

WORDS OF TRUTH

FOR THE

SAINTS OF GOD.



FOURTH SERIES.

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“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily whether these things were so.” Acts xvii. 11.

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P R E F A C E .

To minister, in its measure, to the conscience and affections of the Church of God, and not to advocate or extend the views of a party, has been the object sought in the compilation of this little volume, as in that of those that preceded it. May the Lord grant his blessing.

“Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, Amen.”

WILDERNESS GRACE.

EXODUS XVII.

THOSE who are familiar with the study of this part of Scripture will remember that the history of Israel from the Red Sea to Sinai (i. e., from the time of their deliverance out of Egypt until they placed themselves under law) contains an exceedingly remarkable testimony to the *grace* of God.

At Sinai Israel took up the promises of God on the condition of their own obedience, and then their entire failure was manifested. But up to that moment all God's dealings with them had been in *grace*. Though there was continual murmuring, and unbelief, and disobedience, He did not chasten for these things as afterwards, when they had taken a stand before Him on the ground of obedience.

It was an immense transition in their history.

on the Lord, we shall not have *His* strength in the battle, and the Lord must make us learn our dependance on Him through weakness, and failure, and defeat, because we have refused to learn it in the joy and confidence of communion with Himself.

Victory is turned to worship in the scene before us. ("And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi—the Lord is my banner.") When victory does not tend to worship, we and God part company as soon as the victory is achieved. How sad to see victory often leading to mere joy, instead of still greater dependance on and delight in God.

May we trace out in all these paths of His wondrous ways still more and more of the depths of His divine love.

PEACE WITH GIBEON.*

JOSHUA IX.

* * * “IF acting faithfully, to every step of faithfulness the Lord will surely add more light; only it behoves us to take counsel of the Lord at every step. Peace with Gibeon only deