of it. It is never so presented in the word of God. On the contrary, if the communicants did not enter into the mind of God in the Supper (*i.e.*, did not discern the Lord's body),

it became a means of judgment to them. "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." By this were meant not spurious Christians, but Christians ever so real, who were taking the Lord's Supper in a light spirit and without self-judgment. Where a soul, therefore, is walking in known sin, and comes to the table of the Lord, the effect is that the hand of the Lord is stretched out in one way or another, and it is impossible to escape when thus trifling with God. Again, if one put himself outside to avoid this, he is proclaiming his own sin and practically excommunicating himself. Thus, there is nothing for a soul but to go straight forward and to look up to God for grace to watch against sin, yea, the least risings of it, and in self-judgment to lean on the Lord who alone can strengthen us to walk worthily of Him. To such an one the word is, "So let him eat;" it is not, Let him stay away; but let him judge himself and come.

These two things, then, worship and ministry, ought never to be jumbled together. There may be a word spoken at the table of the Lord, helping on communion; but this can scarcely be called the ordinary exercise of ministry. A regular discourse there would be, I conceive, most irregular: it would distract from the prime object which the Lord intends. There may be the unfolding of the affections of Christ, or in particular circumstances there might be even more, such as one visiting for a limited time, as when Paul continued his discourse till midnight. But the Lord's Supper having no connection with ministry, but rather with the members of Christ remembering their Lord, and with their worship coming together to praise Him, it is plain that the formal exercise of ministry, properly speaking, finds its place elsewhere, not at the table of the Lord. A brief word that would awaken the soul's affections and gather them up to Christ whom we are remembering, is most comely and seasonable, if the Lord so give; but it is important to see the scriptural place, and order, and aim of the two things. In ministry you have the Lord providing for the spiritual supply of His people's wants. And on what is this founded? Upon the fact that Christ has gone on high as Head, having first put away sin and glorified God on earth; and from His present seat of heavenly glory He is communicating the needed gifts. By what title has Christ taken His place? Not as God, nor simply as man. Neither did Christ enter into the presence of God, because Satan had not been able to touch Him, when tempted in all points. There was a still more solemn scene — the great hour for which He came — the bearing of sin — the cross, where He made Himself chargeable with every failure, with my sins and with your sins. He has done so. Christ has only taken His place at the right hand of God on the ground of His having put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Upon this basis ministry is founded. God's righteous judgment has been borne and vindicated; sin and Satan are completely vanquished for us by Christ. The testimony of divine grace, yea, the fulness of it, can be the portion of the believer now without hindrance. The victory for God in behalf of the most guilty sinners is won. And Christ has taken His place in the highest seat of heaven as the victorious man. As such He has carried humanity to the throne of God, and is there, as man, set down far above all angels, principalities, and powers. From thence it is that He gives these gifts.

Christian ministry, therefore, owes its very origin to this — the full remission of sins on God's part and the heavenly glorification of man in Christ's person. They are fruits and witnesses of complete victory. Yet is it all and only made known to faith, save so far as miracles once were a sign to unbelievers. What is the consequence? Man goes on in sin. Satan still roams about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. The judgment of God is hanging over the world. What then is the value of the death of Christ, and of His victory? Immense, but immense only for those who believe in Christ; and, therefore, in the midst of this ruined world, and while sin and Satan are there, the judgment of God impending, there is this wonderful link between Him who is at the right hand of God and those who were once poor, lost sinners in the sight of God. He sends down gifts; He calls out this one and that one, and makes them to be the witnesses of His power, who has won all this and more;

who has, in short, left nothing undone that is needed for the glory of God and the blessing of man. The world hears the sound only to slight the good news, and even the child of God sees it dimly if he reasons about it; but if I believe what God tells me His beloved Son has done, I ought to know that all these things are gone as between my soul and God with as simple a certainty as if they had never existed at all. I ought to be as sure that sin is blotted out, as if I had been guilty of none — that Satan is as thoroughly judged as if he were in the lake of fire — that God's righteous judgment is completely stayed, and that nothing but His grace remains for me. It is true of all His children. It is the only thing that becomes a Christian, because it is what God provides for him. God does not own christian people in their trouble or hesitation whether all is finished for them. To doubt that all which Christ undertook is settled in their favour, is practically to deny redemption; and if all this is done and accepted, what more can I want? Did not Christ know better than myself what was needed? Did not God feel what was due to His holiness more than you or I? And yet He who was and is God said, "It is finished." Who or what am I to doubt it? To Christ, therefore, I owe it to bear this witness.

Ministry is founded upon Christ's work and exaltation. There were the twelve and the seventy sent out, no doubt, before Christ went up to the right hand of God, but their mission during the days of Christ's flesh is excluded from Ephesians 4. Apostles are mentioned of course, but not in virtue of their call while He was the Messiah on earth. On the contrary, "when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." Not that those who had been appointed apostles when Christ was here below, were not also brought into this new place, Judas excepted; but that their being apostles of the Church is founded upon their having this gift of Christ after He had ascended on high. Therefore it is here said, "He gave some apostles." Why had there been twelve? In relation to the twelve tribes of Israel; and so, when our Lord sent them out, He forbade them to go into any city of the Gentiles. But the apostles of the Church, are they sent only to the Jews? Every one knows that it is not so. After Christ was crucified, the links with Israel were broken. The rejected, suffering Son of man ascends to heaven, and from His heavenly glory He sends down the Holy Ghost, and calls out from the world in sovereign grace, constitutes members of His body, and endows with power to serve Him in whatever way seems good to Himself.

Hence what is called succession, is completely disposed of. In Jewish priesthood there was successional order, and all earthly ministry forms itself on this model. But christian ministry is not of human appointment, but divine in the fullest sense; and therefore the whole source of man's thoughts on the subject is a manifest and total fallacy. Are we to abandon the clear word of God for the passing opinions of men? If so, I shall never know any certainty at all. The Dissenter will say a church must call a man to be their minister. He may have and be a ministerial gift from Christ; but what makes a man to be *their* minister is *their own* call. Thus, it is founded on a particular church electing whom they please to be their particular minister. He is their choice and therefore their minister. But what if there be no such thing in Scripture? What if such an idea be foreign to the word of God? There is not even a hint of it to be found there. We have the appointment of men to take care of the funds and of the poor, and this with the concurrence of the assembly. No person ought to undertake such a work unless he have the just feeling of satisfaction in the whole christian assembly. The Church gives what she can, and therefore is entitled by God to say who shall take care of their trust; that is, who shall transact the outward business of the Church. But in spiritual gifts, in teaching, preaching, exhorting, ruling, can the Church give? Clearly not. The word of God contains nowhere such a notion as the Church choosing or appointing, except in such gifts as the Church can confer. The Church gives money, and can appoint persons to administer it. The Church does not give ministerial gifts, and has no title nor room to interfere. Who has? It is Christ alone who gives, as we find here: "According to the measure of the gift of Christ." "When he ascended up on high, he gave gifts unto men: some

apostles, some prophets." This excludes even the true Church of God from any claim of power to appoint; and if it be examined, you will see how the scriptural history agrees with and confirms the principle. Who but the Lord chose Matthias? Who appointed Peter or the rest? Who addressed the multitude on the day of Pentecost? It could not be the Church, for the Church was only formed on that day. Peter preached, and by his preaching the Church was gathered. It was the Lord thus brought such as should be saved; so that ministry precedes the Church, as the atonement and ascension of Christ precede ministry. The Lord from on high calls the vessels of His grace, communicates power, leads forward by His Spirit's guidance, working by and controlling all circumstances, so that His servants shall be more or less faithfully doing His work. The consequence is, souls are gathered and the Church is formed. Thus ministry in the word never flows from the Church, but from Christ, and the Church is the result. Ministry is therefore antecedent to the Church, instead of being founded on its authority. Hence it is that you have not only the dissenting principle of popular election entirely put aside, but every other human device. It was not the apostles, but Christ who gave gifts. And has He ceased to give them? Is He at the right hand of God still? Then, I ask, is He there as the Head of the Church? Does He not remain now as perfectly and efficaciously the Head of the Church as before the day of Pentecost? Then He was there, bringing the Church into being; and now He is there, to perpetuate the Church and supply all its need. It is as impossible, therefore, for ministry to fail as for Christ to leave the right hand of God before the body is complete. But He is there as the giver of all needful gifts; and the exercise of these gifts is what we call ministry.

But if we look further, there is a most magnificent parenthesis of the apostle on this subject. "Therefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men." That is, He led those captive who had led the Church captive. We were led captive of the devil, and Christ going up on high passed triumphantly above the power of Satan. The fallen spirits were completely defeated and by Christ as man. Man has conquered Satan in the person of Christ, and we can look up as those that are one with Him who has defeated Satan. We ought never to treat with Satan as if he had power against us. We are entitled always to bid a detected Satan depart from us. We may and should always resist him: and we are told that, if so, he will depart from us; not because we are strong, but because He to whom we belong has gotten *Him* the victory by death and has given it to us. "Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth." This supposes the glory of His person. He that is gone up is the One that first came down.

It is indeed the constant principle of God; He is always the first to come down. We require to be lifted up and have nothing of our own to come down from. Christ, being God, was the only man who had glory proper to Himself and above all creaturehood. He descended first into the lower parts of the earth. His very humiliation is the proof of His own personal dignity. From His natural supremacy, so to speak, He descends first to do His work here below. "He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things." Thus we have here a most magnificent sight of our Saviour. The Holy Ghost gives us in two short verses the grand sweep of His glory and triumph, who condescended to be a man and a servant. He that is gone up now is the same that first came down, and who only would go up again into glory when He had completely put away all that must have for ever kept us from Him. But He came down to put it away and would not return on high till it was done. He so loved us, with a love according to the glorious counsels of God, that our sins, gross and fatal as they were, only gave Him the opportunity to show what God is, and is to us, in His own person. And now it is a question of God's righteousness, not only to Him but to us, because of Him. What a difference" He might come down in love, but that of itself would not give us a place in the presence of God; but He is gone up in righteousness; and this is the reason why our Lord says that, when the Spirit was come, He should convince the world of righteousness, "because I go to the

Father." You have the full display of righteousness now in Christ seated at the right hand of God. Righteousness toward Him in this world was nowhere found, but the foulest wrong and indignity. Where must I look for it? At the right hand of God. I see One there to whom God, with reverence be it spoken, is indebted for the display and vindication of His moral glory, to whom He owes the only adequate exhibition of all that which manifested and maintained His character before men, even in the man Christ Jesus. God never had His character at all fully retrieved since sin came into the world till Christ died on the cross. When His blood was shed for the glory of God and the deliverance of man, God shone out in a new light before this world. God was no longer regarded as the hard master that Satan's lie misrepresented Him to be. The veil was rent; the truth could no longer be hid that there was no proof of love the creature could have asked of God but what God had surpassed it in His Son, dead, risen, and glorified above. Up to the death of Christ God's righteousness must have destroyed every creature that had a sin upon it. Now, on the contrary, it is the righteousness of God to justify me, a believer, though I have been a vile sinner; and for this reason, that, although my sins in the one scale must have sunk myself alone down to hell, yet there was, in the other scale, Christ and His blood far outweighing all and raising me up to heaven. What is the consequence? My sins are clean vanished before that precious blood, and the scale of Christ proves itself to be the only one that keeps its weight before God. Upon this now hangs the very righteousness of God. It is no longer a question of legal righteousness; but now He has Christ, and this is what God owes to Christ's obedience unto death, even the death of the cross; by virtue of which God righteously clears the guilty, which, as dealing according to the law, He could by no means do. "By him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses." What was known of God in creation contained no provision for sin; what was known of Him under the law would have only blasted the smallest hope of the sinner. Whereas now, the more I see what God is in Christ's cross, the more confidence and peace I have. "This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."

We see, then, in these verses, the heavenly source of ministry. It is not a position which, according to God, gives importance in the world. The labourer, we all know, is worthy of his hire. But do you not see that the Apostle Paul would not use the title to support that the gospel gave him? He would not have what he calls his confident boasting made nothing of; for though he had power, he preferred to work with his own hands rather than be burdensome. And this is the wonderful liberty of grace: under it there is nothing we cannot do, except sin. But though all things are lawful, they are not all expedient; and, no doubt, it was in the wisdom of God that the great apostle did what many servants of Christ would be ashamed to do. What a fearful declension there is from the whole spirit as well as letter of Christianity! How complete the change from the character of the gospel, that men — Protestants or Catholics, Churchmen or Dissenters, Presbyterians or Methodists — should alike consider as a blot and matter of censure that which was the boast of the apostle? There was a weighty principle involved in his conduct. He received a gift from the Philippians; help was sent to him in prison as well as out. He desired fruit that might abound to the account of the saints. If the apostle had not occasionally received from them, it would have been loss to their souls. Christianity does not mean that saints should use for themselves what they owe to God, and what grace loves to do for all and any one. But the apostle never acted either so that it could be said that he served himself by the gospel, or that he was indifferent to the saints. God took care that it should be so in Paul's case. The smaller gifts there would have been the danger of despising. But the gracious effort of the apostle was to maintain the less; the greater less needed his ample shield. But where any gave themselves up to gospel service, the apostle takes the utmost care to affirm their title to live of the gospel. Let those who so live take care that in this they serve the Lord Christ.

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets." I apprehend that the apostles and prophets are clearly what might be called the foundation gifts, such as God used for the purpose of laying a broad and deep platform on which the Church was to be built. This was done by those whom God empowered in a special manner. The apostles and prophets were the two classes that first of all entered as instruments into the calling of the Church of God. Evangelists were at work from early days, also pastors soon after. But the first two, apostles and prophets, were peculiar in their full force to the original laying down of the Church of God. There is no ground to suppose that, in the strict sense, apostles and prophets were meant to continue, or do so in fact, though something analogous to an apostle may be raised up at fitting times. Take Luther, for instance. There was a partial recall of the saints of God generally to fundamental truth, which had been long lost sight of. This answers, in a little measure, to what an apostle did. A prophet, again, was one who not merely expounded the Scriptures, but who so brought home the truth as immediately to connect the soul with God.

At the very beginning, men of God appeared who were not apostles, nor necessarily inspired communicators of truth, such as Mark and Luke; but prophets, like Judas and Silas. (Acts 15: 32.) The Scriptures were not all written when the Church began, nor were the apostles everywhere. God, therefore, raised up prophets, who, in certain cases at least, were the means of revelation. And why is it that we have not such channels now? Because revelation is complete: we have the word of God, and want no word more. To suppose another revelation now, would be to impair what we have; so that the need for these prophets in the highest sense is closed with the canon of Scripture. In a subordinate sense, what would answer to the prophetic work in question is the revival of truth and powerful action on saints at large by recalling what was once revealed, but completely evaporated. Take, for instance, the capital point of the coming of the Lord as the hope of the Church. This truth has suffered a long and almost total eclipse. Within our own day it has again shone out with a certain measure of power from God. In what writing, since the days of the apostles, do you find the nature and calling of the Church set forth? where the unfolding of the Church's hope — the Lord's coming to receive the Church and to give it a heavenly place? These truths had slipped away from the minds of men, until recovered within the last thirty or forty years. Justification by faith had been partially known by Augustine and Bernard. The Waldenses possessed great faithfulness but not clear doctrine. But the nature of the Church as the body of Christ, and the character of the Christian's hope, were most completely lost sight of, as far as I am aware. They had vanished from the Church. And it seems to me that the recovery of these truths resembles prophetic work in this particular, though one might hesitate to call any used in the work either an apostle or a prophet.

When we come to the next classes of gifts, namely, "evangelists, pastors, and teachers," it is plain that we have these still at work, more or less, in the present broken state; and not confined to these believers or those, but distributed throughout, as the Lord pleases. Men confound ministry with local charges. It may be said, that I have slurred over a part of Scripture — the apostles laying their hands on the elders, etc. With the most entire recollection of it, let me say that elders are not the same thing as ministers. Ministry is the exercise of a gift from Christ; elders were appointed by men, but never except by apostles or apostolic delegates, such as Titus was. How do we stand with reference to that question now? Where are the men who are duly authorized to appoint elders today? Do you know any better than I where they are to be found? Some people, no doubt, pretend to the power of appointment, but the pretension does not make their appointing valid. In civil things, if one man were without full authority to appoint another to be a magistrate, he would run the risk of being punished severely. Is it possible that in the things of God interference with the authority of our Lord is of less moment? It is not, that some sections have apostles and some have not, for no one has them more than another. I do not see that much is gained by assuming to do the work of an apostle, where it is only

assumption. It is surely more humble not to pretend to apostolic work, if we are not apostles. We cannot legitimately ordain elders, because we want for it apostolic authority. Is it not most in accordance with the lowliness that becomes us, to abide within the limits of our powers? I do not admit that any one living is entitled to choose elders, or anything else of the sort, because there is neither an apostle nor an apostolic man commissioned by the Lord for the purpose. If men assume to ordain, they should prove their title.

But ministry and eldership are not the same thing; they are almost always confounded, but they differ totally. These two things are found in Scripture: local charges, duly ordained by apostles or their delegates; and ministerial gifts, which never required human authentication. In Scripture, no person was ever chosen to be an apostle, nor called to be a prophet or an evangelist, except by Christ. It was precisely the same with pastors and teachers, as we see in our chapter; and why should it not be the same still? Christ has not vacated His office; and it is His office to call and give pastors, evangelists, teachers, etc. But there is another principle quite distinct from that involved in these gifts, namely, that Christ warranted the apostles to act in the way of authority. In virtue of this, they appointed persons to be elders or deacons, as the case might be. We cannot do what apostles did unless we are clothed with like authority; but we have Christ ever abiding the immediate giver of ministerial gifts: this is always true. Ministry does not and never did depend upon apostles or the Church, but upon Christ; and therefore it cannot lapse. But as the appointment of elders, according to Scripture, hung upon the apostles, and as there are no apostles now, the rightful power to appoint elders is necessarily and evidently at an end. Scripture may intimate the continuance of gift, but not of authority to ordain. Elders, or rather officials, of the various religious bodies abound; but what is their appointment (I do not say their gifts) worth? Let any one that knows the Bible, say whether I am treating fairly this weighty matter according to the word of God.

The question, then, for us now is, Are we carrying out the will of God? Many have a notion that there is some special value in a human rite of ordination in making a man a minister. But in the days of the apostles themselves, no one ever thought of being appointed to preach the gospel. If a person could preach, he was bound to do it; if he did not, he was like the slothful servant, hiding his talent. If a man took the ground of having a right to preach or to speak in the assembly, you may safely deny his right. None but God has a right to proclaim glad tidings to the world, or to speak to His assembly by whom He will. He, therefore, may call men and put them forward, one to do this work and another to do that work. And here comes in the searching question, Is the Lord to be acknowledged honestly and thoroughly as the Head over His own Church? In ministry, properly so styled, it is not a question of men appointing men, but whether Christ is allowed to be the Head of His own Church. Do not, then, acknowledge that it is the Church's business to appoint ministers in the word. The Church is not my Lord, but Christ; and we ought never to put the Church in the place of Christ. This has been one of the main and most mischievous sources of Popery.

It follows that we ought to acknowledge all those the Lord appoints. If a man preaches the truth in this or that body, I am not to ignore, but own the servants of Christ everywhere. They may not thoroughly carry out the truth; but in all cases it is not the brethren, but Christ who gives gifts. But does it follow that I am to go to mass, even if a Romish priest preaches a measure of truth? I must examine whether he who may be ever so real a servant of Christ, is doing the will of God in the matter. We are not called to follow this or that one, except so far as they follow Christ. We are called on to do the will of God; and "he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." Nothing, therefore, can be more simple than the path of the Christian. Let him value the servants of Christ in their place, but not necessarily all that they are doing, unless it be according to the will of God. But is it not said that

we are to obey them who have the rule over us? Yes, and it is as true now as ever it was. But supposing you are converted to God and there is a priest of Rome who says that you must obey those who have the rule over you, and that they have this rule, am I not to question what he means and what he is using the text for? Is it to induce me to disobey God? If so, am I not to say, I "must obey God rather than man?" Thus a path always appears for the saint of God who desires to do His will, and that path is simply *obedience*. It may sometimes take the form of what mistaken or self-willed men might call disobedience; but certainly it will be the obeying of God rather than man. Nothing can absolve us from the positive, invariable duty of obeying God.

This will show that whatever may be the value of ministry, it was never intended to bind down the children of God, and to make it a question of mere blind acquiescence. Ministry, where it is true, manifests what is the will of God wherever there is a simple mind. It puts the truth in so convincing a way as to bring the conscience into the light, making it feel its responsibility to follow that light. If you do a thing merely because a minister of God says it, influence is at work and not the power of the Spirit of God. Christian obedience is neither the blind leading the blind, nor the seeing leading the blind; but the seeing leading the seeing. Every believer has power in the Spirit to see the mind of God for himself; and he who is called of God to the place of guiding others will, as a general rule, be enabled to bring the mind of God so completely to bear upon the conscience that the simple-hearted cannot but see it. But let us remember that it is serious for any one to acknowledge the truth and not to follow it. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

I have already explained that the first two of these classes of gifts brought before us in verse 11, had for their aim the originating of a new work and testimony. They were destined for, and employed in, laying a foundation for that previously unknown building, the assembly gathered in one out of Jews and Gentiles in the confession of Jesus, the Son of God. The apostles were used not merely like the prophets as the inspired communicators of the mind of God which had not been before revealed, but also as invested with authority in the Lord's name. Hence there was a competent governing power, as well as a sure medium of communication from God to man. The prophets as such had nothing to do with government, properly so called. They did not visit as authoritative agents (1 Cor. 4, 11; 2 Cor. 12, 2 Cor. 13), nor did they lay down institutions here and there for regulating the Church as the apostles did. (See 1 Cor. 7: 17.)

Nevertheless, the prophet was used in what was of the deepest importance, in bringing out directly and immediately from God truth that had never till then been known or even disclosed. They were, consequently, connected very specially with the revelation of truth, it might be by word of mouth or by writings; and this is the meaning of Romans 16: 26. Any one who is able to examine the language which the Holy Ghost employed, will see that the expression is not strictly "the writings of the prophets," but prophetic writings. These refer exclusively to the New Testament Scriptures, which were not all of them written by apostles. Two of the gospels were not apostolic, but they are just as much inspired as if they were. This is as true also of the oral instruction that was given in the apostolic days. For the Church began before any part of the New Testament was written. The misuse of this fact is a favourite argument of those who contend for a sort of inspiration in the Church. They insist that the Scriptures are not so essential as we allege. But I answer, that if the Church at first had the presence of inspired men, the Church afterwards had the holy deposit of the apostles and prophets committed to writing, under the perfect guard of the Spirit of God. Here, then, we have the only standard of divine truth: the Old Testament being the original revelation of God as given to Israel — the New Testament being that supplement of His truth which is necessary to the Church. But before the canon of Scripture was closed or even begun, it is evident there was needed a class of men who

should bring out the mind of God in the rising difficulties of the Church. This was supplied in the apostles and prophets. It appears that, among the saints at Corinth, there were such persons as prophets.

Hence we have a remarkable word in 1 Corinthians 14, that I would advert to for a moment. The Spirit of God laid down there as a rule (ver. 29) that in case any one were speaking in an ordinary way in the assembly, if a revelation were given to another, the latter was entitled to stop the former, and to bring in the revelation. Persons may reply, Supposing you had such a thing now, there would be confusion. But I answer, God is no longer now giving new revelations. While you had the state of things in which the full unfolding of the mind of God was not given, and while there were these inspired persons on the earth, God maintained His right, even to interrupt a person by a communication of some fresh truth from Himself. But now, if any person were to plead a fresh revelation from God, he would only prove himself deluded if not an impostor. We have the full communication and standard of God's mind, now that these inspired persons have passed away. Thus the Church is cast, not upon apostles and prophets, but upon the written word of God as a criterion. Of course, there are the more ordinary means that the Spirit of God used then and still uses — gifts just as really as apostles and prophets, but not of the same authoritative character in action as apostles, nor having the title to communicate new revelations like the prophets. Now everything is subordinate as compared with these. Whatever measure of authority there may be at present must prove itself to be from God in its character and end; and it must not pretend to be some fresh revelation of the divine mind, but the right use or application of what has already been given.

On the other hand, the gifts which the Holy Ghost still raises up for the good of the Church, are here called evangelists, and pastors, and teachers. These are not the only gifts that abide, for Scripture in no single passage gives, as men would like, a complete list of them. We must search all Scripture. And a wholesome, blessed thing it is for us, that we never can find anything complete from the word of God, by merely examining some particular part of it. God necessitates our searching His word through and through, in order to get at His mind with any measure of fulness. Were it not so, we should be disposed to make favourites of certain portions and to leave the rest alone. This is the reason why many Christians practically neglect a large part of the word of God, as if it no longer applied. On this very subject of ministry there is a great deal of ignorance and infidelity at the present moment. The idea is that you have merely sanctified intellect. Now, I admit, God gives and forms intellectual power. That is what is called in Scripture "the ability." But examine our Lord's parable where He alludes to this very thing, and you will find that He distinguishes between "the gift" and "the ability" — "He gave to every man according to his several ability." God in calling men to serve Him, even before they are converted, fashions the vessel for His purposes. His providence singles out a person from his very birth, and He orders all the circumstances of his after life. Perhaps he is educated as a priest, or as a lawyer. Thus Paul so thoroughly knew all the resources of self-righteousness that he could fall back upon grace, and judge what it is that man's righteousness loves, lives in, and leads to. His own experience proved that even when cultivated to the highest degree, it issues in direct antagonism to the Lord of glory. Still you have in Paul a most remarkable natural character, as well as no ordinary training and acquirements. All this was providentially ordered in Saul of Tarsus; but besides, when called by the grace of God, a gift was put into him, that he did not possess before, a capacity by the Holy Ghost of laying hold of the truth, and of enforcing it on people's souls. God wrought through his natural character, and his manner of utterance, and particular style of writing, but everything, though flowing through his natural ability, in this new power of the Holy Ghost communicated to his soul. Thus there are these two things, the ability which is the vessel of the gift, and the gift itself which is, under the Lord, the directing energy of the ability. There is no such thing

as gift apart from the vessel in which the gift acts.

But now let me make another remark. In this epistle the gifts are not regarded as merely spiritual powers. They are regarded as such in Romans and Corinthians, but in Ephesians they are always persons. He gave apostles — not merely the apostolic gifts. I find the gift of teaching in Romans and the gift of a teacher in Ephesians. The two truths are perfectly harmonious. There is a divine reason for the difference, which seems to be this. In Ephesians the love of Christ to the Church is the key-note to the whole epistle — it is the fulness of blessing which Christ's body, the Church, has by virtue of union with the Head. What acts upon the affections of the Church is not a mere power. You can love, not a power, but a person; and a person through whom the gift flows evidently acts upon the affections of those for whose good it is used. All through the epistle it is Christ, and not (save exceptionally) the Spirit. In Corinthians the Holy Spirit is made prominent. Here it is Christ; and in accordance with this, you have these persons who act from Christ for the good of His body. In this is a beautiful instance of the harmony of the truth of God. The active love of Christ is represented in this epistle as the spring of all the blessing of the Church; and so with the personal gifts of Christ, whom He Himself loves, and uses to keep up His own love in others.

The difference between the evangelists and the pastors and teachers is obvious. The evangelist is the ordinary means of gathering souls to Christ. It may be said as a gift to be wandering in its own nature; not confined to one spot, but called to be here and there wherever the Lord by the Spirit might lead him out for the need of souls. Timothy, who has been by clerical sleight of hand metamorphosed into an archbishop, is called in Scripture an "evangelist." He was marked out by prophecy to a particular work, and a certain gift was communicated to him through the apostle, accompanied by presbyters. He goes at the apostle's command to a certain place, and there he takes a cognizance of things. But neither he nor Titus were stationary, like a modern diocesan. Still less was there a provision made for successors. Timothy was to commit what he had heard from the apostle to faithful men who should be able to teach others also; that is, the charge concerns the conveyance of truth, not of authority or holy orders, as men perversely say.

The fact is, that a plurality of bishops were appointed in every Church where there was a certain number of saints gathered together — at least, after a certain time of testing and experience. They were chosen there by an apostle, or one commissioned by the apostles. As it is usurpation for gifted individuals to discharge the functions of the Church, so it is equally usurpation for the Church to assume the functions of the individual gifts. Of course, if there were anything immoral in the conduct of a servant of Christ, he is as much responsible as any other, and more so. The children of God and himself are bound to watch with holy jealousy, because his sin would bring a greater shame and scandal upon the name of Christ than a less conspicuous member of the body. But, except in matters of a moral nature, in the exercise of his ministry, there ought not to be the slightest interference between him and the Master who has called him to serve Him. Herein dissent is thoroughly and radically unsound, because the Church is supposed to appoint a minister, and, of course, has the power to discharge him if they like. This makes the minister to be the minister of their church; but Scripture never speaks, as all do now, of the minister of a particular church. There is no such thing as "our" and "your" minister. What Scripture shows us is, that all gifts are gifts in the unity of the body of Christ. If a man is a pastor or teacher at all, he is set as pastor or teacher in the whole Church. As far as this goes, it matters not where he may be; wherever he goes, he has a call, if walking scripturally, not from a congregation but from Christ, to exercise his ministry fearlessly, of course humbly, and not pretending to more than he has got. For a person setting up for more generally destroys credit even for what he possesses; and, in general, the tendency of the children of God is not to discredit ministry, but

to give an undue place to it. But Satan, who is always working to dislocate the means of helping the body on, stirs up the saints to give credit where they ought not, to be captious and to discredit where they ought to be thankful. All these things require to be regulated by the word. The thoughts of men in general are founded upon the Old Testament and not upon the New: hence the notion of ministry being a kind of honourable profession, or something known as a title in the world. But if we examine such a portion as this, or all others in the epistles, it will soon appear that there never was such a thing recognized in the world as an apostle, etc. They were despised by the world. Peter was not more honoured in his day in the world after he became an apostle than he was before. The world might recognize that he wrought miracles, which is another thing altogether. Many fleshly men wrought great miracles. In Corinth they were mere babes in understanding, because they were so taken up with miracles and the display of external gifts. They liked, too, to hear themselves talk; and the apostle shows that to bring out even a few words for the good of the Church, was far higher and better than any signs and wonders they performed. He could work more miracles than they all, yet he says he would rather speak five words with his understanding "that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." Thus, if the Church is shorn of the miraculous powers which strike the eye of the unbeliever, what is even more important abides, save the fundamental gifts, which did not require to be continued.

The foundation was so perfectly laid that apostles and prophets are not needed. This is intimated here. The Spirit of God does not prepare the saints for the long continuance of things in this world. Christ gave "some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." The believers in those days could not have known but that the whole work of the Church was to be completed in that very generation: there is no such idea as a succession taught here, though now we may see it is implied. Ministry is the exercise of a spiritual gift; and these gifts depend upon Christ always abiding the Head of the Church, never terminating His office as a high priest might, whose office would devolve upon some successor by reason of death. But Christ is in heaven after resurrection, and these apostles are what He gave when He ascended on high. We stand so far on the same ground now as they did upon the day of Pentecost. Christ had left the world then, and it was thence that He gave these gifts here described. The Holy Ghost abides in the Church, and by the Holy Ghost He empowers men on earth for whatever the Church may need. We have evangelists, the great agents the Lord uses for recruiting His spiritual army. Then we have pastors and teachers whom the Lord raises up and gives for the purpose of leading on and guiding and ruling those saints of God who are brought in. All these gifts abide as much as ever. I am not speaking of measure of power, for things are weak indeed; but inasmuch as they depend upon Christ above and the Holy Ghost below, and as Christ never can cease to be Head there and the Holy Ghost does not leave the Church here, these gifts necessarily abide also. So it is added, "Till we all come in the unity of the faith." There is no divine warrant for the continuance of miracles, but it is implied for the continuance of these edification-gifts for the good of souls.

Our Lord, then, gave these gifts "till we all come." It does not say He *will* give them, because the early Church was set in the posture of expecting the Lord Jesus Christ again. Paul and the other apostles directed the saints to be always looking out for Christ. There was no intimation that Christ must come, but they were to expect Him constantly. Hence, there is no such thing in connection with ministry as preparing for a long lapse of ages. But Christ is at the right hand of God, supplying what is necessary. "He *gave* some till we all come in the unity of the faith." If Christ had come in the apostolic generation, this would have been true. Christ has delayed; but it abides true, "till we all

come." So that, with the exceptions already stated, we are warranted to expect a perpetuation of ministry of the same character, and flowing from the same source, as the apostolic Church had. Whatever is necessary for the gathering in of souls, and caring for them when gathered, abides till Christ comes and completes all.

What a blessed thing it is to know that we can accept from God that ministry, which in man's hand has been so proud or servile or both — that we can look for it from Him and recognize it as a divine thing — that we are not driven to the notion that we have only a human ministry now instead of a divine, as of old, but that we have the certainty that these gifts flow from Christ, who cannot fail in His word and work! But how are we to know a minister, an evangelist, a pastor, a teacher? I ask, How do you know a Christian? Every Christian, who is conversant with Christians, has a general idea. I do not say there is any infallible discernment of it. But although nobody can pronounce unflinchingly, and we are necessarily dependent for our measure upon God's present help, still we know as a general rule there is that in a Christian which commends itself to his brethren in general. There is that in his confession of Christ which harmonizes with the word of God more or less. The spirit, the tone, the general life and ways, after they have been a little inured to the trials of the way, may either strengthen or weaken the conviction. It is just so as to judging of ministry. And we are bound to prove all things. A person is used of God to move souls powerfully and with blessing; to gather them in and to bring them to Christ. There is an evangelist clearly. On the other hand, you may see one whose heart does not go out so much in putting the gospel before souls, but who enjoys and loves to make others enjoy the truth of God, and to develop the character of God. Is not he a teacher? Others may know the truth of God as well, but they cannot bring it out so as to act thus upon others. But if a third person attempts to deal practically with souls and yet habitually makes grave mistakes, can I say, There is a pastor? When there are difficulties, he is at his wits' end, knowing not what to do nor advise. He may be able to explain the Bible, but when it is a question of applying it to the practical life of Christians, there are endless blunders. Again, a pastor supposes not only knowledge of the truth, but the power to urge it day by day on individuals: it involves a dealing with conscience and affection in a way that a teacher does not necessarily imply. A man might be a teacher without being a pastor (and vice versa), or he might be both. An apostle might be a teacher, and an evangelist and pastor too. You will find a particular gift in one man and another of a totally different kind in another. Again, there may be a person who cannot bring out truth powerfully, but he can exhort; he can deal with the conscience. This is an invaluable gift not alluded to here; but in Romans 12 we find it. Here are the more prominent gifts for adjusting the saints in their proper order and functions. But while I believe the indwelling Spirit of God is the only power of discerning with the measure of certainty that God pleases, whether a person is a Christian or not, and whether he has a gift or not, of course the degree of discernment depends upon our hearts being above the flesh and its activity. It demands spirituality, and this supposes self-judgment. The whole Church is responsible to judge. An evangelist might make a mistake, thinking a person to be truly converted, and he might baptize him. But something comes out which leads the Church to refuse him. Supposing a person confessing the name of Christ and baptized seeks fellowship, the assembly of God in that place are bound to examine. No one has a *right* to come: who has rights now but God? We are to be under obedience instead of talking about rights. The Church then examines, and if there be a general fellowship or such a measure of satisfaction as would lead them to say, We believe that this person has received Christ, we should not be justified in refusing his profession to be a member of Christ; the person is then received into the assembly, and then comes the trial — dependence upon God after one is received. Christ is absolutely necessary for a right walk. Those even that are born of God will not be kept unless they walk in real lowliness and looking up to God.

The Spirit of God works in the assembly. One man manifests ability to preach, another to teach; some to serve the Lord in private, and others in public. What is the power for judging of these? The same Spirit of God. And after all, it is a simpler question than many imagine. Just as a human being knows the food that is good for it, whether it be a babe or a man: so is it inseparable from the saints that they should know in the main what is for their spiritual blessing. If persons are low and fleshly they will be taken with showy trash; but you will find in the main a right and sound judgment from the most matured spiritual judgment down to the mere babe. Although all are not able to point out the right thing, all who are guided of God in any measure are able to find out the value of what is ministered. And as to heresy. How can the assembly judge of false doctrine? Christ is the standard. Whatever scripturally exalts Christ is true; whatever lowers Christ is false, and of the devil. Christ is the power of God. and the wisdom of God. But God works by means, and if there is a false teacher who brings in what is evil, there are true teachers who are able to discern it; and though he may try to wrap it up in pleasing forms, yet the Holy Spirit who dwells in the Church works against Satan, and by different members He unveils and brings out the true character of the evil thing before the assembly of God, and all are able, who are walking with God, to pronounce a divine judgment upon it when once it is exposed. If we had to make a railway we should not know how to begin the work; but when the railway is made, we can tell perfectly well the use and value of it, and can judge well enough for practice whether it is a good one or not. So with the Church of God. Though all may not equally discern and expose what is evil, God gives some who can, and afterwards all readily form a judgment upon it. These gifts are indispensable to the Church as a whole, though I do not say that wherever there is an assembly of God, it is absolutely necessary for their walking together that there should be such or such persons raised up in their midst. But we can bless God for this provision for the wants of His Church, as long as He has a Church here below. The existence of the Church and of ministry rests on the same ground; they both flow from Christ's love, and as long as we have the one we shall have the other; it is the same love of Christ that sees His body and that supplies certain members with the requisite spiritual power for the well-being of that body. All men of God, no matter where they are, acknowledge that God must have to do with ministry, and therefore the Dissenter, when he puts his vote into the urn, does not deny that the Holy Ghost must capacitate a man to be a minister. If he was a minister before, he is, of course, a minister after; but they say we want to make him our minister. Would it not be better to drop this unscriptural form and own him as a minister of Christ always? You thus leave him on his own proper ground as one who is bound to serve God at all cost and in all ways.

I admit that we find in the word of God bishops and deacons; but they are not referred to here. It is not said that He gave some bishops and deacons. But I maintain from the Scripture that these bishops and deacons required an apostolic or quasi-apostolic appointment. Is it not becoming for us now to say that, not being apostles, we do not pretend to exercise their functions in ordaining, though we do heartily recognize men possessed of the requisite qualifications for these local offices wherever we find them?

But the prevalent system not only assumes an authority which is not really possessed, but it introduces the utmost disorder and the most guilty confusion, if we judge it by Scripture, or even by its practical results; and this too in every human association — Episcopalian, Presbyterian, or Congregational. For what can be more fatal to blessing or the Lord's glory than to see an ardent evangelist tied down to a limited sphere and vainly essaying to meet the wants of a body of Christians who need to be built up in Christ? or to know that a mature teacher, just adjoining, is compelled to abandon his proper gift, because his congregation consists almost exclusively of the unconverted? What can be more painfully calculated to hinder the Spirit of God than this network of canons, ecclesiastical etiquette, etc., which degrades ministry into the bondage of man and disposes of souls as

if they were the serfs of the soil on which they live?

On the other hand, where Scripture ground is taken with conscience toward God, things may be weak, still there is room for the Holy Ghost to enter and work by whom He will. The enemy, no doubt, has his special wiles for distracting, and, if possible, perverting those who are there; nor do any need more watchfulness and prayer, not to say humiliation. But thank God it is the arena of faith; it honours the word of God; it gives the Spirit His proper place; and it recognizes the Lordship of Christ, welcoming each member of the body where the Head has set it; and because of this, if men plead that there must be order, I ask of what sort it is to be. Is it an order of our devising or God's that you really wish? If we are subject to Scripture, we shall allow no claim, howsoever specious, to set aside the only order which God sanctions for His children now on earth, *i.e.*, His assembly, guided by the Holy Ghost, present in their midst to maintain the glory of Christ and to work sovereignly by whom He will, though, of course, only for edification and with the comeliness that befits the presence of God. Disorders there may be through want of spirituality, and this on the part of gifted men as well as the ungifted. But, assuredly, Scripture is a safer and mightier rule to correct all disorders by, than the wisest regulations of men, though nothing will avail without present dependence on the Holy Ghost.

The Apostle Paul, however, whilst meeting fleshly abuses, supposes the fullest opening for every gift of the Lord within the christian assembly, subject only to His own express restrictions. (See 1 Cor. 14) If this was God's order then, when did it cease? or has the Church of God no longer divine landmarks for its public services? I cannot envy those who, abandoning God's system for one of their adoption or invention, do not scruple nevertheless to cite scraps here and there, such as verse 33, 40, to support human arrangements directly opposed to both letter and spirit of the inspired word from which they are so abruptly taken. What God has laid down for the Church's worship and service, is and ought to be as obligatory on the conscience as that which He has written for our individual walk and conversation. In a certain sense, indeed, it seems to me that public corporate disobedience is even more insulting to God than any individual's failure, grave as this may be. And what is the present state of Christendom? God's people, with the world mixed up together, have departed from the word of God. I do not speak of them as men or of moral duties; but the Spirit of God is not allowed His own proper place in the assembly, or even its members individually. His power is not owned as a divine person come down not merely to convert sinners, but to be the guide of the christian assembly. How is it everywhere with the meetings of the Church (nay, does it meet at all as such?) and with the exercise of the gifts of Christ in the assembly of God, separate from the world? When Christians ordinarily come together, is there not an unscriptural method set up, one thing here and another there, instead of leaving God's assembly in holy subjection to the Holy Ghost, and trusting Him to work freely, and fully, and mightily by the members as He will, for the good of the whole? Is not the revealed word of God, as to His assembly, like all other truth, eternal for the Church's conduct here below? I maintain that it is; and believe those who dispute its constant authority and their own present responsibility, will have a serious question to answer before the judgment-seat of Christ; while such as stand by the will of God in His word, will surely have His blessing now and His approbation in that great day.

But to come out from what is ostensibly evil is not all. Separation from our associations ought to be a pain to us, and should never be done except as believing it to be the clear will of God. And though one ought not to refuse the weakest Christians that come from elsewhere, yet I do not think that a person ought to be quick to receive what is new to them, unless they believe that it is assuredly of God. If they only come because of some happy circumstances, it will not stand: if they say, "There is so much love, truth, union, simplicity, etc., among these Christians that we must go there," by and by some trial comes, and then they are ready to say, "There is no love at all among them — how

changed they all are!" These spiritual effects may act upon the affections and win attention; but they are not an adequate ground-work for the Christian in presence of the revealed will of God. Nay, supposing you could assemble a company of happy believers, all of the same mind as to the Spirit, and the Church, and the Lord's coming, beside fundamental truth, I would not belong to it, if adhesion to their mind were a condition. It wants and ignores the divine foundation. Be it mine to cleave only to the name of the Lord Jesus, the sole and sufficient gathering-point for the entire Church of God; and this if those who gather to it are ever so few and feeble and whatever the cost. Perhaps my dearest friend may get astray or I may myself. Of course it is painful and humiliating for one to be judged by others, because of failing to judge self. But I dare not stay away because I know the will of God is against it. We are not free to make of the Church a religious club to suit ourselves. It is God's to choose and to call as it pleases Him for the glory of His Son; it is ours to obey from our hearts. In the present broken state of Christianity we have learnt that God's principles always bind the conscience, and we have come together to be where His word is free to be carried out by the Holy Ghost. If some one amongst us falls into sin, our adversaries cry, See! they are no more perfect than their neighbours. But who ever talked of personal superiority? We arrogate nothing to ourselves, only desiring to be led of God to walk individually and collectively as He would have us do.

Are you willing to be like the people who gathered round David in the cave of Adullam? Though they were distressed and miserable when they came, they did not continue so. He who attracted them to himself was the centre of God's counsels, and God wrought in them and formed their hearts, and put honour upon them, and the day came when those despised ones became the heroes and champions of the Lord's cause when everything was broken in Israel. May it be our lot to serve Him faithfully! I believe that we are ecclesiastically where we ought to be — where the Spirit is free to open and wield and apply that truth which is calculated to separate us in heart and practice to God and His objects from the world. It is now our own fault only when we do not get on. If all that hindered us once (when bound up with the systematic dishonour of the Holy Ghost) is removed, may we feel deeply our personal failure! Our principle is no longer a human motive but divine, because it is neither more nor less than carrying out the word of God as to His Church in faith, and this as He vouchsafes light and power. If any others could show us wherein we could do His will more perfectly, should we not greatly thank them, and bless God for the help? May we hold fast truth in subjection to His Spirit, desiring the good of all believers, let them be where they may, and not anxious to bring them out or in one moment sooner than God gives them to know His mind! I do not acknowledge that any human society, great or small, has the least right to a single child of God. It is only a question of His will. To obey His word, to urge it upon others, is neither presumptuous nor uncharitable, but faith in God. May we abound in it with thanksgiving!

Although we have already dwelt upon the more remarkable forms in which the grace of Christ has displayed itself in the way of gift — apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, we have not yet touched upon the object that our Lord had in view, *i.e.*, the general aim of ministry. This is said, in verse 12, to be "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Now you will observe, in the very first expression of the Spirit of God, that which corrects one of the most prevalent fallacies of Christendom at this moment: and not merely of Christendom in its darker forms (for I am not speaking so much of Latins or Greeks), but where there is the orthodox light of Protestantism, and even strong evangelical sentiments. No one who is acquainted with the state of feeling that is now so general will doubt but that, even among Christians, the prominent notion of ministry is the bare calling in of souls to the knowledge of their own salvation in Christ.

But this is not the Lord's ultimate design in ministry. The winning of sinners to the Saviour is a necessary part, but is only a part of the blessing. Evangelists, like the rest, are given "for the perfecting of the saints," which goes much farther. It is clear that they must first become saints; but that which the Holy Ghost makes to be the proper end in view is the forming the saints according to Christ; adjusting them according to the Lord's call and sovereign will touching them; the bringing them out adequately and rightly and freely, so as to find their proper action toward God and one another. This seems to be implied in "the perfecting of the saints." Then we have rather the mediate forms which this end assumes, "unto the work of the ministry, unto the edifying of the body of Christ."

God always makes of prime moment His saints individually considered — their right condition before Him, their being thoroughly fashioned according to His standard. Their being gathered together and working as an assembly, important as it is, comes after. Thus, the subject of the body, the Church, does not appear till the close of Ephesians 1. What is the early part of that chapter filled with? That which is necessary for the perfecting of the saints. God Himself reveals His truth precisely in the same order, and to the same primary end. Here again the gifts of Christ are found to be just after the pattern of His own dealings. The perfecting of the saints is the nearest object to His heart; and then follows the means used to bring into the knowledge of common privileges, and the working of the Spirit in the assembly, which is bound up with His glory in the earth. Thus, whatever may be the condition of the Church, whatever the blessed ways of God in dealing with the Church, whatever the affections of Christ towards His body, after all God makes His saints of most immediate account, makes their perfecting to be the first and most prominent object. And this He always holds to. Whatever the fluctuations of the work, whatever the character of His testimony at any given moment upon the earth may be, the perfecting of the saints is the unceasing object before Him.

There is something exceedingly sweet in this. Come what may, God will accomplish the perfecting of His saints, and turn even the things that are sorrowful and afflicting into a means of blessing for them, if not always to their credit. Where we need humbling, it is plain we are not humble; where we are not low in our own eyes, God must Himself make us so. The process does not give room for our importance; but God keeps His own blessed end in view, and never fails to accomplish it. So that we may always adore Him for His goodness; though it may be in that which is distressing for the time, still God never fails; He is bent upon the perfecting of the saints; He is faithful and will do it. He puts this forward before His saints as the practical object of Christ. There we have ministry taking these different forms according to His own sovereign disposition.

But the Lord has to do with ministry, directly and immediately, without the intervention of the assembly. There is no such thing in Scripture as a ministry flowing from the Church, though there is ministry directed to the Church. St. Paul speaks of himself as a minister of the Church: that is, not as derived from it, but serving it: for the Church is formed by ministry, instead of ministry flowing out of the Church. The gifts are for the perfecting of the saints. The ministry may fail, but the Lord never fails in accomplishing His end. It may be in a slower way, and there may be that which is utterly weak and even afflicting; but He accomplishes His purposes. He gives these gifts "for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of the ministry, unto the edifying of the body of Christ." These two latter clauses come in as subordinate to the first. It is most blessed to see the saints acting together; but however the work of the ministry may fail or be impaired in man's hands, the great end to which the Lord commits Himself, and for which He has given these gifts, is carried through spite of all. And more: this is true, "till we all arrive at the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at a perfect man, at the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." The "perfect man" here does not refer to resurrection, but to our being thoroughly grown up into the knowledge of Christ.

This is observable in St. Paul. Although his great work was unfolding the redemption of Christ and the counsels of God's glory founded on redemption, yet he cannot but insist on this full growth of the saints in connection with the deepening knowledge of the Son of God. It is the person of Christ that rises up before the soul; and this is very much more a test of spirituality than any acquaintance with His work. It is with Himself, as a divine person, that we become more and more intimate through the truth that God ministers to our souls. This is what is put before us — "Till we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at a perfect man." Knowledge of the past ways of God would not do now. The Old Testament saints did look to the Messiah in the way of hope; but the present form in which the Spirit of God presents the object to us is the knowledge of His person, as the Son fully revealed for our joy and praise and worship. So that we have here the great christian object and form of knowledge that God has in view with all His saints now. The comparison with verse 14 gives the force of the expression, "a perfect man;" it is in contrast with being children, "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; that we henceforth be no more babes, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." What God designs for us is that we should be full-grown, and this "unto the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." It is in contrast with this condition of weakness and exposure to all the craft of men, and their changing, scheming tactics of error.

Then we have the opposite practical way in which our growth is carried on. "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up unto him in all things, who is the head, even Christ." The expression seems deeper than what we have here. It is "being truthful in love," not merely "speaking the truth in love," though, of course, this is a very important part of being truthful, but it is not everything; and we all know that it is very possible not to be truthful in thought and feeling, where the words are quite correct. "*Being truthful* in love" implies truth in the inward parts.

We find here the two essential features of godliness which were found in Christ in infinite perfection. He was the light. Whatever He might say, He exactly reflected the full truth from God Himself; nay, He was it. We find a remarkable expression when our Lord was dealing with the Jews and bringing Himself out as the light of the world, in John 8. They asked Him what He was, and He says (according to the English version), "Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning." But the true meaning is, "Absolutely what I speak unto you." There should be neither "at the beginning," but "absolutely;" nor "what I said," but "what I am speaking." If these words are weighed, you will find the force of them. Our Lord is exactly and absolutely what He utters; His words convey with infallible certainty what He is. *He* certainly was truthful in love. Our Lord's words so completely gave out the inner man, He was so perfectly transparent, that not one thing in Him deflected from the truth; nothing seemed to be but exactly what He was. And this because there was no sin in Him neither was guile found in His mouth. There was no object but God before His soul, as He says Himself: "I do always those things that please Him." And you may rely upon it, that it is having Christ before us as the object of our souls in everything practically, which alone gives us power of truth. The moment we have anything of our own as an object, so far we slip aside, and that comes out which is not the full truth, for Christ alone is the truth, and He alone gives us the truth in perfect love; and it is only in proportion as we are filled with Him, and have Him to the exclusion of all our own evil, that we ourselves walk in the truth. Let us have our hearts fixed on any one thing or person save Christ, evil slips out, and it is good for us to know and own this. It was never so with our Lord. He could say, "I have set the Lord always before me." And He has given us Himself always to set before us.

Our Lord's meat and His drink was to do the will of His Father; still, of course, He had to meet God about our sins in a manner that none is called upon to do. We start upon a redemption

accomplished by Christ, which has brought us into the presence of God, and which calls upon us to walk according to the grace which has brought us there and which keeps us there. We may not all realize it, but we have done with ourselves by virtue of the work of Christ; we are brought near to God, brought to be at home with God, and from that place we are called upon to take up everything that becomes us here below; and here we have to judge what is the will of God, for we are palpable weakness if we are not doing His will distinctly. It is not only that God will have us conformed to Christ by and by, but this is what He has in view now. And in spite of all, wherever the heart is true and Christ is before the soul, though there may be immense differences, yet this is God's delight with His children. The child does not remain always a child, but becomes a man: and so should it be with the family of God. He would have us all to grow.

This, then, is the object in the gifts of Christ. He is bent upon blessing souls even now in the world, and such is the object of all ministry. It is not something left for our thoughts and arrangements, but it is all in the hands of the Lord. It is He who loves His saints, who will bless them, and who makes His individual servants, that have to do with the saints, to be immediately connected with Himself, and to have His objects before their eyes in a duty which they have to discharge to Him and not to them. For directly the Church becomes the great object before the soul, the blessing is of a lower character altogether, inferior in all its spiritual lineaments. There may be right feelings toward one another, but there is that which is much higher than loving one's brethren, divine though it be; and if you know nothing above brotherly love as the object, you will fail to walk in love. God is higher than love, and this is precisely the point of difference so much needed for the moment. One of the main things that we have to guard against is Satan's endeavouring to persuade people that, because God is love, therefore love is God. But it is not so. If I say that God is love, I bring out what He is in the active energy of His holy nature. But this is not all that God is. He is light as much as He is love; and I should own His love without the denial of His light. What prevails among many now is the deifying of love in order to strip God of His light. But where we have it clearly before us, not that love "is God," but that "God is love," love will not be the less, but in fact more true and pure. While it will be the active spring of our own hearts, it will not be found at issue with His character, but will leave room for God to display Himself according to all that He is. God is truthful in love. Take it in the case of His dealings with my soul, for instance, in conversion. Is faith the only thing produced by the Holy Ghost? What is the first effect of His breaking in upon a sinner? Making nothing of him. Is not this love? Yes; but it is God's love that deals with me in the truth of what He is, and of what the sinner's awful condition is. So the effect produced on the heart of him that is renewed is not merely faith in Christ, but repentance toward God; it is the judgment of his whole moral condition in His sight. And as you find both connected in God's dealings with a soul from the first, and in the moral answer produced in the soul of the saint, so it is true all through. Where the action of a saint is healthful in the presence of God, the room will surely not be less open for divine love, yet there will be the maintenance of the holiness and majesty of God. We should not wish to be spared pain for the purpose of slipping through at God's expense. There never has been one trial of heart gone through with God, but we have been blessed by it. We might have the blessing in a still fuller way without so much failure or letting out of what we are. But supposing we do not so lay hold of Christ as to be lifted above ourselves, then we must learn painfully what we are. Yet God turns it all for blessing. This is the great thought of the chapter. He has brought us into a blessed place. First of all, we are in Christ before God; and next, God dwells in us: the one is our great privilege, the other is also our solemn responsibility, which flows from the fact that God has made us His dwelling-place.

At once all contracted ecclesiastical notions are shut out by the truth of His dwelling-place. If we merely meet as a church, such a connection with God disappears. But if it were only two or three, I

must meet on the ground of *the* Church or it has no truth in it before God; and two or three Christians thus gathered would do God's will and would have Him dwelling in them. There Christ is, and there God dwells in a special way. God can bless where He does not sanction; He can bless even in Popery. His grace is so rich and free, and above all the wicked ways of men, that He can use the name of Christ in the most untoward circumstances; but this is very different from God's putting His seal to what we are about. In order that He may Himself be associated in it, we must be in the truth of things, and acting according to the divine mind. I believe that only in our own days, since the time when the apostles, Paul especially, were raised up, has this great truth been brought out by the Holy Ghost so as to bear upon souls according to God. I am not aware of any adequate testimony to it since the ruin of Christendom. There were in abundance efforts of men to improve the present and imitate the past; but either is a very different thing from God's provision in the word for saints in a fallen state. If you see a man who is striving simply and ever so earnestly to get better, you say justly that he is under law and does not understand the gospel. Just so, when a number of Christians are trying to ameliorate Christendom by new plans and efforts, I should say that, if they understood the nature of the Church of God, and the Holy Ghost's relation to it, they would feel that mere union is a poor substitute for unity; they would humble themselves in the sight of God because of the state of the Church, and would fall back upon the word of God to see whether there is not a real and lowly but divine direction for the actual state of things in Christendom. May God deliver His saints from the unholy as well as unbelieving but very general notion, that we are obliged on account of present circumstances to go on in sin! To men of spiritual discernment the thought is just making God such an one as ourselves. If I give up His holiness in one thing, how can I stand up for it or trust Him in another? Contrariwise, let us maintain that there is no emergency as to which God can lower His holiness, or sanction the lack of it in us; and if His will be perfect in other things, is it less in that which so deeply and nearly concerns the glory and name of Christ as the Church? People argue from the fact that things are not in order and beauty now; they go so far as to deny the responsibility of saints, as if Christians were not in one way or another connected with these public departures from God. Will it be urged that they are to be adhered to because they themselves or their fathers have been brought up in them? Surely the one question for us is this: Do we desire to learn and do the will of God? Is this our governing object? Or is it merely, Where can I get enough comfort or blessing to keep my head above water? Of this, too, I am fully assured, that if you are found doing the will of God, you will have the most and best blessing; but it is not the true christian motive, and it is an unsafe guide. We may go here and get a little blessing, and then go there hoping to get a little more. But, as it is said here, growth is, "that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine." He would guard us from all the cunning craftiness of men whereby they lie in wait to deceive.

Is there, then, no means of having certainty in the midst of the confusion that reigns? Assuredly there is, and where the soul is sufficiently broken down to feel what is due to God, He will make all plain. We never ought to join in a single thing that we know to be wrong, whether privately or publicly. Of course, there may be everywhere things done or said that one may not be able to approve of, but this individual failure is different from joining in public acts of worship, the order of which is known beforehand to be systematically unscriptural. There I am identified with the guilt of what is done contrary to the word of God and so fixed by human authority. But this shows us the importance of nothing being done in the assembly but what will carry the weight of the whole assembly along with it. Hence, too, the evident desirableness of keeping out of the assembly all debatable questions. We may speak of them to a servant of God, to a wise brother; but even that which I may individually enjoy is not a thing that I am entitled to occupy the assembly of God with, unless I believe God would have me say it, especially when there may be room for a just doubt on the mind of the simplest

believer there. Minor matters of discipline never ought to be brought into the assembly. When anything appears of fundamental false doctrine or of a grossly immoral character, let it be what it may, there it is plain that all saints must be assumed to have the very same judgment. All would feel that they could have no fellowship with blasphemy or drunkenness, or any fatal manifestation of evil of one kind or another. Then we have cases which claim the united judgment of the whole assembly. Supposing a saint were what is called a Churchman, or a Dissenter, and little versed in scriptural thought or action ecclesiastically, still, if he were really born of God, there could be no material difference of judgment about such matters. The power of the Spirit is mighty; the Lord knows how to work; and the common spiritual instincts of all the children of God, guided by His word as to such matters, find their expression in the renouncing and judgment of all such evil. But public discipline in the Church is so serious a matter, that it ought never to be resorted to till the evil rises up to such a height that all unbiassed believers would be united about it. There is a tendency among righteous and active minds to make, out of every matter of difference, questions for the Church to decide on and deal with. This is a grave mistake, fraught with ill for all concerned, and to be resisted with all possible earnestness. Even saints are apt to be prejudiced or prepossessed in what concerns one another especially in small things which can at all admit of party feeling. Besides, it would become an instrument of torture for many souls, if every private matter were liable to be brought into public. Thanks be to God, He has made His own landmarks for our guidance, and has shown us clearly that to bring anything into the open arena of Church discipline, ought never to be till every means has been taken to hinder it. The desire of our hearts ought to be the glory of the Lord in the blessing of one another's souls; and we all know that needless publicity must add largely to shame, pain, and difficulty. But when it is needful, let it be done, so that it be to the Lord, with the utmost gravity and real love. The destroying the true notion of the Church, and of its action, has tended to reduce it to the level of a mere club, sometimes lower than the world, though with the highest pretensions.

But when we lay hold of the truth that the Lord has that on earth with which He links His name, although only two or three souls may have gathered unto that name, renouncing their connection with what is of the world and of man; when we have come to learn from God that He who saved our souls is the only One competent to form and keep and guide the Church, when we know that He has made us members of His own Church, all we have to do is to act upon the ground of the Church that God has made. If we now belong to God at all, we belong to His assembly, and we are called to follow it out practically. If I know ever so few that act upon the word of God which applies to this, I am free, yea, bound in the liberty of Christ to meet with them. Of course, it would be matter of thankfulness, if there were hundreds of thousands meeting thus, though this might in other ways entail more sorrow and trial; but the trial will not be mere trouble of flesh; it will be, if we walk with God, the exercise of grace and patience; it will call out the real love to Christ that seeks the good of others, and this is always drawn out into intercession by the pressure of evil on all sides.

Supposing, then, two or three come to the point that they cannot acknowledge a human church, any more than a human salvation; are they to sit still, dishonouring God and ruining their conscience by persisting in known evil; or are they not in faith to meet in the Lord's name? By all means let them come together, following the word and trusting the Spirit of God. They will find trial, but true liberty and the Holy Ghost working in their midst. He is given to abide with them for ever; let them believe it and not fail to count upon it. They may be very weak, but the Holy Ghost is not weak. On coming together, perhaps there is no one to speak at length, with profit, to them; but the assembly of God does not come together for sermons. Much or little speaking, their object is to do the will of God, to remember Christ, to act scripturally on the faith of God's aim and glory in His Church. If there were twenty thousand Christians round about, but meeting on human principles, what believer can maintain

that these two or three would not enjoy the special presence of God among them in a way the others could not? The more we have the sense of the ruin of the Church, the fuller our confidence that God's principles always remain intact and as obligatory now as on the day of Pentecost; the more happy the soul in the Lord, the more it will be drawn out in love to all saints. May it be ours thus by grace to "grow up unto him in all things, who is the head, even Christ!" This does not depend on the number of communicants, nor on the forms and means of ministerial power, but far more on our own souls being with God, and doing His will, not only in individual service and life, but also as His assembly, which ought to come together according to His word.

There are, then, these three things: first and prominently, the perfecting of the saints individually; subordinately, next, the work of the ministry, where other persons act upon me; and, lastly, the building up of the body of Christ. The full aim and desired result of it all is the growing up unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; "that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up unto him in all things, who is the head, even Christ." Allow me to point out a practical proof of it. You are aware that at an early date, false doctrines and heresies of all kinds came in. What was the resource of good men in those days? They invented creeds and confessions by which they endeavoured to try suspected persons. But where was the authority for this course? Or was it found that these bulwarks kept the evil out? In no wise, time, or place. There is only one power of maintaining truth and love — even Christ; and where Christ is really held up and to, without the devices of men, there may be weakness and ignorance at first, but the result will be that Christ's strength will be made perfect in their weakness. The power of Christ will rest upon those who, feeling their own weakness, cleave to Him alone. On the other hand, while you often stumble weak consciences in good men by imposing creeds, you can rarely, if ever, thereby shut out bad men; nor would spiritual men, alive to the honour of God's word, and aroused to see their unwarranted character if ever so correct, deem it right to own them. Thus you hamper the weak and you exclude the strong among the children of God; you have a crowd of thoughtless or bigoted subscribers; and, as to dangerous men, what thief or robber cannot leap over a creed? Human restraints may clog and dishonour the work of God, but they avail not to hinder the evil of man or Satan. What you find in Scripture is the saints led on and the body knit together by the different joints and bands and thus having nourishment ministered. This is the exercise and fruit of ministry exercised in all its extent; for there may be the Spirit of God giving a word by one who has not a permanent gift, though God ordinarily makes a man an evangelist or a teacher; so that a stated ministry is a truth of God, while the truth goes much farther.

But exclusive ministry, I am bold to say, is an interference with the rights of Christ and with the action of the Holy Ghost. God has caused to be felt in these last days the ruin of the Church more than at any epoch known to me in its past history; but He has also made souls learn and feel that no ruin of the Church destroys a divine principle. What was the truth for the Church is the truth for him who believes. The original principle of ministry ever abides the only principle which He sanctions or we ought to follow. If there was nothing like modern practice in apostolic times, it is a human thing (and why should a saint hold to or justify it?) in our days. It is absolutely due to the Lord, that the Church should not interfere with those who are scripturally doing His work;* and also, that all should leave room for Him to raise up others as He pleases. No workman, skilled or blessed as he may be, has all gifts in his person. There might be some member of Christ in the congregation qualified of God to edify by a word of wisdom occasionally, or able to preach the gospel, to exhort, or to minister in some mode or measure, according to the word of God. What we find in Scripture is the door kept open in

principle and practice for all that God gives. Surely this is not to disparage ministry; it is, on the contrary, to assert it, and the rights of the Lord in it. But the ground on which ministry is exercised at the present time, is so wholly, certainly, and transparently human, that the effect is inevitably to accredit a number of persons as ministers who are not even Christians, and to discredit all real ministers, who, for the Lord's sake, refuse unscriptural forms, old or new. This is an evil that no godly man, who desires to be obedient, ought to tolerate, or even make light of, for an instant. It seems to me a good reason why it is wrong to become a minister of any denomination that follows (as all do) these baseless traditions. If you are a minister at all, you are a minister of Christ and of nobody else. This the word of God makes as plain as light. The action of the assembly, as such, is entirely distinct. While the minister is, of course, a part or member of the assembly, yet must he act, if he act rightly, from Christ, and from Christ alone. He may strive to edify believers by discourses, exhortations, etc., addressed to them; he may seek earnestly the conversion of unbelievers; but ministry or no ministry (in which last case there would, of course, be loss), yet the assembly goes on, competent and bound to perform its own functions in subjection to the Lord. Again, not ministry but the presence and operation of the Spirit constitute the power of the assembly. This is as important for the assembly to bear in mind, as it is for the servants to remember that they have immediately to do with Christ as their Lord. Of course, abuse of ministry, like any other sin, necessarily brings him who is guilty under the judgment of the assembly. No man can ever be beyond the Church's judgment, where he gives occasion for it by the allowance of evil in his conduct. But the Church's interference never ought to appear, save in the case of known evil doctrine or practice.

*If honour to those that labour and help to maintain them or their families in case of need are supposed to involve a title to interfere, the worldly and evil source of such a thought becomes apparent. Would they purchase the gift of God with money, or reduce a servant of Christ into the hireling of men? On the other hand, let us beware of mere human independence, which is simply pride, where it is least becoming and most injurious.

This may help to show the practical bearing of the passage. What God does and Christ gives, the mutual service of the various members of the body, joints and bands, — all is that we should "grow up unto Christ in all things; from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." There we have the theory of the Church, because God, in laying down these blessed principles, does not bring in the mere accidents of evil. There is no such thought as a screw being loose here or something else being wrong there. All is supposed to be moving on harmoniously for the great end for which the Lord has established it. Disciplinary action, resources where evil reigns, must be looked for and are provided elsewhere.

There is a difficulty that people often bring forward — that you cannot have a perfect church on earth. What do they mean? If it be a condition where there will not be a soul ever doing or saying anything but what is quite according to God, they are asserting, doubtless, a simple truism, if it be not rather mere foolishness. But what is insinuated is, that you cannot on earth get any association of saints according to the will of God. I deny this, believing that you may readily find the path of His will, and that every believer ought to find that path. You are responsible to learn the will of God about His Church, if you are a member of it, and to be doing nothing else. If I know two or three Christians in a place, seeking to walk according to the Scriptures, there should be my lot. One may be a forward man naturally, another might have strange notions and ways. There might be something faulty in each of the individuals. All this is not to deter me for an instant, because my owning them as being that part of the Church which is acting where they are according to God does not depend upon an immaculate

ideal in this or that. The question is — are they doing the will of God according to His word? God's will at least is perfect, and he who does it abides for ever. Is not His will about His Church as absolute as about anything else? If this be allowed, there, I say, is the ground of action. Must we not be about our Father's business as to this? Hence the one question for all who desire to please God is, what is His will? Not surely to meet as the flock of Mr. So-and-so, (for where do we read anything of the sort in Scripture) but to meet as Christians who are simply cleaving to Christ, and counting on the Holy Ghost to teach all the will of God? Is not this, and this alone, the true basis on which Christians should corporately act? Where, then, shall I find believers so meeting? Are there any who have had the faith to come out of that which is merely human, so as to stand on the ground laid down in God's word? The same Scripture that tells me how I am to be saved tells me how to walk in His house, the Church of God. Neither the assembly nor ministry is left to human wit or caprice; as to both, we must search, and be subject to, the word of God. God's system (for He has one, as revealed in Scripture) is what we have to learn and act upon; and though we may encounter great trial and difficulty, and find ourselves in the same straits the early saints experienced, yet, even this confirms the truth to us. Surely we shall have joy and strength if simply dependent on and obedient to the Lord. The very trials will become a means of fresh blessing; and we shall prove how truly God can give us to use for His own glory much of His word which was once practically useless to us, and which we supposed merely referred to apostolic times. We thus begin to find a present application of the word of God in our corporate position, just as much as in meeting the wants of our souls day by day. If this be so, may we have the happiness, not only of knowing these things but of doing them steadfastly unto the end!

The reader now enters upon the general walk of christian men, as suitable to, and connected with, the doctrine of our epistle. Indeed there was already an exhortation in the beginning of Ephesians 4, to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called. But the apostle here descends to particulars. And, first of all, there is a solemn injunction to the saints, that they should not henceforth walk as the other Gentiles walked, in the vanity of their mind. The Spirit of God guards us against what we perhaps might think needless — the walk of those who surround us — the walk that was our own before we were brought to Christ. And yet, the moment that we reflect, the wisdom of such an exhortation is apparent; for Christians are ordinarily liable to be much influenced by the tone of thought and feeling-current in the world outside. The ruling passion that carries the world on for the time being is always apt to be a snare to those, at least, who shrink from the cross day by day, and so much the more because they do not suspect themselves. Whatever be that which occupies its energies, especially if philanthropy, moral progress, or religion be the form that it takes, there is always a liability to be thrown off our guard. Besides, and this is the immediate point here, old habit is strong; so that the apostle does not hesitate to warn these saints who stood out, not only in the fresh joy of faith, but also in outward position, very separate from the world (and the lines were at that time strongly defined); and yet, in this opening word of exhortation, the Holy Ghost very solemnly guards the saints against being drawn into the ways and practices of the Gentiles. There is often a danger of this with Christians, because they do not like to be singular. There may be peculiar people among the children of God. Of course, the apostle does not speak of eccentric individuals, to whom it would be no difficulty but a pleasure to differ from everybody else — men who affect originality in word and deed, and in their strain after it are only odd. But he is guarding against the common moral danger, when faith has lost somewhat of its simplicity and freshness.

On the other hand, the apostle has shown elsewhere — and we should always endeavour to remember it — that it is a wise and important thing to meet souls in grace as far as possible, not to impose upon others what they have not strength to bear. In writing to the Corinthians the apostle had insisted on this, as his ministry exemplified it. He had become a Jew to the Jews, that he might gain

the Jews. He was made all things to all men, that he might by all means save some. There was no kind of pressing points. There was the hearty desire for the good of souls; for we may have this without the pressure of our own particular thoughts and feelings, however right they may be. It is the elasticity of the Christian if established in grace. We rarely can pull the cord too tightly in dealing with our own souls, or be too stringent in our vigilance and prayer against slipping here and there. But it is a totally different thing in having to do with others. We have to bear their infirmities, if, in truth, we are strong; it is for their good that the Lord lays them upon our hearts. We find that, even with His own disciples, *He* went not beyond what they were able at that time to bear. But the very desire to meet souls, and not to raise questions that would gender strife, might expose a gracious Christian to be taking the colour of those outside himself, and giving up his own principles. On every side he has to watch.

There is no doubt, then, of the forbearance in which we are called to walk with one another; nevertheless, we need to beware of turning grace into levity or licentiousness. "This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their minds, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." (Ver. 17, 18.) Here he begins with the inner thing. You will find that our tendency is to occupy ourselves and others with something outward. But the apostle goes to the root of the evil walk of the Gentiles. Their minds were vain and empty, as all must be who have not God distinctly and positively and intelligently before them in any matter, whatever it may be. As to these Gentiles, in nothing had they God before them; they were "without God in the world." Consequently, there was nothing but the empty vapouring mind and mouth of man, imagining one thing and expressing another. What was the effect? The understanding was darkened. "They were alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that was in them, because of the blindness of their heart." These are various descriptions, not of the outward walk, but of the root of all the evil fruit they bore. God was not in all their thoughts. They were "alienated from the life of God." How indeed could it be otherwise? The life of God is only found in His Son; and Him, and, consequently, it they had not. Far from having relish, or a just sense of need, they were estranged from good; and this on account of the blindness or hardness of their hearts. Thus far is the evident tracing of what the evil walk of these Gentiles sprang from; the sum and substance is that it arose from their ignorance. And their ignorance was because their hearts were hard, not from mental dullness. What a solemn and practical truth for every soul of man, converted or not! Our conduct flows from our judgment, and our judgment from our affections. Thus, the state of our heart becomes most important in practice. We find here that all the outward man finds its source in the inner man, and the inner man is formed by that which governs the heart.

Hence the all-importance of having Christ for the heart's object — yea, exclusive object. For nothing is more common than to have divided affections. Indeed, it is the great thing against which we all have to watch. Had we an eye more single, and a heart more thoroughly and self-judgingly devoted to Christ, what would be the consequence? The heart always gives direction, colour, and energy to the judgment. There never would be a waver individually, and there would be nothing but peaceful walking together in the light of God, without slip or stumble of any kind. And this is the theory of a Christian. (Compare Phil. 1 and Col. 1) Practically there are difficulties. Who of us has not had to confess grievous failure and sin? Who has not had to say, I do not know what the mind of God is as to this or that? In a word, the understanding has been too often darkened, and the walk unlike His whose we are. Of course they differ from what we have described here. But is it not a solemn thing that the Christian has to watch against the very same evil which, in souls that know Him not, denies and outrages the character and will of God? And yet this is what we all have to feel and confess as to ourselves. How often we have been without divine light! This ought never to be in a saint. It never

was so with Christ. He was the light; so that it would utterly fall short of His glory to say that He was always not only walking in the light, but according to the light. Consequently He never knew what it was to have a shade of doubt. If He waited, it was never doubt but simple dependence on His Father's will, as in John 11. It may be our path to wait; and it is well to do so, when we have no such assurance. The development that follows is a description of the awful depravity of the Gentiles; as he says in the next verse, "Who, being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." No doubt it is the lowest moral degradation of which the life of man is capable. But the wholesome thing for us to see, and to apply for our own souls' help and guidance and guard too, is that all the excesses of this outward evil were the result of the heart being darkened, and this because it was without the life of God. There was nothing but what Satan drew from a man's own mind, and the consequence was the falsifying of his judgments and feelings. Hence men became a prey to every kind of evil. They had given themselves over to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

But now comes the Christian in contrast. He says (although we are in danger of all this, and the very sense of our danger is what God uses to keep us from falling into the danger), "Ye have not so learned Christ." As all the practical evil of the Gentiles arose from their ignorance of God, the heart, the mind, the walk, all wrong, and increasingly evil; so now God's deliverance from all evil, root, branch, and fruit, is Christ. And what a blessed, simple, holy, God-glorifying deliverance it is! It is not that He enters into anything of the various processes He may use in leading to this result. Besides, Christ is the way, as well as the truth. The one grand means that applies to every case, and that gives the surest deliverance, is Christ Himself. "Ye have not so learned Christ." He purposely makes Him to be the person who has to do directly with the soul. It is a remarkable way of connecting us with our Lord, though common in John, "My sheep hear my voice." But here, though the union of the members with the Head and not life only is the point insisted upon, we approach closely to the teaching of "the elder." It is as if we listened to Christ ourselves. "If so be that ye have heard him" — not *about* Him; they were taught *in* Him also, "as the truth is in Jesus." Is there not great emphasis in this expression? It is not as the truth is in *Christ*. We all know that Jesus is Christ, and Christ is Jesus. But God never uses one word in vain. And I think that the difference is the greater because both are used. He first of all puts the word Christ — "Ye have not so learned Christ;" because there he brings the whole mass of my privilege before the soul. Christ is the special name, when I look at Him as the risen, exalted man. In Him I have got my blessing. The word conveys to my mind the thought of One in whom all is concentrated as dead, crucified, but now in heaven. Jesus is the personal name that He bears on earth. The Spirit had been revealing in previous chapters the great name brought before us in Christ. But when He is about to speak of the practical knowledge which would apply to the duties of their walk here below, He says, "If so be ye have heard him, and been taught *in* him, as the truth is *in* Jesus." There, I apprehend, He is more speaking of Him as that person who, in the eyes of men, as well as before God, was the blessed example of all light and purity in His ways here below. Thus, I conceive, any spiritual mind will at once appreciate what a blessed way it is of bringing this before our souls. He places before us the living presentation of all we have in Him; but we see it in the ways of that blessed Man, Jesus, here below. By the "truth that is in Jesus," does He not mean the truth that we see and hear and know carried out in every word He said, in all His ways and obedience and service, in every kind of suffering that He passed through on the earth, in His patience, in His earnestness, in His zeal for the glory of God, in His tender care for those that belonged to God, and in His compassion for perishing sinners? And yet, look where you will, behold His intolerance of that which is contrary to God. All these, and infinitely more, we find in Jesus, and no where else, in perfection.

It is only in the person of Jesus that we have all truth fully out. I may learn truth through the

Holy Ghost, and He is the only power of my knowing the truth, and is therefore, I suppose, called "truth" in 1 John 5: 6. Neither God, as such, nor the Father, is ever called the truth; nor could it be. When you speak of the truth, you do not mean merely either the divine nature in its perfectness, or His person "from whom cometh down every good gift." But why is it that Jesus should be emphatically the truth? Jesus is the One who objectively has presented to me that which shows me the bearing and relationship of everything to God as well as to man. If I want to test any one thing, I never can arrive at its full character till I view it in connection with the person of Christ. The Holy Ghost is the truth subjectively, because no man can behold Jesus or find the truth in Jesus without Himself. The Holy Ghost is the revealer of Jesus; our own mind cannot see Him. Even the new man cannot of itself understand Jesus, or enter into the things of God. And you will observe how strikingly this was shown when the disciples themselves, already born of God, had to wait till the Lord opened their understandings to understand the Scriptures, and after that for power to act on them. After they were converted, they needed the power of the Spirit to enable them to apprehend the Scriptures. Besides, again they must wait for power to testify the truth from the Scriptures to others. They required to have the power of the Spirit, distinct from the new nature, for the purpose of entering into the things of God. Mere human nature never understands the things of God, the new man does. But in order to do it, the Spirit's leading is requisite. The new man is characterized by dependence. The Holy Ghost acts in His own power. So that we do not merely need dependence upon God but power from Him in order to enter into the truth. I am not now speaking of being converted merely, but of the practical entering into the mind of Christ, and the ways of God as brought out in the ways of Jesus.

Let me illustrate the value of the truth as it is in Jesus. Take any truth you like, as, e.g., man. Where shall I learn the truth about man? Shall I look for it in Adam — a man that listened to his wife after she had listened to the devil — a man who, when God came down, ran away from Him, and even dared to insult God by laying the blame upon Him? Shall I look at his sons — at Cain, his firstborn, or at Abel, whom Cain slew? The beautiful grace in Abel was what was of God, not what was of himself. If you pursue the history of man as such, you only find evil and pride and presumption increasing upon him, till you give up the whole tale in shame and disgust. And so it would all end, but for the Second Adam. I find here in every step that He took, in every word that He said, in everything that flowed from His heart and was reflected in His ways, One that never did His own will. Now I learn the beauty and the wonder of a man subject to God upon the earth — the only One who ever walked in perfect, moral dignity, though He was despised of all, and most of all hated by the religious leaders of the world in that day. But how did not God delight in Him? Here, then, the humbling truth is told. Man has shown himself thoroughly out: Jesus, the cross, tells the tale in full.

But supposing another instance: if I look up and think of God, where shall I, of a surety, find Him? In creation? It is all ruined. Besides, to read Him only in the book of nature, is but to have glimpses of power and beneficence, But in the midst of all these large and shining characters of divine majesty, and wisdom, and goodness, scattered up and down through everything that He has made upon the earth, I should also have to face other characteristics, as of weakness, decay, suffering, death, etc. The question arises, whence do these come? They are as crooked as the others were straight; the latter as full of misery as the former were the impress of wisdom and power. The result of all is, that, for the mere reasoner in the vanity of man's mind, the understanding gets darkened; and all that can thus be learned, even from the consideration of that which comes from the hand of God, completely fails to give the knowledge of Himself. I see the effects of another hand there as well as His own — the hand of a destroyer and liar; and instead of rising up from nature to nature's God, as poets vainly sing, you are apt to sink from nature to the devil who has ruined it all; you fall into the snares of the enemy by the effort to find out God in your own strength. I want some other way wherein to learn

what God is. To gather an evidence of His being is one thing; to know Him is another. I can delight in anything that He has made, but what are His thoughts, feelings, ways, especially to a sinner? If you talk about providence, is there not an Abel suffering and a Cain prosperous? Great deeds were done in the family of the proud murderer; while those who had whatever then shone of the light of God, were disliked and scorned by the world; often weak in their own eyes too, but suffering and cast out wherever faith made them odious to those who had it not. This is an impenetrable enigma to man. How can he, in the face of such facts, discern the superintending power of a God as conscience tells there is? Constant difficulties arise; and the reason is very plain; — it is not in circumstances around, any more than in my own mind, that I can find the truth. Not that there are not traces and indications in providence as in creation; but I want the truth and cannot find it in either.

Then I may come down to the law. Does it give me the truth? In no way. It is not that the law was not good and holy, but it is never called, nor in itself could it be, the truth. Its design was more for making the discovery of man than of God. Its operation was that man might thereby learn what he is himself. It runs like a ploughshare, when directed by the Spirit, into the heart, and lays bare many furrows, and discovers what man never knew was there before. But none of these things shows what God is to man in grace. Not even the law can give the truth as to this. I cannot at all learn by it what a Saviour-God is, nor even fully what man is. At the best it declares what a man ought to be as well as do; but this is not the truth. What *I ought to be* is not God's truth but my duty. Law was the standard for man in the flesh; and hence it never was given till man was a sinful man. "The law was given by Moses," and not to or by Adam. The commandment laid upon Adam is never called the law, although it was, of course, a law.

Further, you will never find truth, even in the Bible, if you sever it from Jesus. But the moment the same blessed One, who has shown me in His own life and death what man is, has also shown me in the very same what God is, then all the clouds break and the difficulties vanish. Now I know God, beholding Him in Jesus. New thoughts of God dawn on the soul, and submitting to Him, I am made perfectly happy; perhaps not all at once, but as surely as my soul has received Jesus, and learnt what the true God is in Jesus, I have eternal life, and shall find unbroken peace; but in Him I receive all that I want, all that God intends for my soul, because the truth is in Jesus. Thus, then, as a believer, I know God; I know that which the heathen never did nor could reach. Their understanding was darkened. Having no knowledge of Jesus, they had no full or saving means of knowing God. But this is precisely what the gospel brings close to every poor, needy soul who hears it now. And what is it then that I learn of God, when I look at the truth as it is in Jesus? I learn first this — a God that comes down to me, a God that seeks my soul to do me good, a God that can follow me with love, selfish as I am, and pity my ignorance, and not this only, but One that can instruct me, and is willing to do it, spite of my wilfulness and stupidity; in short, a most gracious and faithful God He makes Himself known in Jesus. I find One who, after using other means, spent Himself in love upon me, that I might know Him; One who undertook to bear the judgment of my sins. For Jesus came and took all sins upon Himself for every soul that believes upon Him. I learn now that even the hateful self which has so refused and slighted Him — for this He has suffered, and completely deals with it. It has been judged in the cross of Christ; and if my soul believes that God is good enough to do all this for me, to suffer all this for me, to take and bear the whole consequence upon Himself in the person of His beloved Son; if I see this and bow to it, and receive it from God, what can shake or harass my soul more? My sins? Certainly if anything ought to trouble my soul, they most of all. But what is the cross for? What has God done there? What has He told me in the gospel? If it was God revealing Himself in His beloved Son, if it was Jesus the Son of God that was made sin there, why should I have a single doubt or anxiety upon that score? All depends upon this: Have I bowed to what God has wrought and given me

in the cross of Christ? If I am despairing about sin, it is in effect making the cross of Christ of none effect, and the work of Christ a vain thing. He has perfectly done His task, and I am entitled so to rest upon it, as to know that my sins never can come up against me more. Ought I not to be a happy man, and to rest in the most perfect peace because of what Jesus had done and suffered? Here faith can repose. Christ's death has such value in the mind of God, that He loves to give this peace in consequence. Such is the truth as it is in Jesus. What a wonderful depth and breadth of truth there is, if you look at it thus! What a poor thing my own experience is, compared with the truth as it is in Jesus! Spiritual power is much more proved by discerning Jesus in others, than by measuring or comparing what people are in themselves, which, indeed, is far from wise. But yet what a disappointing thing it is to see Him merely as He is reflected in others! I must look at the truth as it is in Jesus: in what He was here below, as One who has shown me all through His life and up to His death what God is and man too, Himself the model-man.

In the same person of Jesus I alone see the full truth about anything at all. And you will find the value of this not merely in the great lessons of what God or man is, but if you have to do with any particular trial or difficulty, what is the one test of anything right or wrong? The truth as it is in Jesus. It is the power of using Jesus to meet that difficulty, and of seeing how His name bears upon it. He has expressed His will about it — where I am to be quiet, where I am to act, how I am to walk, and how to bear. He has given me an example that I should follow in His steps. The secret of the power of being like Jesus depends upon the measure of spirituality we have in applying His name. I am still assuming that there is honesty of purpose, and that we are desiring to walk before one another as we are walking in truth before God ourselves. It is in proportion as we turn to Jesus and use Him, and view things in Him; this is the rule and spring of real spiritual power. It is this which constitutes strength and maturity in Christ. It was not the amount of zeal or of overcoming the world, or any great knowledge of this thing or that, but it is found in knowing Him. "I have written unto you fathers, because you have known Him that is from the beginning." Who is this? Jesus. The knowledge of Jesus, then, is the practical power, growth, and wisdom of the Christian; it is, as well as shows, advance in the things of God. This is in truth what all have to learn, more or less. But to know it deeply, and so as to apply it and bring it out, was what specially characterized the fathers. Everybody talks in his own tongue. The dullest soul can use intelligibly the words of his vernacular language. But there is an immense difference between the capacity of different persons in wielding their own tongue. It is not every one who can speak according to what the subject calls for. A man who has a mastery of the language proves it by applying it appropriately to all variety of subjects. So all saints must have laid hold more or less of the truth in Jesus, but then the power to know it well, to use it rightly, to bring it out on fitting occasions and turn it to profit for ourselves and others — this is the true secret of our progress in the things of God, and what tends to the blessing of souls and the helping on of the cause of God. The importance of such growth in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus cannot be over estimated.

Then we have stated to us the practical object of it all — "That ye put off according to the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the lusts of deceit." It is not a question of improvement. There is no bettering our old man. The heart may be purified by faith, but in itself it is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Faith may work the new life, and the Spirit; but the flesh never can be changed or renewed. And here we find what is to be done with our odd nature: "That ye put off," etc.* The apostle is speaking to Christians. They have the old man, and need practically to put it off. We must beware, remembering that we have still this incurably evil thing, accustomed to indulge its bad ways before conversion, and still tending to drag one, if unwatchful, into evil.

*Some suppose that the truth in Jesus is, "that ye *have* put off, as concerns your former conversation, the old man and *have* put on the new man," etc. (Ver 22-24). so Dr. Eadie and Mr. Peile, whose rendering seems to me quite consistent with the context, notwithstanding the depreciatory notice of Alford and Ellicott. Mr. Darby takes the version and connection to be that the truth in Jesus is not exactly "that ye should," nor "that ye have," but "your having put off," etc. I have not, however, altered the rendering and the comment, which remain here as before. The reader can judge for himself.

But now begins the positive part. There was, first, the putting off the old man, the moral judgment of it, grounded on God's judgment in the cross of Christ, where it was definitively done with. Then comes the renewing of the spirit of the mind, which we cannot have unless there is the judgment of the old. The renewal is intimated to be a present process going on gradually, as the spirit of the mind is imbued with Christ. The putting off and putting on are not viewed as present, but as the act in itself once for all. "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; that ye put on the new man which, according to God, has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth." They had the new man of course; but it is the putting on the new man practically, the outward manifestation of the new man that was already within them. It is well to bear in mind that this is "righteousness and holiness of truth." It is the truth here again that produces it. Such is the full and real meaning of the expression.

Righteousness and holiness differ in this respect. Righteousness is the true perception and, of course, the walking in our relative duties as men of God, holiness is rather the rejection in heart and way, according to God's nature, of what is contrary to Him. Holiness, therefore, is a far more absolute thing than righteousness, which takes up what we owe relatively to God and man. It is in contrast with the first man. Adam was good as a creature, but he had no right apprehension of God Himself, or of what evil was according to God. He did not then know sin; there was no evil to know. If one had talked about lust to Adam in the garden of Eden, he must, I believe, have avowed his ignorance of what it meant. Therefore, if the law had been given to Adam, "Thou shalt not covet," he would not have comprehended its meaning, having no experience of sin till afterwards. We have hearts which crave what we have not got, but Adam had not. He was just the sample of creature-goodness in a man. It was not after God, created in the righteousness and holiness of the truth. God made man upright; but uprightness is a different thing from being created in holiness. Upright he was created, and innocent; but the new man is much more, knowing right well, through the Spirit's teaching, what evil is and what good is. Adam only learnt what good and evil are when he fell, never before; he then became conscious of a good that he lost and that he was not, and of an evil that he had fallen into, which God hated and must judge. So when a man is brought to the truth as it is in Jesus, he knew good and evil before with a bad conscience, but now he knows it with a purged and good conscience. There is nothing that could make a conscience so clean as the sacrifice of Jesus. Supposing that any of us were able to live without iniquity to the end of our days, would this make our conscience good? Not in the least. There would always be a bad conscience, because of the consciousness of past, unremoved, unforgiven sin. No human process, nay, nor giving us a new nature, can get rid of the evil we have done. The sacrifice of Christ has done it perfectly. My evil is there judged according to God. The evil of the old man is dealt with in His death before God. Christ rises from the dead and gives me His life, which is the new man. Christ in resurrection is the very source of the new man in my soul. If this be so, we must deal with the old man. It is to faith a thing done with. Jesus has shown me it as a judged thing in His cross, and I must judge it, and in no way allow my old pride and vanity and folly. I have all still within me, but I must treat it as dead: else I shall grieve the Lord, and bring myself under His hand. We have each of us to watch earnestly against the former conversation; but then it easily happens that a person might be enticed by an evil never fallen into before, because he imagined it was

impossible for him so to fall. There is nothing so exposes one to fall, as the notion one could not so turn aside. Self-confidence leads away from dependence on God, and has often been the ruin of a christian man, as far as His glory is concerned.

Thus, the new man is spoken of so as to bring out its contrast with what man was even in his best estate. Yea, Adam, when he came from the hand of God, could not be described in the terms of blessing which are true of every believer now. There is no such thing as restoring to an Adamic condition. A soul when converted now has the place of the second Man; and as He, the Lord, cannot fall, so the Christian has a life that never can be touched. It is as impossible for a Christian to be lost, as for Christ to be removed from the right hand of God; because He is the life of the Christian. If you say that people can fall away from grace, nothing is more certain than that they may. But if you mean by this, that the life of the Christian can perish, you flatly contradict the word of God. It is a question, then, of understanding the Scriptures. Christ Himself is the life of the Christian: can He fall? Thus it is a virtual denial of Christ Himself, that there should be a doubt allowed about it. All these exhortations are based upon this; that they had learnt Christ, and knew the truth as it is in Jesus. They were already in living relation to Him, and upon this ground all christian exhortations come. Is it even or ever a reasonable thing to talk about fruit till the plant has thoroughly taken root? It would be no use to talk to a baby about the duties of a man. The man must be there, as such, before you can expect to see the discharge of the duties of a man. And so with the Christian, before you can rightly insist on the duties of a Christian. But now that the truth as it is in Jesus is known, you must not allow the old man. He is speaking of practical fruit and walk, because of already being in Christ, and knowing the truth in Him. This ought always to be a great encouragement to a soul. Even if God is exhorting me to self-judgment, it always supposes my previous blessing as a possessor of life everlasting. It is on this ground that God, as it were, thus addresses us. Is it possible that when I have done so much for you, you can be so careless of my will? It is to touch the spring of grace in the soul, in order that we may go on with Him and do His will.

Now some of the results are pressed upon them. "Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour, for we are members one of another." (Ver. 25.) As they had learnt the truth in Jesus, the shame of falsehood was the more manifest. What is the ground that we have here? We are too apt to take falsehood rather upon the human basis of honour. Many a man would not do it on moral grounds; or he would be too proud to tell a lie; and he that had a certain sense of the fear of God before his eyes, would not do it, because it was a practical denial of God. It is as good as saying that God does not hear. So that whether you look at a mere man in his natural pride, or at a godly man, like a Jew, there you have the grounds on which many would act. But this is not enough for a Christian. It is of great importance for our souls, not only that we should walk well and righteously, but that the motive, character, and extent, should be according to God too. Not only is this exhortation necessary, but there is that coupled with it which we rarely think of in our intercourse one with another: we are here exhorted to speak truth every man with his neighbour, "*for* we are members one of another." It is looking at Christians only. None but such are members evidently. He wants to connect with Christ the most common duty, which we are in danger of putting upon a lower basis, and the ground he takes is this: — that it is as preposterous and uncomely for a Christian not to tell the plain simple truth to a brother Christian, as for a man to deceive himself. They are part of ourselves. "We are members one of another." Do we realize this? If we did, what would be the effects? Assuredly, one would be perfect plainness in dealing with that which is wrong; another would be a real, hearty desire to set right those who are wrong. It is evident that we could not wish to injure ourselves. And if I regard another as a part of myself, I ought to act towards them accordingly. In the same way, also, we ought to feel what is contrary to God in another. And as one would greatly desire

if awakened to feel one's own sin, to go to God about it, and have our souls set right there, so it should be in having to do one with another. The deeper realizing of this truth would give a stronger desire for the well-being of our fellow-Christians. And yet if it is to be in accordance with God's glory, it is not merely that we should judge what is wrong, but that we should seek to get what is right and according to God. We are apt, where persons have been, for instance, put away from fellowship, to think only of getting rid of the evil; but do we find this where the membership one of another is felt and owned in the presence of God? Even where it comes to the extreme degree of so dealing with one whom we had believed to be a member of the body of Christ, the end of all discipline is to remove the evil, in order that that which is of Christ may shine forth.

"Be ye angry and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath." (Ver. 26.) I take this to be a most important and holy intimation for our souls. There is a notion often that it is wrong for a Christian ever to feel displeased or angry; this and other Scriptures show it *may be* right. But we must take care what the source, as well as the character, of the anger is. If it is merely about something that affects self, and it therefore takes the form of vindictiveness, this is of course beyond a doubt contrary to all that is of Christ. We find in Him (Mark 3) that He looked round about upon certain persons with anger, showing clearly He had the strongest feeling about that which was contrary to God. It was not merely that He denounced the thing, but the people who were guilty of it. I find the same analogy in the epistles. We are told not only to cleave to that which is good, but to abhor that which is evil. Man's thought is that it is not for a Christian to judge and to be angry with what is wrong. The word of God tells us there are certain things we ought to judge and others we ought not. I am not to judge what is unseen; I am to judge positive, known evil. There we have plainly and clearly the line drawn by God. You will find that men say, if you speak strongly about the wrong of this thing or that, you are uncharitable. But not so; it is real charity to denounce it, not to let it pass. True love as to this consists in always having the feelings of God about what comes before us. That is the one question. What God has fellowship with, we can have fellowship with; and what God hates, we are not to love or allow. But we must take care that we are in the intelligence of God's mind. "Be ye angry and sin not." There is the greatest possible danger of sinning if you are angry, and therefore is this added. The simple emotion of anger toward one who has sinned may and ought to be a holy feeling; it is provided it rests there. Thus it is felt in God's presence. But how am I to know that I am not sinning in my anger? "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." If there is irritation kept up in the spirit, impatience, dislike, or scorn betrayed, who cannot see that it is not of God? When the sun goes down, it is a time either for your peaceful communion with God, or your indulgence of resentment away from Him. Therefore it is added, "Neither give place to the devil." (Ver. 27.) Where there is the nursing of wrath or the keeping up of grievances in the mind, Satan easily comes in and is not easily dislodged.

In these exhortations, as in the doctrine of the epistle, there is no notion of bettering the nature of man. A new nature is shown to belong to the Christian: Christ is his life. The practical aim follows that this should be exercised and manifested.

Nevertheless, there is a serious hindrance, for the old man remains, the flesh is still in the Christian; and as the new creature is in no way the result of improving the old, so the old nature is incapable of being absorbed or exalted into the new. They are irreconcilably opposed. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." The only course and comfort and duty open to the faithful is to deny and mortify the flesh, so that the new man may be left free to do the will of God.

On the last portion which occupied us, we saw the danger of yielding to anger; it easily degenerates into hatred, and this gives occasion for the devil to enter. We have now another

exhortation, which to some might seem hardly called for among Christians. "Let him that stole steal no more." It is not exactly "him that stole," but "the stealer." "Thief" would be too strong; and "he that stole" is too weak. The apostle was led to choose a term so large as to take in every shade of such dishonesty. Do you think the caution needless? Beware lest your self-confidence, and the slight of any word that God has written, ensnare you. There can be no doubt that the Spirit, who inspired the epistle, judged the admonition necessary for all saints, as well as for the Ephesians; yet nowhere do we find an assembly more happy, flourishing, and blessed of God, than the Church in Ephesus. Yet even for them, quickened and raised with Christ, and seated in Him in heavenly places, the Holy Ghost saw its suitability. God knows us better than we know ourselves; and let saints be ever so instructed, devoted, or earnest, in none of these things, apart from the enjoyment of present communion, apart from actual dependence on God, is there any adequate safeguard. Besides, if a soul, through unwatchfulness, had slipped aside into that which is so degrading even in human eyes, we can readily conceive the force of such a word to the heartbroken and ashamed, in danger of being swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. How little the heart felt its perils, or knew either its own weakness or the power of Satan! Now, restored to judge itself according to God, it owns the value of words like these, which it had once deemed well-nigh useless for the saint. Now, too, it feels how exceeding broad is the Spirit's appeal, comprehending every kind of worldly, professional, or trade custom (no matter how respectable) that is fraudulent, as well as the grosser forms of dishonesty. God is training the new man according to His own wisdom and grace.

How strikingly also such a precept shows that the Christian is on larger, higher, firmer ground than that on which Israel after the flesh stood or rather fell. Never do you hear the law say "Let the stealer steal no more;" its voice must rather be, "Let him die." The law is good if a man use it lawfully; and its lawful application is expressly not to form, guide, and govern the walk of the righteous, but to deal with the lawless and disobedient, ungodly and sinful, unholy and profane, and, in short, with whatever is contrary to sound doctrine. Sin, we are told in Romans 6, shall not have dominion over Christians, "for ye are not under the law, but under grace;" and this in a chapter where the question is the holy walk of the saint, not his justification. Yet in the face of this, the clear and uniform teaching of the New Testament, the tendency of most in Christendom habitually is to go back to law, especially where there is feeble separation from the world. But it is easily understood. For the world does not receive or understand the grace of God, whereas it can appreciate in the letter the righteous law of God. Hence, when the world and the saints are mixed together, the will of man soon takes the upper hand; and as the saint cannot elevate the world to his standing, he must sink to that which he holds in common with the world; and thus both meet once more on Jewish ground, as if the cross of Christ had never been, and the Holy Ghost were not sent down from heaven to gather believers out of a mixed condition into the assembly of God apart from the world. Even for the individual Christian, as well as for the Church, and most of all for God's truth, grace, and glory, the loss has been incalculable. For the ordinary walk has been reduced to a string of negatives, save in public acts of philanthropy, religious activity, or ritual observances, which the Christian shares with any and everybody that will join him. It is not occupation with good according to God's will; still less is it suffering for the sake of Christ and of righteousness from a world which knows them not. This is not Christianity, though it is the state and the system of most Christians. Did Christ ever obey from the fear of judgment? Was not His life a surrender of Himself to the holy will and pleasure of His Father? So our souls must be occupied with God's grace in Christ, if we are to find strength in pleasing Him. The mere avoidance of evil, the *not* doing this or that, is below our calling. Do we indeed desire to know and to do His will as His children? Are we zealous in learning to do well, no less than careful to cease from each evil way? If not, the day will come when we may begin to do evil again, and with a conscience the less sensitive,

because we have learnt truth which we do not carry out.

Very beautiful, therefore, is the apostolic exhortation on the positive side. "But rather let him labour [idleness is neither right nor safe], working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to distribute to him that needeth." (Ver. 28.) Thus does the Spirit cheer and direct the man whose hands were once put forth in unworthy ways; thus does He open a happy path where grace can vindicate its power, spite of a dishonest nature and habit; and he who was the stealer before he knew the Saviour's name, may now have fellowship with the spirit and practice of the great apostle (Acts 20: 33-35), yea, and of the Master Himself, remembering His words, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. To *live* is the worldly man's object in labour; to *give* is the christian motive. It is not a mere question of chance surplusage, but an express object, especially for him who has the consciousness of the mercy that delivered him from covetous sin and its shame and judgment. Only the toil must be about what is good and honest. In vain will you plead a benevolent or religious use of ill-gotten gain! No employment that is contrary to God's will is good for the Christian, but should be given up at once. The covenant of Sinai never enunciated such a motive for toil as this. To talk about the ten commandments as the rule for the Christian's walk now, is to go back from the sun which rules the day to the moon which rules the night; it is to eclipse Christ by Moses under the delusive profession of doing God service. In general, what the law exacted from those under it on the principle of right, the Christian is responsible on the principle of grace to exceed in every possible way. The scope of obedience is immensely increased; the inward motives are searched out and laid bare; the very tendency to violence, corruption, and falsehood is judged in its roots, and suffering wrongfully and withal in love takes the place of earthly righteousness for the disciples. Such is the unquestionable teaching of our Lord and of His apostles; it is darkened, undermined, and denied, by those who insist on judaising the Church by putting the Christian under the law as his rule of life. Truly, they "understand not what they say nor whereof they affirm."

Next, it is not our deeds only that have to be considered, but our words. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers." (Ver. 29.) Worthless language is to be eschewed as one rejects good-for-nothing fruit; if it were on the tongue, let the unprofitable word proceed no farther. Unclean allusion we shall find specified and forbidden in the chapter following. Here I conceive the circle is more comprehensive. Many who would neither utter nor hear impure conversation may often have to bemoan the utterance and the sanction of unsavoury discourse. Better to be silent *if* there be not (such is the force) something good for needful edification. The need measures the service, and love builds up instead of puffing up as knowledge does. It is equally true that "in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin," and that "the lips of the righteous feed many;" they "know what is acceptable;" and those who hear are refreshed and blessed.

Hitherto we have had grounds of holy action, as well as guards against sin, found in the features of the new man. But this, we know, does not give us the full character and power of the christian man. The holy Spirit of God dwells in him. This blessed but solemn truth is now pressed in its practical bearing. We are said (Eph. 2: 22) to be built together for an habitation of God in Spirit; and therefore do the apostles exhort us (Eph. 4) to walk worthy of the calling wherewith we have been called. But there is an individual indwelling of the Holy Ghost, as well as His relation to the house of God. We have been sealed by the Spirit, appropriated thereby to God on the ground of accomplished redemption. The precious blood of Christ has washed away our sins; in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offences, according to the riches of God's grace. Thus, His sacrifice has effaced before God and to faith all our evil, and a new nature is ours in Christ; so that the

Holy Spirit can come and dwell in us, and seal us for the day of redemption, when our body shall be transformed into the likeness of the glory of Christ, as surely as our souls are now quickened into His life. In presence of this infinite present privilege and pledge of glory for ever, the apostle adds, "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." He is the spring of energy to strengthen the saint unto all that is well-pleasing to God. But this supposes that there is self-judgment and dependence on God. Otherwise we grieve Him, and are made to feel, not His power, but our own wretched unfaithfulness.

Again, it seems strange that any Christian should be so unintelligent as to confound the word here with "quench not the Spirit" in 1 Thessalonians 5: 19. The context (ver. 20) there shows plainly that it is a warning not to hinder the smallest real manifestation of the Holy Ghost in a saint, no matter how feeble he might be; and the history of Christendom to the present hour proves how much the precept was needed, and how little the apostolic injunction has been attended to. But the passage in Ephesians 4 is a personal concern for every saint and his own conversation every day.

Another thing to be noted is the difference from the language of Psalm 51: "Take not thy Holy Spirit from me." But the apostle, even when he presses that we should not grieve the Holy Ghost, never hints at His being taken away. On the contrary, he in the same breath assures us that we were sealed by Him for the day of redemption. Where can there be a fuller way of intimating our personal security than such a sentence? To what are we to attribute this difference? Not, I need hardly say, to a higher inspiration in Paul the apostle, than in David the king; but to the necessary and revealed modification of the Spirit's relation to the saint, since Jesus died and rose and went to heaven. Till then there was no such thing as the Spirit given to abide with the believer for ever. He blessed souls then, wrought in and by them, filled with joy and power betimes; but indwelling, as the Christian has and knows it now, there was and could not be till the glorification of Jesus, because of sin put away by His blood. Hence we are told not to grieve the Spirit, but are never, since He was given, supposed to deprecate His departure. Unquestionably, this aggravates the sin of a Christian and imparts poignancy and bitterness to his self-reproach in that case; but even this is intended of God for the graver warning of His child. The verse, therefore, clearly proves, on the one hand, the danger of sinning and thus of grieving the Spirit; and, on the other, the security of the saint even in and spite of such sorrowful circumstances. He is brought to God, reconciled, washed, sanctified, justified; he has eternal life and shall never perish; he is sealed of the Spirit, and that seal, who can break? If he fall into sin, assuredly God will see to it and chasten, yea, unto death; for He will neither make light of his evil nor condemn himself with the world. So Peter exhorts the godly to walk in holy obedience, and while they called on Him as Father who, without respect of persons, judges according to each one's work, to pass their time of sojourn in fear; at the same time, far from weakening their confidence, he proceeds, "forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold but with the precious blood of Christ." Thus, the truth of God has the effect of attracting and strengthening the affections, even when it sets us with our faces in the dust, while human error, as it weakens the full grace of God, so it fails thoroughly to humble the soul. But what a truth it is for the believer, that he has within the constant presence of a divine person, the Holy Ghost, the witness of all that passes these! How careful should we be that we grieve Him not! But it is not a truth for conscience only, but pregnant with consolation; for He dwells in us evermore, not because we are worthy of such a heavenly denizen, but in virtue of the worth of Jesus and the perfectness with which His work has cleansed us in God's sight from our sins; and He is in us for our joy, and strength, and blessing evermore, through and in Christ the Lord. May we be enabled, always confident, always to pray, and not to faint!

The doctrine of the Holy Ghost's presence in the individual believer, sealing him for redemption-day, has been already seen, and seems to be bound up in the closest way with practical holiness, as a motive and a guard, no less than as the power. For what more solemnly affecting than the remembrance of such an inhabitant ever dwelling in the believer's body? and what more certain than that He is the Spirit, not of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind? We may be utter weakness, and the natural heart deceitful and treacherous beyond human conception. But this is not the only truth. The Christian is characterized by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. Is He weak? Or if ill might be His, is He in the believer the passive, inactive witness of every fault and infirmity? Is He not, on the contrary, within Him to associate his affections with Christ, to glorify Christ, taking of the things of Christ and showing them to him? Doubtless, He may be and is grieved by allowed folly, and carelessness, and evil, and as to this we have just been seriously cautioned; but it would be well for such as speak incessantly of the good-for-nothingness of the flesh (which is most clear and certain) to bear in mind that the believer, the Christian, is no longer in the flesh but in the Spirit, seeing that the Spirit of God dwells in him. Meet it is, therefore, that sin, all and every sin, should be confessed and judged; but it is neither genuine humility nor the faith of God's elect to ignore the blessed and encouraging as well as serious fact, that the Spirit of God is in us to give all strength in revealing Christ to our souls. It may be wholesome, unquestionably, to learn the painful lesson of Romans 7: 7, and seq.; but to rest there is to prove that it has been ill learnt. For the proper place of the Christian is, as to this, the end of the chapter, ushering him into the still deeper exercises and the more unselfish sufferings of Romans 8, with the liberty, and power, and hope, and security which it so abundantly shows to be our portion through grace. The redemption of our body and of creation outside is not yet come; but He who is its earnest is within us.

This being so, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking be put away from you with all malice." (Ver. 31.) The very nearness into which the family of God is brought may become a snare unless there be watchfulness and a simple looking to Christ. But the Holy Ghost gives quarter to no evil feeling whatever. These are the *breaches* of our nearness; in the next chapter (ver. 3 and seq.) we shall find the *abuses* of it.

If we come to particulars, "all bitterness," I think, denotes every form of the sharp, unsparing mood which repels souls instead of winning them, and makes the most of the real or imagined faults of others. The "wrath and anger," next following, refer to the outburst of passion, and the more settled vindictive resentment, to which the indulgence of acrimony gives rise, a "clamour and evil speaking" are their respective counterparts in words: all flowing from the deep-seated fountain of "all malice," which is finally condemned in our verse. Thus, as we were warned against dishonesty in word and deed, before the allusion to the Holy Spirit's seal, so now, after it, hatred in its various parts and expressions is denounced. It is, alas, natural to the first man Adam — the same corruption and violence which brought the flood on the world of old, but, spite of God's judgment, renewed itself, and will, till Christ deal with man and Satan in person.

But, as was observed in the previous verses, bare abstinence from the mind and workings of the flesh suffices not. There is the activity of good in Christ, the second Man, and this the Spirit produces as well as demands in the Christian. Hence it is added, "Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ hath forgiven you." Clearly, therefore, It is a question of showing grace; and the pattern of it all is God in Christ, not in the law, holy, just and good as the commandment is. But good as the law was and is, Christ is the best of all, the genuine and only foil and perfect expression of what God is. And leaving the law to deal with the wicked (1 Tim. 1), as the apostle expressly declares is its lawful use, we who are dead with Christ are not under law but grace,

which, by the power of the Spirit, strengthens us according to its own character and gives communion with Him who is its source.

The reader will notice that there is a departure from the Authorized Version of verse 32. It is done advisedly. Why king James' translators deserted the Greek, followed by Wycliffe, Coverdale, and even the Rhemish, it is hard to say, especially as Beza, who often influenced them, is here accurate. The erroneous rendering obscures the very grace of God which is set before us as our spring and pattern, and tends to countenance the error that Christ was the procuring cause of His love, instead of being the blessed and infinite channel of its communication to us, the only possible means in which even His love could holily and justly avail for us. It is a part of the same error to think of God as "our reconciled Father," or to say that Christ "died to reconcile Him to us." Atonement was necessary beyond a doubt, the expiation of our sins by the blood of Christ. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities." But God was in Christ *reconciling*; it is we (not He) "who have now received the reconciliation." "And you that were sometimes alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now *hath he reconciled*." Such is the uniform doctrine of Scripture. How blessedly all is put and kept in its place! The atonement is that aspect of Christ's work, which is *toward God*, to put away sin by suffering the divine judgment of it in His own person; reconciliation, contrariwise, is *toward us*, to bring us back in Christ unto God. Both are most true; to confound them is to lose much and weaken all; and what is more serious, it is more or less to misrepresent the character of God, as if He were turned by Christ from an angry judge into a loving Father. God is love as truly as He is light. It is what He is, not what He is made.

Ephesians 5.

What a mighty principle opens here on the saints! "Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children." (Ver. 1.) What limits can there be if we are exhorted to imitate God Himself! Nor is it in any way now an assertion of claim, as the law was, on man, standing on his own responsibility before God as a creature. God has revealed Himself in grace; still He is God and none other; and if He has communicated to us His own nature, a lesser, lower standard there could not be. It would dishonour Himself and the very grace He has shown us, and nowhere more fully than in the earlier parts of this epistle. It would be, too, the most grievous loss to His children beloved, whom He would train and bless yet more and more even in this scene of evil and sorrow, turning the most adverse circumstances into an occasion of teaching us what He is in the depths of His grace and filling ourselves with the sense of it so as to form our hearts and fashion our ways, as we forget ourselves and live above our own habits and the conventionalities of men in the truth of Christ.

Neither law nor even promise ever opened such a field as this. The very call so to imitate God supposes the perfect grace in which we stand: indeed it would be insupportable otherwise. No doubt, it is most humbling to reflect how little we have answered to His call; but even the sense of our previous shortcomings where it is deep, if we do not lose sight of His grace, is turned to precious account, and we are growing and going on with Him when we may little think it. The law demanded what man ought to render to God: to love Him and our neighbour is no more than our plain and bounden duty. The promise held out the hope of a Seed of blessing, not to Israel only, but to all families of the earth. But now, after promise was despised and law was broken, God has displayed *Himself* in Christ, and, while accomplishing all in Christ, has brought out higher counsels in infinite grace to us in such sort that His own character, thus displayed, becomes the only suitable pattern to which He would conform His children even here. "Be ye therefore imitators of God as beloved children; and walk in love as Christ also loved us, and delivered himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-

smelling savour." (Ver. 1, 2.)

To forgive one another, even as God in Christ forgave, is blessed; but this, though after His own heart and ways, is not enough. It is surely divine in its source, and impossible in its full character and extent to flesh; but it is in view of man and man's failure, and of the outbreaks of an evil nature. He would cherish this in us. It is the fruit of His grace, and most needful, in such a world as this; most wholesome for His saints in their intercourse and dealing with each other. But it is far from being the expression of all He is and would have us enjoy and reflect. There is the outgoing of good according to His heart, where there is no question of evil to be forgiven, which is in a certain sense only negative, however real and sweet it may be. Here all is positive, flowing fresh as it were and above human thought. Hence the word is, "Walk in love, as Christ also loved us and delivered himself up for us," etc. To be forgiven was our abject, urgent need, if we were indeed to have the smallest comfort from God or hope of deliverance from wrath and of blessedness hereafter. It was grace, of course, the grace of God, but addressed to, if not bounded by, man's need. But now we stand on the new ground of the excellency of Christ and the exercise of that which is proper to God in the activity of His own nature. Hence it is not the sin-offering that is here alluded to, nor is it simply the blood or the sufferings of our blessed Lord, but His delivering *Himself* for us, in matchless love, "an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour."

One would not be mistaken on such a theme, nor weaken for a moment the certainty that in the Lord's sufferings on the cross there are depths found there only; but these are not and could not be put before us as a pattern, seeing that they pertain exclusively to Him who bore our sins in His own body and was made sin for us, meeting that judgment of God, which no man, nor angel, nor creature, nor new creature could share with Him, however blessed through it, and filled with thankful, adoring delight in Him who was thus alone, not only for us, but for God's glory, the object of the wrath of God felt and must execute against sin. But here it is a question of that which sets forth the admirable love of Christ in all its positive fragrance and beauty; and this in order to call out, in the energy of the Holy Ghost, the answering ways of the new nature in the saints; for indeed Christ is our life, and what bounds are there to the power of the Spirit who dwells in us? Love lends to service in self-abnegation, whether in Him perfectly, or in us according to our measure; but surely it gives and forms the spirit of service, as we see in our blessed Lord. (Phil. 2)

Nevertheless, the more sweet and blessed, the nearer it is to evil, unless it is maintained in divine power and self-judgment. It brings together; it awakens spiritual affections; but what is begun in the Spirit may end in fleshly corruption, as we see at Corinth, no less than it may seek fleshly perfection of a religious form, as we see in Galatia. Accordingly the apostle proceeds to warn the Ephesian saints against the dangers to which free familiar converse might expose, unless sustained by the Holy Ghost. "But fornication and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be even named among you, as becometh saints." (Ver. 3.) These lusts of the flesh were not only not to be allowed, but not even to be named. They were God's holy ones, saints; and the question now was of that which becomes (not mere men but) saints.

Nor does he confine his warning to unbridled licentiousness or the covetous desire of that which might gratify man, but extends it to unholiness of language too, whether openly shameful or under the veil of refinement — "and [no] filthiness, and foolish talking, and jesting, which are not convenient, but rather giving of thanks." (Ver. 4.) Here again, not merely the absence of what is indecorous in the Christian, but the positive side is brought in and the heart's reference to God's goodness, which breaks out in thanksgiving. "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, or unclean person, or covetous man, who is an idolator, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." (Ver. 5.) It is most

important to remember, that let sovereign grace do what it will let it go out to the vilest, let it cleanse the most defiled, the moral ways of God remain inflexible. His nature does not change. He hates and never can tolerate iniquity. His love may find and has found a glorious solution of the difficulty in the cross of Christ; but God and sin never call walk or dwell together.

The children of God have opposite dangers to this, and need to watch against their feelings. They may be quick to exclaim in some flagrant case that there can be no life there; they may be too precipitate in giving their confidence where there is a fair show in flesh. Some of the most solemn departures into the world have been where few, if any, doubted; as on the other hand, who has not known the comfort of seeing the painful appearances which repelled one fade away so as to let the grace of Christ shine out more and more, or flesh was judged by the truth in the sight of God? Thus those, of whom most doubted because of untoward looks, at last won the confidence of all. Sometimes it may have needed a serious dealing of God: severe sickness, reverses of fortune, domestic sorrow, before the soul was set right; still it was, though late in the day. Both these extremes teach us the need of waiting on God, instead of trusting our own impressions, that we may judge righteous judgment. The natural heart may take advantage of grace, but ere long will manifest its unremoved evil. Perverse men may rise up, wolves may enter, and sheep may for a while be deceived. But God abides, and the word of His grace: why should we be disquieted? Let us have faith in God, imitate Him as children beloved, and walk in love, not only because, but as Christ loved us; and, whatever the result, we shall have the comfort of pleasing God, meanwhile kept from haste one way or another. Watching for evil is very far from "giving of thanks," and indeed incompatible with it. But then let us never lower the standard of the ways which God looks for in His children. If no corrupt person have an inheritance in His kingdom, never treat such sin lightly now. "Let no man deceive you with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them." (Ver. 6, 7.) To be partners with such in any way is grave for a saint. Let us take heed.

The eighth verse of our chapter gives another ground of appeal. The exhortation to walk is neither in view of the calling wherewith we are called (Eph. 4: 1), nor specially in contrast with other Gentiles, alienated from the life of God (Eph. 4: 17, 18), nor yet in love only (Eph. 5: 27), but "as children of light." "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord." The change being thus complete, the word is "walk as children of light." Be consistent with what you are, not merely with what you ought to be. We *are* light, yea, light in the Lord — at once the ground, and character, and measure of that which becomes our ways as Christians: let us walk accordingly. How comforting is the call of grace to holy ways! The most solemn appeal reminds us of our blessing, and its security, even when urging us on with ever such closeness. How holy is our standing in Christ that God Himself should be able to say of us, "Ye are light in the Lord." If He does; should we not say it of ourselves, both in privilege and responsibility? Let us look to Him that, thus set outside all taint (for there is nothing purer than light), we may go forward, showing that light which we are now in the Lord. It is in the light we walk, and by it we should judge all, for light we are. God would repudiate a lower standard or an atmosphere less pure. He is light, and in Him is no darkness at all, if we are His children, we are children of light. We are never said to be *love* (which is God's nature and prerogative), though surely called to love as born of Him and knowing Him in Christ. How completely law disappears as the motive or the mould of our walk.

"For the fruit of the light is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth." No doubt these are the characteristics of the gracious operation of the Spirit; and this may have led to the substitution of "the Spirit" for light in the common text. But there can be no reasonable question that the true thought and word in verse 9 is "the light," which is not more borne out by external evidence than by the scope of

the context. In Galatians 5 it is the fruit, not of the light, but of the Spirit, because in contrast with the works of the flesh — ways of uncleanness, violence against God and man, tampering with and subjection to the deceits of the enemy; whereas the Spirit's fruit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against which, as the apostle emphatically says to the law-affecters, there is no law. Here it is in contrast, not with legal proclivities and the workings of flesh, which the law alike provokes and condemns, but with the darkness which we once were when without the Lord. But now we are called to walk as children of light, which is our very nature in Him, and we are reminded that its fruit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth. God's exceeding riches and grace in no way weakens, but rather confirms, the display of His moral principles, and makes them good even in us His children, whatever we may have been and are naturally. The new life He has given us in Christ answers to His own goodness and righteousness and truth. It could not be — it ought not to be — otherwise; nor would the renewed heart calmly bear that He should be dishonoured or even misrepresented in the objects of His favour. He implants in us the desire of pleasing Himself, and He watches over us that this desire should be neither vague nor unimportant, but bear fruit — the fruit of the light, "proving," as it is added, "what is acceptable unto the Lord." (Ver. 10.)

Again, it is not enough for our souls to refuse to be partakers with the children of disobedience, as in verses 6, 7. We must have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even expose them. (Ver. 11.) It is all a part of our marvellous place and responsibility as being children of light. It is not law, simply condemning as by an applied outward standard, but an inward and most searching divine capacity, which, whatever the love that is the source and end, spares evil even less, but brings in good by the Holy Ghost in Christ. "For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret [*i.e.*, the doers of the fruitless works of darkness]; but all things when reprov'd [or exposed] are made manifest by the light; for whatsoever doth make [or is made] manifest is light." (Ver. 12, 13.) It is the property of light to manifest itself and all things else; and this is quite as true spiritually as in nature.

But there is more in the Lord's mind here concerning us. He would have us in the full enjoyment of the blessing, and not content to possess it only. There are dead things and persons around us, and their influence when allowed is most injurious. "Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead and Christ shall enlighten thee." (Ver. 14.) It is not giving us life as if we were dead, nor even light as if we were not light already, but rather shining upon us who are light in Him, yet slumbering carelessly in the midst of that which is dead and deadening. How vigilant His love which thus thinks of us, that our cup of blessing may run over and our souls may be delivered from that which degrades Him and even us in Him, that we may be full of that which we are as His own! How every word of His, how every circumstance of ours, calls us to see how carefully we walk (ver. 15), not as unwise but as wise, redeeming the fit opportunity because the days are evil! We are furnished indeed; but constant watching and dependence are needed. The due season must be, looked at and sought, let it be ever so costly, if, in these evil days, we would not be senseless, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. (Ver. 16, 17.) Worldly excitement must be avoided, and those incentives to nature which jaded man craves, wherein is excess. Yet we may and should be absorbed with a power above nature, which excludes not only what is evil, but the power of present things. "Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things to him who is God and Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ." (Ver. 18-21.) Speaking "to yourselves" means, I suppose, and might be translated, to one another, as in Ephesians 4: 32; speaking to one another in every form wherein the joy of the

Church expressed itself. I understand them all to be the sacred metrical compositions of Christians, outpourings of worship and praise, or of holy feeling, the word "spiritual" being added to the last or lowest class of them to mark even their consecration to the Lord. This is true and holy joy. May we cultivate it in simplicity. In truth, we have a goodly portion. What can we not thank Him for, who is our God and Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus? What else makes us so happily submit to one another in His fear?

We now enter upon the special earthly relations. The general exhortations we have had, which concern the saints of God as such — children of God and members of Christ's body. But now the Holy Ghost shows that He is not indifferent to the relations which these saints may sustain, either towards one another, or towards others upon the earth. There might be, for instance, husbands and wives, both of them Christians; or there might be only one in this relationship converted, the other being still a Jew or a heathen; and so with the relation of fathers and children, masters and servants. For the present we have only to do with that which pertains to the nearest tie upon earth, that of husband and wife. And we shall find that the Holy Ghost most amply provides for the wants of the children of God bound thus together; so that whatever may be their difficulties, they may find gracious instruction and grave exhortation, and not merely commands in reference to the circumstances in which they stand before God — for this is not strictly the form in which christian regulation comes before us. Of course, there may be and are, precepts and commandments throughout the New Testament. Indeed the one who most brings out love presses commandments most; for it is in the Gospel and Epistles of St. John, where the greatest stress is laid upon such injunctions; and yet we all know that there is no part of Scripture which brings out God's love to us more strikingly and constantly. It is, therefore, the greatest possible mistake to suppose that there is any inconsistency between God's love, and the strictest injunction that His authority lays upon His children.

Still it is undeniable that as the general character of christian instruction does not take the shape of commandments of a legal shape, so we are not set under the Mosaic commandments to form our present thoughts and feelings and course as Christians. Nay, we have got nothing analogous to the law, but a decided and complete contrast, according to Scripture, for "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Commandments we have; but they suppose and regulate life, and are calculated to bring the obedience of Christ (1 Peter 1) into exercise; and there is nothing more beautiful to the soul, nor more glorifying to God. Ordinarily the way in which instruction comes in the New Testament is thus: there is a relationship formed, and according to its character, amply unfolded and enforced in the word, we have to glorify God. As this is true in natural things, so the Spirit of God uses an every-day relationship as the occasion of bringing out the spiritual one that answers to it. And our hearts being occupied with the exceeding grace that has formed the new and eternal tie, we may find not only a motive, but a pattern and power to glorify God in the natural as well as the spiritual one. There is one place where this comes out more strikingly than in the first of these relationships on which the Holy Ghost here expands peculiarly. "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." The opening comparison which He uses, before entering into the spiritual relationship which is brought before us after the figure of marriage, the very first thought is to present the headship of the man, as having special force in married life. We all know that, apart from marriage, the man is the head of the woman. That is, if there were no such thing as marriage, man has a place which woman has not — a place entirely independent of character. We may find a man imbecile, and a woman with firmness and wisdom; but nothing can alter God's order. We may find a child endowed with great prudence, and the parents unwise and weak. Still the relationship is altogether apart from the peculiar character, and state, and condition of those either in the superior place or in the subordinate. And it is of great importance that we should have the thing settled in our souls, that no circumstances whatever

warrant a breach of Gods arrangements. There are trying circumstances which make the difficulty immense in either relationship. But it is of deep consequence to remember that the rights of God's order always abide; that nothing ever justifies disobedience of His will. There may be cases where obedience of the natural order of God would be a sin: there are none where disobedience is a duty. You cannot be required to disobey under any circumstances. But there are crises where you must obey God rather than man. It is an exceeding mercy that the times are few indeed, where obeying God involves an apparent breach of natural order and moral duty. But it may be so. You will find, for instance, in the beginning of the Acts, Peter and John charged, by the powers of that day which governed in Israel, not to teach in the name of Jesus. What could they do but fall back upon the authority of God? They could put it to those very rulers that their consciences were bound to God before men. Thus the first great principle remains and is plain, before we enter upon particulars, that *obedience* is always the part of the Christian.

Hence, flowing out of the general call to submission in the fear of Christ (for Christ is the one brought before us with continual honour in this epistle), the Spirit takes up this first appropriate place for a christian woman, and lays down the word, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." Although this may appear extraordinarily strong language, when we remember what husbands are or may be, still it is a great thing to be always certain that God is right. To human prudence it may seem little guarded. Perhaps you have even to do with an unconverted husband! But only bring in the Lord, and at once you see the power that will make submission easy, and you learn the measure to which submission is to be carried. But more than that, you have the guard against the abuse of the principle; "Submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." The Lord is brought in, and this sets everything right. If it is a question of trial or suffering, still the word is the same. The Lord may put us through great difficulties and dangers. What is the proper place of the Christian under such circumstances? Unqualified submission. Because I ought to be sure that, whatever may be the breaking up and down which these trials may occasion to one's spirit, yet whatever the Lord does is the best and happiest and most strengthening in the end to my soul, the Lord being incapable of any one thing for me that is not for enduring good to the praise of His own name.

In this epistle it is not merely God's control that is brought out, but special relationship. Here it is the Lord loving His own, with a love that has sacrificed everything for their sake. How can I doubt the blessedness and value of submitting myself to the Lord? The Christian wife may have a husband; and it may be very painful and hard to bear all. Perhaps he makes nothing of you, and asks often what is unreasonable. But what will make the burden light, though felt? "Submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." I am to submit unto my husband as unto the Lord: let me only see the Lord in the matter, instead of his inconsiderateness and bad temper, and my path is plain. It is made a matter, not of mere duty, but of confidence in the Lord as above everything in His love, care, and government. This is what the Holy Ghost first starts with, and makes to be the basis of all the various instructions that He is about to bring forth. He begins with the grand truth, that the christian woman is entitled to submit to her husband as unto the Lord. So that it is not made a question simply of affection, which would be human: this is a most necessary thing as a natural element, but it would be true if a person were not a Christian at all. Neither is it a question of that which the husband expects, or of what I might think to be right. All these things belong to the region of proper feeling and morality. But the important thing is that God cannot be with a christian woman who walks in the habitual slighting of His ground for her in her relationship as a wife. He will not allow a Christian to walk merely on moral or conventional grounds. They may be right enough in their place, but, if I am a Christian, I have a higher calling; and then, no matter what may be the difficulty — even if the one to whom I owe my subjection be not a Christian — here comes in the blessed direction, "Submit

yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." He entitles me to see Himself behind the person of the husband; and I have got to follow Him and to submit myself to Him. In this thought there would be great comfort for the christian wife who is ever so tried. But then the limit of the trial comes in — for there is a limit in every path — and it is this: that God never puts me in any circumstances where I am free to commit a sin. Therefore, supposing a husband were to command that which would be positively sinful, thence at once I learn that I am not bound, because I am told to submit to my husband, as unto the Lord. The Lord would never sanction what is sinful. He may put me through the sieve, and I may not at first understand the goodness or the need of it; but faith constantly finds its strength and guidance in the Lord's wisdom — in trusting Him, and not my wisdom in understanding Him. And you will find that we grow in wisdom by being content to take the place of having none. If my confidence is in His wisdom, I shall gather wisdom and grow in it. Our Lord was perfectly man; and although always perfect in every condition of life, yet the great mark of His perfectness lay in this — He was ever the dependent One who looked up to God, and who could say, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" There was at once for man the lowest, but in truth, the highest place. He understood the secret of His own relationship to God the Father. And although this was true of Christ as of none others, yet it is surely true of every believer in measure.

But we have most carefully to watch ourselves in this matter. Wherever there is the smallest tendency to slip out of the path of submission, we have to search and see, if we are wise according to God. Nature never likes to be subject. And wherever there is a danger of pleading the truth of God for any act that might seem to be a want of submission to the authority of another, I have need to watch myself with greater jealousy than in any other thing. When we are found in a path where submission is the word, let us leave room to bring in the Lord. In order to give power and faith to our obedience, and a holy character to it, I should see that it is the Lord I am obeying, even while there is an earthly authority to which I am subjected. The blessed truth that the Lord was about to introduce begins to open to us. "For a husband is head of the wife, even as Christ is head of the Church: he is Saviour of the body." (Ver. 23.) In this we have an allusion to the near relationship, which is intended to show us how we ought to walk towards one another in this respect. Although He, and none but He, is the Saviour, there is no taking the Church or the saint out of the place of subjection, but expressly the reverse.

"Therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their husbands in everything." Such is the general principle. But then, you will observe, there is always a measure and a guard in every such word of Scripture. It is not simply said, "Therefore, let the wives be subject in everything to their own husbands," but "Therefore, *as the Church is subject unto Christ*, so let the wives be," etc. There I find that Christ's own blessed way of caring for the assembly and dealing with it in its due subjection to the Lord, is brought in as the pattern of wives towards their own husbands. But it is when we come to the higher of the two relationships, that we have the Holy Ghost bringing out its character more clearly. "Husbands, love your wives." Here we find what the snare of the husband might be. First, the wife is to look to her temper, that she discipline her spirit in thorough submission to her husband. It is not said to her, to love her husband, but to submit herself to him. But Satan might take advantage, and (they being in the relationship) the husband might be wanting in tender care and affection. There is the ruling and guiding the wife; but what he is exhorted to here is that which his circumstances most need, and which would be most for his own soul's good and the comfort of his wife. So that the word is, "Husbands, *love* your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." What a holy standard! What a most unselfish, considerate, pure, and heavenly Exemplar is brought before us, in order that the relationship, which might be easily

degraded, should have and keep its due elevation; and that even the poorest saints on earth, so bound together, might have the light and love of heaven shining upon them.

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." Thus we have the love of Christ to the church set forth as the model according to which the christian husband is to seek that his own love to his wife should be conformed. Look at its source and character: "Christ also loved the assembly." All flows out of this. Need I, even as a man, say, that love, as it is what ought to precede a marriage, so is the only secret which, in nature, makes the marriage happy when it is formed? The love of Christ that is shown us here is taken in from first to last, as one unbroken whole. It is well to remember it in married life: the love that was true before the tie was formed, is a love that abides when it is formed, and that should grow unto the end.

Certainly it was so perfectly in our Lord. He loved the church. It is a question of a very special affection here on the part of Christ. It is not the general truth of God's love, who loved the world even; but no relationship was formed with the world. The important thing to look at here is that, although it is a love that exists before the relationship, it finds its proper exercise in it, and ever continues its real strength and joy. And if we turn aside from looking at the earthly thing to that which is set forth by it, how great the grace, and how rich the blessing! Once it was a joy for our hearts to realize that God could love sinners, and so love as to spend His Son upon us, sinners as we were. But there is another kind of love that we know now. God has taken the relationship of a Father to us; at any rate He has brought us into that of children by Jesus Christ to Himself. We are "children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." Accordingly the Father loves us with a father's heart; it is not only that He loves the creature as God, but He loves us as a father — yea, as the Father of our Lord Jesus loved Him, and not only in the measure in which a human parent regards his children. In such a circle there might be complacency and delight; and when we think what and who we are, to think that such an one as God the Father could delight in us now in this world, is most wondrous! that He should infinitely more love us than an earthly father does the child that he loves best, and that this love should extend towards the weakest and most needy of His family! There is also a conditional love towards those that are walking faithfully, and St. John brings this out in John 14, 15. But now I am speaking of unfailing, personal love in the relationship in which God stands as Father to His children, as such; which does not only pity, but look with pleasure upon and take delight in them now, spite of everything that is calculated to turn aside or weaken His love. Ought I not, as in Christ, to be as sure of this, as I am of my own existence as a man? yea, to have a better knowledge and certainty of what His love is towards me, than of anything that affects me as one living on the earth? I have that in me which is not proof against the deceptions of the world outside. But in the things of God, where faith lives, it is not so. There is, there ought to be, divine certainty.

Where God clearly reveals Himself, the soul should receive it in humbleness of mind; and the more humble, the more sure, because the ground of the assurance is that God has revealed it to us. It is a question of Himself and not of us at all. If this be so, what a wonderful place it is to be in Christ! It is quite true that Christ loved me, but here it is the Church — "the assembly;" and Christ has a special love for His assembly, which I am entitled to appropriate and count on. This makes the gathering together of the children of God as the assembly to be so precious, and shows the all-importance of not reducing it to a voluntary society, small or great. The moment you bring in the will of man, you virtually and at once destroy the divine ground which Scripture assumes. Whereas, if you see that God has formed a certain bond in the Holy Ghost for the glory of His Son among those who belong to Him

on the earth now, and that Christ regards those who are within that bond with a perfect and most peculiar love; then it is the greatest possible joy that our own souls should enter into His love, and next that we should seek to act by His word upon the other members of the body of Christ, that they may believe and enjoy it also. It is not a part only, but He "loved the assembly." The reason why I use the word "assembly" is that people often have a very vague notion about the Church. The word is usually and completely misapplied in the present day. It is said of a religious building, or of a particular party, in particular of what may be dominant anywhere. But bring in "the assembly," and understand by it the whole body of those that God calls out from this world by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; and there you learn the special love that God has revealed in Christ, not merely to the soul, but to the assembly which is His body on earth.

Of course, the death of Christ was essential, in order that the gospel should now be preached to the world. This, too, is the ground on which the heavens and earth will be cleared of all that now pollutes and defiles. Everything for the justification of God in the past, and for the outflow of the love of God in the future, is founded upon the death of Christ. Hence the momentous value of His redemption, for earth and heaven, for Jew, Gentile, and Church of God, for time and eternity. But, besides, there is great force in the word, "He delivered himself up for it." There was nothing in Christ that He did not give. It is not what He did, nor only what He suffered, but He gave Himself. Of course, it implies all that was in Him and of Him, but it goes a great deal farther, because it is absolute self-renunciation in love for the sake of the object that He loved; the perfect pattern of the very fulness of love, which it is quite beyond any human relationship to emulate. Justly does the Spirit, in addressing the christian husband, show us that Christ in all things has the pre-eminence; "He delivered himself up for us." What is the consequence? The Church is without sin before God — sins are blotted out for ever — redemption is effected — Satan is defeated — divine wrath and judgment borne — ordinances, which were against those that were under them, are nailed to the cross — the enmity is gone — the new man is formed; and all this, and much more than this, founded upon Christ's surrender of Himself. The effect for us is that here we have, in unclouded light, without doubt or question, Himself in love, as the object of our souls to delight in and submit to and serve and worship evermore.

I have no more right to believe that Christ gave Himself for me, than I have to believe that my iniquities are completely purged out by His precious blood. If I believe the one, I owe it to God to believe the other; and the ground of my faith is God's testimony to the perfectness of what Christ has done according to the glory of His person. God sets such value upon His work of suffering on the cross, that He can perfectly love me. We are free. We have redemption through His blood. But it is in Him, not only through His blood, but in Him; as it is said in Ephesians 1, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." So that it is of great importance that, while we hold redemption, we should not hold it, if I may be allowed so to say, apart from but in Him. And what will enable me to estimate, and hold fast the preciousness of this work, is His person; we must remember not only *what* was done, but *who* He was that did it. If you in self-judgment, cleave to Him and to these two blessed truths in Him, there never can be a cloud upon your soul as to your own perfect deliverance from all charge before God.

But now comes another thought. If Christ has completed this, if it is a past thing, never requiring to be re-touched, we enter upon the second proof of His love "that he might sanctify it, having cleansed [it] by the washing of water by the word." I take it that the sanctifying the Church spoken of here, though connected closely with its being cleansed through the word, is a distinct thing. These are two operations and there is an important difference between sanctifying the Church and cleansing it.

This sanctifying does not merely refer to our growth in grace, it is connected with Christ. It is not the Spirit of God merely working in the believer. Men talk as if it were the business of the Son to justify, and of the Spirit to sanctify. But we are washed, we are sanctified, we are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. All that by virtue of which we are washed, and sanctified, and justified, is Christ; and it is by the Spirit of our God. The Spirit of God is the active agent in the justification, no less than in the sanctifying; but it is always by using Christ. Hence there is a great danger in disconnecting Christ from sanctification. Christ gave Himself for the Church, "that he might sanctify and cleanse it." His blood is involved in His giving Himself, though this is more than that.

In fact, all that which flows into and from redemption, properly so called, is supposed in verse 25: "He loved the church, and gave himself for it." This is a past thing, followed by that which is going on all the time of the Church's existence upon the earth. As the fruit of His love comes the death of Christ for us — His giving Himself for the Church. And now you have, founded upon the cross, the sanctifying and cleansing that goes on continually. But how is it wrought? In both cases it is by the washing of water by the word. This shows us the immense importance of the word of God. Of what moment it is for every child of God to value that word and to seek to grow in acquaintance with God through it — to increase in the knowledge of God! So far from our belonging to the Church, or rather to Christ, being the sum and substance of all we have to learn, it is only the foundation; and it is after we know this, that there follows all the sanctifying and cleansing by the washing of water by the word. So that it is clear we have got three fruits of the love of Christ that are very distinct indeed. The first is, that He gave Himself (that is, unto death); the second is, the present work of His life. Since the cross, He is occupying Himself in heaven about the Church; He is taking care of His members, working by the Holy Ghost, and applying the word of God. And all is connected with Himself, because the whole starting-point is Christ's love to the Church. He is sanctifying and cleansing now by the washing of water by the word; but we know that our sins were put away by His blood.

Before we turn to the third effect of His love, allow me to say here that a fresh application of the blood of Christ is unknown to Christianity. There are Christians, no doubt, who tell you that you must have fresh recourse to the blood; but they have no Scripture for their thought. On the contrary, it weakens the fundamental truth of the efficacy of Christ's own sacrifice, which it is intended, after a human fashion, to commend and exalt. Such is the effect of forming our own thoughts of the use that is to be made of any truth, instead of simply bowing to the word of God. The moment we take a truth out of His connection for us, it is like rooting up that which has its own due place in the garden of God, where it produces its proper, abundant, and precious fruit, but which becomes a withered thing when man takes it into his own hands. Repetition as to this would prove imperfectness. This foundation has been laid so completely in the Epistle to the Hebrews, that it never requires to be laid again. There is no more the possibility of a fresh sprinkling of Christ's blood, than there is room left for His dying once more to shed His blood. When a soul has found Him and been washed from sin in His blood, there it abides for ever. This is what makes the sin of a Christian to be so serious. If you could begin again, what is the effect? Not very different from that which his confession before a priest has upon the Romanist. People soon learn to trifle with sin, and to get hardened by its deceitfulness. Although it is a different thing where Christ is looked to, still the moral effect is much the same, as far as the making light of sin is concerned. If a person can again and again start afresh, as if a trifle had happened, and begin over and over again for every new downfall, sin is never felt nearly so deeply. For on one side we are bound to bring no stain upon that which is washed in the blood of Christ, yet, on the other, we are conscious of constant failure.

Is there, then, no resource? Is there no renewal of access to the cross? It would be a tremendous

thing if there were no provision against our failings and falls, no means of dealing with these departures: but there is a resource, and we have it here — "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." You have similar truth set forth in its individual application to John 13. There it was on the ground that the disciples were His own; that He loved them, and that whom He loved He loved unto the end: and then we find that, being exposed to defile themselves in the world, the Lord would guard them against two things; first, the anxiety lest He should cease to love them because they were unfaithful; secondly, the danger of their using His faithfulness as a reason for trifling with sin. Christ will never cease to love, nor will He trifle with sin or allow us to trifle with it. He keeps us always resting on His blood. But, then, supposing one is guilty of sin after receiving remission of sins, what is to be done? Let us go and spread it out before God. The veil is not set up again because you have acted foolishly outside it. You are entitled to draw near and spread out your failure before God — to come to Him on the very ground that you are washed in the blood of Christ. What is the effect of this? and what is this the effect of? It is because Christ is sanctifying and cleansing, keeping up the washing of water by the word. There may be this corporate aspect of it, as well as the individual — both are true. It is true for every soul and for the Church at large. Christ is always acting in the presence of God on behalf of the Church; and the consequence is the needed reproof and chastening. A man is brought to feel what he has done. Some word of God, either in his own meditation, or through others, flashes upon his soul. He is convinced of his folly; the will has ceased to act; the word of God is brought home with power by the Holy Ghost; the man bows under it to the Lord.

This is the washing of water by the word. It is the effect of Christ's priesthood at the right hand of God. The application of the word of God to the soul is the effect of the intercession of Christ to put away failure wherever it has been. The work that He is doing at the right hand of God has an intercessional character. A great deal of that which goes on in the soul is not provision for failure, but to guard against failure. God does not count upon sin — He does not look for failure in His child. On the contrary, there is a most solemn injunction against sin. "My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin not." He had been telling them, that if any man say he has no sin, he deceives himself, and the truth is not in him. Then the effect of that on the corrupt heart of man would be, that some would infer sin to be not so much matter after all. "My little children," he says, "these things write I unto you that ye sin not." We are never free to sin. We are always inexcusable when we do sin. "But," it is added, "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." There you have what answers to the Scripture before us. It is not that the position of Christ is the same, but the effect, as far as regards the soul, is similar. Christ is carrying on His blessed action of love, and the effect is that there is that in the word of God which applies itself, by the grace of God, to our fault; so that the sanctifying spoken of here is the practical setting us apart according to our proper calling as God's assembly — the making it good in our souls by the word of God. This is done by the revelation of Christ, and of Christ as He now is in the presence of God. And this is what is referred to in 2 Corinthians 3, where it is said, "We all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." We find that the Holy Ghost, revealing Christ as He is glorified now before God, separates us from the world which knows nothing of His glory, but is bent upon its own glory connected with present things. God reveals to us Christ on high, and the effect is that we are weaned from the false glitter of this evil age.

But this being the complete account of what Christ does, there is the cleansing, as well as the sanctifying, the Church. All defilement requires to be removed; and in both cases it is the washing of water by the word which God uses. But there is a third and future fruit of His love — "that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing." There we have

clearly the complete blessing of the Church, when there will be no question of cleansing it any more; when all the love of Christ will have its perfect effect, and when the Church will be glorious according to His own likeness, "That he might present the church to himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." Thus we have the full, divine account of the love of Christ. But mark, it is not introduced merely in a doctrinal form, but in a most practical way, for the purpose of illustrating the place of the christian husband towards his wife. The husband can only act properly towards his wife when the relationship is regarded on higher ground than a natural one. A Christian must act upon heavenly principles, in order to act well in a natural relationship. You might have a husband attached to his wife, and a wife ever so much attached to him; but if this is their whole ground in married life, it will never have the power, blessing, and honour of God. Though it is all quite right, yet more than this is needed; and the something more that is needed is just the constant reminding of our souls how Christ feels and carries Himself toward the Church. There is always blessing and power in believing the word of God. If not using the word, we shall not have His strength in the natural relationship of this life; yet we ought to have it. If we have it not thus, are we not so far doing without that which would give power, and which God would own and honour?

The Spirit applies it, "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself." He is now taking up the common instinct that men naturally avoid pain and take care of themselves. He is speaking only of the fact, and says, Look upon your wife as a part of yourself; and that anything that would wrong her is so much wrong done to your own body. It would teach you affectionate care, "for no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:" a beautiful and sweet addition to the truth that was already brought out. All the rest had shown redemption, the present practical cleansing, the future glorification of the Church. But now he adds, that Christ "nourisheth and cherisheth it." There is the special entrance of His mind, His careful interest in those that belong to Him. It is a great comfort that we know this to be true in the present state of the Church, when we think of the ruin of all around. Does Christ ever cease to nourish that which belongs to Him? Impossible. Spite of all the ruin, He has the same care for His people. We never can pray too much for the Church; but it is another thing to be troubling our minds as if the Lord forgot her, and were not taking adequate care of the saints in their need and sorrow. The Lord has never failed; and what He here tells us to do in our earthly relationship is no more than what He perfectly does towards His Church. He loves the Church; He nourishes and cherishes it, and He does this because "we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." Just as Eve was a part of Adam, so the Church is of Christ. The Lord took out of Adam's side that which He built into his wife. So we stand in this nearness of relationship to Christ.

The verse is sometimes applied to Christ's becoming man; but it is the converse of this. It does not mean Christ taking our flesh and bone, but our being made members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. It is our relationship to Christ risen from the dead, and not Christ's relationship to us as a man upon the earth. I only refer to it to guard souls. There is no allusion to our Lord's taking flesh and blood, which we know He did: this is taught in Hebrews, but not here. We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. We are really a part of Himself, united to Him as He now is in the presence of God. It is our union to Him, not His incarnation.

The case of Adam is then quoted, and of Eve, in language of allusion to Genesis 2. "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church. Nevertheless, let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself, and the wife see that she reverence her husband." Thus we have the subject summed up with this practical word. I need not say that

everything contrary to the most entire confidence in such a relationship is excluded by this verse. The husband, if acting in the spirit of it, has no secret from the one that is part of himself: but as to the wife, let her see that she reverence or (literally) fear her husband. It would not be the mere familiarity of love, which is wrong in a heavenly point of view. Whatever the confidence of a wife in her husband, it is surely a becoming thing for a wife to fear him. Nor is this the least incompatible with love. We are told to hold fast grace; and what is the effect? That we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. There is an immense difference, of course, between God and man; but it may serve to illustrate. Here it is the fear that dreads to offend, and seeks earnestly the husband's honour. This holds true in every case. Supposing you take the case of a stupid husband who has a clever wife; if he shows what he is from day to day, so much the more has the wife to guard her own spirit, that she should use what she has for her husband without seeming to do so. And now comes in the very important thing, that in these circumstances she should honour God and her husband, instead of a word to himself or to others that would wound or show a want of care. It is in such circumstances that the wisdom and spiritual feeling of a godly woman should shine, and shine by not shining: for the blessing of the married pair supposes that the man should appear and not the woman. Where the heart is simply looking to the Lord, there would be this result: and although it might look unseemly that such should be linked together and it would make their path more difficult, still there is nothing impossible to God. And if the christian woman sought the mind of God, honouring Him in the circumstances, God would use her in a very blessed and happy way for the helping of her husband, and for the covering of that which would be mortifying to him. But the principle always abides. As nothing justifies a husband in not loving his wife, so nothing justifies a wife in not reverencing her husband. The Lord grant that we may bear in mind His holy and gracious admonition.

Ephesians 6

Let us briefly look at the relations of children and fathers, as well as of servants and masters. Here, *obedience* is the grand point pressed on the inferior in each case. As all saints are called to submit themselves one to another in the fear of Christ, and wives especially to their own husbands, subject to them in every thing, so children are to obey their parents in the Lord. (Ver. 1.) It is not that the Holy Ghost has not a suited and a serious word for their fathers; but, in general, how easy is the flow of a christian household where the young obey — above all, where they "obey in the Lord." Natural affection is sweet, and the lack of it is a sign of the perilous last days; but it is not enough; nor is conscience, all-important as it is in its place, an adequate guard, nor can it be a spring of power; but the Lord is. And how blessed, where duty is clothed with and absorbed in Him! This, and nothing less than this, is pressed by the Holy Ghost.

It was so with the Lord Himself when He was here, and knew what it was to be in the place of a child. "And the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him." Nor are we left to a vague, general statement; we are shown a living picture of His ways. "And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us?"

behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" Thus, He, even as a child of twelve, had the consciousness of His own proper relationship. The humanity He had taken, as born of a woman, in no way weakened the sense He had of His Father's love and business, but rather gave a new occasion in which He had to make it good. At the same time, we see what is so beautiful — how His eye, absolutely single, saw that which became Him on the earthly side, in striking contrast with Joseph and even His mother, who "understood not the saying which he spake unto them." Hence we read immediately after that, "He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them." Such was Jesus, the Lord of all, during much the larger part of His earthly career.

The same principle is true of the christian child; save that Christ's relationship to the Father was essential, ours to Him and to His Father is, of course, the pure gift of grace. But still we, too, are children, conferred on us as the title surely is in and through our Lord Jesus. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God Beloved, *now* are we the sons of God." And this, by the working of the Holy Ghost, is the secret of happy obedience in the earthly relationship. Conscious of what we are to the Lord, we can obey in Him. "In the Lord" is both the encouragement, the safeguard, and the limit. The parents might be Jew or heathen, or they might bear unworthily the name of Christ; but christian children (while thoroughly owning their relation to their parents, whatever they might be) have the sweet privilege of obeying "in the Lord." How it simplifies questions otherwise perplexing! How it determines also where and how far one ought to go! For if they are to obey "in the Lord," such a call cannot rightly be made a reason or excuse for sin.

In the Epistle to the Colossians, where the saints were in danger from a misuse of legal ordinances, the ground urged why children should obey their parents in all things, is "For this is well-pleasing unto the Lord." Here the faithful were free from that snare, and the Holy Ghost could freely use a principle embodied in the law, and hence adds "for this is *right*," or *just*. Nay, He can follow it up with a quotation, slightly changed from the decalogue, drawing attention parenthetically to its special place therein. "Honour thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest be long-lived on the earth." (Ver. 2, 3.) If such was God's estimate of filial piety under law, was it less now that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ unfolds His nature and calls us to the relationship of sons unto Himself? If respect to that word of old found its approval and recompense in the righteous government of God, if He then watched over and prospered such as honoured their parents, did the revelation of Himself in grace relax the obligation for His children, or make the love that prompts and sustains such honour less precious in His own eyes now? No intelligent Christian would contend that it is other than a precept from the law, but so applied as to insinuate, if I mistake not, a kind of *à fortiori* conclusion to the New Testament believer. Certainly, to be well and live long on the earth is not the form in which the proper portion of a saint, since the cross of Christ) is usually set before him.

To the fathers is the admonition (more needed by such than the mothers, perhaps, though in principle no doubt intended for both), "Provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." (Ver. 4.) What knowledge of the heart of both old and young! What tender consideration, after the pressure of obedience, lest a too stringent and capricious use of the parental authority might exasperate! The bringing them up, or nourishing, is, on the other hand, to be with the Lord's discipline and admonition. As the Christian knows His ways, as they are in exercise toward himself and others, so is he to train up his children for Him — an all-important principle for the parent's own heart and conscience. Do we desire the Lord alone for them, or the world too?

Next (ver. 5-8), the christian slaves are exhorted to obey their masters according to the flesh (such they were, whether converted or not), to obey them with fear and trembling, in singleness of their heart, as to Christ; not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the soul, with goodwill doing service as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each doeth, this he shall receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. Is it not worthy of all note the extent and depth of the liberty that is in Christ? There is nothing violent or revolutionary; and yet the change is complete, absolute, final in its principle and character, though one has to grow in the appreciation and manifestation of it. And this growth is important morally, being part and parcel of Christianity practically viewed, where the very first blessing which God's grace bestows upon us in Christ appears not save to faith, has to be realized all through in the power of the Spirit through self-judgment, and is only ours in actual possession and display when that which is perfect is come in resurrection-glory. Still, how blessed, that if in one sense we have nothing, in another and just as real a sense we possess all things. On this truth faith has to lay hold and act; and among the rest, what a boon to the christian bondman! What a mighty motive for him, who, already consciously free in Christ in a liberty entirely superior to circumstances, has for that very reason such a scope for triumphing over his fetters and serving Christ in obeying the worst of masters if it were the Lord's will so to try him! Doubtless, the master too has his duties; but if he fail, what then? Is the slave absolved from his responsibility? How can this ever be a difficulty, if he obeys in simplicity as unto Christ? Does *He* fail? What a deliverance from every shade of dishonesty! — "not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ [how honourable the title which one shares with an apostle!], doing the will of God from the soul;" for such is the true word here. More than this: not only is there the call with goodwill to do service as to the Lord and not to men, but they are reminded that the day was coming when each, whether bond or free, should receive of the Lord for whatever good he might do. Ample wages then, be assured; for He, at least, is not unrighteous.

Then, in turn (ver. 9), the masters are called to impartial equity, doing as they would be done by, and abstaining from the threats so natural toward a poor slave. They were to know that the Lord both of masters and slaves was in the heavens, and that no respect of persons is with Him: — both of them weighty considerations for a master, and, with delicate propriety, laid before him rather than the slave.

We now enter on the final exhortations of the epistle, no longer occupied with the several relationships of the saints in their earthly circumstances, and hence looking at distinct classes, but addressed to all. "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." It is the opening of the solemn subject of proper christian conflict, viewed, naturally in Ephesians, as carried on at the height of our heavenly privileges in Christ. In 1 Peter the scene lies, so to speak, in the wilderness, where, most appropriately, sobriety and vigilance are enjoined on the pilgrims and strangers who pass onward to the incorruptible inheritance; because their adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour. Here the enemy is regarded as on high, where the saints are blessed with every spiritual blessing, where their Head is exalted, where they are seated in Him, where the principalities and powers are learning by them the manifold wisdom of God; there, too, is the real struggle with the prince of the power of the air and his hosts.

But if, on the one hand, there is no keeping back from the believers the formidable conflict to which they are inevitably committed, there is, on the other hand, no weakening of their hands. On the contrary, the trumpet, which here summons to the battle, gives the most certain sounds of good courage, without presumption, in the saints, and of the amplest provision for their victory in the Lord, who has called them to warfare at His charges. What was His name by faith in His name to him that was lame from his mother's womb, whom they laid for daily alms at the gate of the temple? Is it less

for our need? Far be the thought. All that is needed is the faith which is by Him; and faith comes by a report and this by God's word; and what more inspiring to us than such words as these, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might?"

Nevertheless, the mighty contest with the powers of darkness admits of no negligence on our part. We cannot afford to be unguarded anywhere. We have to stand, not so much against the strength of the devil (Christ did this) as against his wiles. In truth, he is to us a vanquished foe in the cross; and we are entitled always to treat him as such. Therefore, says James, (James 4: 7), "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." It is his artifices that are chiefly and always to be dreaded; and to resist these we need to put on the panoply of God, as it is added here: "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places."

Well might we tremble if we stood in any resources of ours against such an array. But it is not so. The battle is the Lord's and our exposure but draws out His mighty hand and unfailing wisdom. Still we have to fight. It will not do to plead our weakness or His strength in order to shirk our responsibility. We must not merely look at, or point to, the panoply of God as our possession, so to speak, but must put it on at His bidding.

Another thing must be borne in mind. It is no question here of our wants before God. For *He* has no conflict with us; but having delivered our souls, He calls us to wrestle for the mastery with the unseen armies of His enemy. As naked in our lost estate once, we needed to be clothed; and His grace did clothe us with the best robe, with Christ. This is our clothing as before God: nothing less, nothing else, would suit His presence as His guests. But here it is a question of fighting the enemy, after we are clad with Christ; and we needed armour of divine tempering to stand aright and securely. On the details of this armour we shall enter by and by; it is only on the general truth that I would insist now.

How remarkably we are here reminded of Joshua in verse 10, and Israel's foes in verse 12! To Joshua the word was, "Arise, go over this Jordan, thou and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land which I swear unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous." (Joshua 1. Compare also verses 9, 18.) Again, it is clear that if the Canaanites were but enemies of flesh and blood, they are types of the still deadlier foes we have to fight — foes whose effort it is to hinder the Christian from taking possession, in present enjoyment, of his heavenly inheritance.

It is not here, note it well, the Red Sea crossed, and then the desert, where we have to learn what God is and to be proved ourselves. The wilderness is the great scene of *temptation*; though, no doubt, there are occasional battles, as with Amalek and with Midian, still it is the place where we have to go or stay at God's bidding, in need of daily, heaven-sent supplies, where there is nothing else to sustain, ever marching onward with the heavenly land before us. But the wrestling here, as in the Book of Joshua, supposes the passage of the Jordan and entrance into Canaan, where the day of *conflict* begins, rather than that of temptation in the wilderness.

Is the evangelical school right in making Jordan to be the act of death at the end of our career when the saint departs to be with Christ? Clearly not; for in this case what would answer to the wars in Canaan? No! excellent as Bunyan was, in this he was mistaken, following the mistakes of others

before him and perpetuating them far and wide to this day. Indeed, this is one of the tests of where the soul is and how far it is emancipated from traditional theology, which limits its disciples to a minimum of truth. Elsewhere, as for instance in their use of the Passover and Red Sea, there is defectiveness; here there is absolutely nothing, or error. And this I say, singling out the author of "Pilgrim's Progress" as a noble and most advanced specimen of popular views. The best of their day in the religious world are but his commentators — some of them literally so. Can there be a better proof how completely the gist of this epistle is ignored? The truth is that in the Red Sea we have Christ dead and risen *for us*; in Jordan, we have our death and resurrection *with Him*: the one ushering us into the world as the dreary waste of our pilgrimage, the other putting us in view of our heavenly blessing, which we have then to appropriate by victory over Satan. The distinction is as clear as it is important, though both are true of the Christian now. When the glorious day comes for the inheritance to be ours, not by the force of faith which thus in practice defeats the enemy and makes good the land God has given us, we shall not have to wrestle with these principalities and powers in heavenly places: the conflict will be closed for us and for ever. The expulsion of the dragon, "that old serpent," is not our work, but that of Michael and his angels. With overcoming him we have to do, but not with his forcible ejection from heaven. All the time the Church is here below, our conflict goes on with these spiritual wickednesses in heavenly places; when the actual casting out by God's providential power takes place, we shall not be here, but above.

After the Passover and the Red Sea there was no return of Israel to the slavery of Pharaoh; their taskmasters were overthrown and gone; "there remained not so much as one of them." "The Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptian, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore." But circumcision did not characterize the redeemed in the wilderness. No sooner were the children on the Canaanitish side of Jordan than they rolled away the reproach of Egypt at Gilgal. The knife of circumcision was applied to deal with Israel before they draw the sword on the doomed inhabitants of Canaan. They were in Canaan and had nothing more to do to get there: their work was to make the land their own.

Has this no instruction for us? Have we consciously laid hold of our union with Christ on high? Do we know our place is there in Him, and that we have there to stand? Is nature, root and branch, a judged thing in us? Do we render a heavenly testimony — not only righteous and holy, but heavenly? Are we then and thus advancing on the enemy and making good our title by present victory to enjoy the boundless blessings above which we have in Christ? Or are we still, as far as realization goes, ransomed, but in the wilderness, with Jordan uncrossed and the old corn of the land for us untouched food? Are we merely guarding against the flesh breaking out here or there, against worldly temptations overtaking us in this or that? If so, need we wonder that verse 12 sounds mysterious, and that we question what is meant by the wrestling with the enemies in heavenly places? It was probably the total misapprehension, or non-apprehension, of the truth here revealed, which led our English translators into the unwarrantable change of *heavenly* into "high" places in this passage only. It behoves ourselves, however, to consider whether our own souls have proved and are proving the panoply of God in this conflict, where, above all, it is plain that "the flesh profiteth nothing."

In these verses, after a prefatory resumption, we come to the particulars of the Christian's armour. "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth," etc. (Ver. 13-17.)

The first thing to be noticed is that the Holy Spirit calls on us to take up the panoply of God. Neither strength nor wisdom of man avail in this conflict. As we have to do with the hosts of Satan on

the one hand, we need on the other "the whole armour of God." Our natural character and habits may not signify, where the Spirit of God is at work to save our souls in His grace; but they are of vast moment in presence of a foe who knows how to take advantage of every unguarded opening. Even to those at Corinth, carnal as they were, and only fit to bear the food of babes (not the solid meat which is set before the Ephesian saints), he had shown that, walking in flesh, we do not war according to flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but divinely mighty to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down reasonings and every high thing that lifts itself up against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. Not flesh, but the Spirit of God has power against Satan.

Here, too, the character of the time in which the conflict goes on is designated as "the evil-day." Evil indeed is the entire period since Christ was crucified and the enemy acquired the title of "the prince of this world." Hence, in chapter 5, we are expected to walk with carefulness, not as fools but as wise, seizing every good and suited opportunity, because "the days are evil." But here we have something more precise, "that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day." For there are occasions when the power of evil is allowed to press more closely and the danger is great for the careless soul. It is emphatically then "*the* evil day;" and it is well when the Christian has anticipated it; for the point at such a time is not to take up the panoply, but, having already taken it, "to *withstand*." "The evil day" should find us already and fully armed, if we are to make effectual resistance. Nor is this enough. For how often the victory of faith is too great for the faith that won it, and a saint who has long and afresh vanquished the enemy, may tire of the struggle and turn aside into a seemingly easier path, to prove his own folly, and his exceeding danger, even if in the end delivered by the pure mercy of God! To resist, then, does not suffice, but "having done all," having thoroughly accomplished all things requisite, "to stand." The fight — the fights — may have been keen, the victory complete through the Lord's goodness and might; but the war is not over. Our place is still to stand our ground.

"Stand, therefore, having girt your loins about with truth, and put on the breastplate of righteousness, and shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace." I have changed the English Version slightly, so as to adhere more closely to the true sense, which supposes not only a settled position, but the soul in activity according to the summons of the Holy Ghost. Much mischief has arisen from regarding this passage as if it treated of standing, whereas, in truth, it is essentially different. It is practical arming and conflict, founded on the most blessed standing anywhere revealed in the New Testament, and suitably closing the epistle which reveals it.

To know the truth and be set free by the truth is one thing; to have girt about our loins with truth is another. It is the intimate dealing of truth with the soul, so that there is no laxity of heart or indulged will, but, on the contrary, the affections and judgment braced up to Christ and the things of Christ. Thus the saint cleaves to the Lord with full purpose of heart; and, self being searched and judged by the truth, there is vigour imparted through the revelation of His mind and grace, which are now more than ever enjoyed. It is the power of truth in keeping the soul, delivered in God's rich mercy, and too thankful to be under an authority so comprehensive and penetrating and absolute, as to leave nothing, let it be ever so inward, outside the range of God's will and the saint's obedience. To bear and delight in this, however, assumes that the heart is established in grace; it can then welcome the truth in all its energetic claim and control.

Next follows "the breastplate of righteousness" put on. This is quite distinct from the righteousness of God, which we are made in Christ. The latter we need before God; the former we want for successful wrestling with our adversary the devil. As the Spirit, in the girding round our loins with truth, shows the first piece of armour to be the thorough application of the word to us in self-

judgment, and, withal, in moral energy, so the next demanded is that we put on practical righteousness as our breastplate. Nothing exposes a saint in conflict more readily than a bad conscience in his ways. I do not mean a conscience unpurged, but where evil, after the knowledge of redemption, has been allowed and communion is broken.

Connected with this is the having "the feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace." This, again, is evidently a matter of practical power and enjoyment, the effect of maintaining a good conscience, as the latter can only be where all is held and guarded by the truth. Then the soul goes on in peace. "The fruit of righteousness," as another apostle says, "is sown in peace of them that make peace." Where there is laxity, the conscience gets bad; and the result is trouble, and making trouble; where truth governs, the conscience is kept bright, and, happy ourselves, we shed happiness around us.

Verse 16 introduces another and quite as necessary a part of the divine armour, but, doubtless, justly put subsequent to what we have seen. "Above [or, beside] all, having taken up the shield of faith with which ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one." This means that confidence in God Himself which the soul is entitled and encouraged to cherish: I say, in Himself, because, though inseparable from the godly and righteous state the previous portions of the panoply intimate, it is a confidence springing only from what God is known to be in His own nature and character. All the envenomed efforts of the wicked one are futile where God is thus known in the power of the Holy Ghost ungrieved within us; all his darts not only fail to produce despair and distrust, but they are extinguished by the shield of faith.

But there is more (ver. 17): "and receive the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God." The shield of faith is more general confidence; the helmet of salvation is rather the bold and joyful consciousness of the full deliverance God has wrought for us in Christ. This crowns the various parts of the armour already noticed, and is therefore followed, not by further means of defence (for it is complete), but by the instrument of offensive energy against the adversary, the sword of the Spirit, even God's word. How wisely it is thus placed in the last place of all, will be apparent to the instructed mind! Indeed, if there be not this order known practically, the word is made a mere toy of, or perhaps a scourge for self, rather than to have the character of the sword of the Spirit; it is misused and powerless. Handled in the Spirit, what deliverance it works! What disabling of adversaries and what a detector of Satan! It is for conflict.

We have had the details of the panoply of God, active energy following that which pertains to the state, practical security and the confidence of the soul. But there is a hidden spring of power without which nothing avails — the expression of weakness, strange to say, but of weakness in dependence on God. Hence the word is, "praying always with all prayer" — praying at every season. There is nothing the enemy more dreads, nothing that flesh more seeks to hinder, or to make amiss if there be the form. But so much the more need we to bear in mind the call to habitual and complete dependence.

Besides, there is the exercise of spiritual desires, and not dependence only; as it is said by our Lord elsewhere, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it." "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." (John 14, 15) In a word, there is encouragement and exhortation to every kind of prayer and at every opportunity, while there is also that character of petition which is sustained in the power of the Holy Ghost, "supplication in the Spirit," which all prayer of the saints is not.

Another weighty word is the call to "watch unto this very thing;" for this supposes the activity of love which is quick to discern in the fear of the Lord and in the bowels of Christ that which might tarnish His glory on the one hand, and on the other whatever would contribute to the exaltation of His name in His saints and testimony. What a deliverance this is, not only from self-will, but from anxiety and from self-importance! And what a field for gracious affections to turn everything of good or ill into occasions of intercourse with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to turn all — otherwise transient, or food for gossip — into channels of everlasting blessing! How wise and good is every word of our God! May the thing itself, as well as His word about it, be precious in our eyes! Where this is so, there will be watching in the habit of prayer, "with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." For where God's presence is thus realized, there is no straitness in the affections, but love goes out energetically to Him and in communion with Him concerning all the saints. It is the service of love before Him who is love. But as having at heart the interests of Christ, there is the special remembrance of such as gather with Christ. So here the apostle speaks of their supplication on behalf of himself; and, as it appears, with a link of greater energy than that which spread desires about the saints before the Lord — "and for me" (not merely *περὶ*, but *ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ*, as indicating particularity among the general objects of the action), "that utterance may be given unto me that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, on behalf of which I am ambassador in chains; that therein I may be bold as I ought to speak."

It is blessed to find such a practical evidence of the apostle's own sense of the value of intercession, the intercession of saints, for his ministry. His consciousness of its dignity rather increased than diminished his wish to be thus remembered.

But again, he reckoned on their love, not only in thus praying on his behalf, but also in their desiring to know matters concerning him, how he fared; and, therefore tells them that "Tychicus, the beloved brother, and faithful servant in the Lord' shall make known to you all things: whom I sent unto you for this very purpose, that ye may know our affairs, and that he may comfort your hearts." What a contrast with the spirit of men is the mighty, gracious working of divine love in the heart, which counts on the tender concern of the saints in him who served and loved them in the Lord! Man, as such, would either be indifferent and hard, or would fear the imputation of vanity, as if his matters could be objects of interest to others. But Christ changes all for the hearts of those that have received Him.

"Peace to the brethren, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: grace with all that love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruption."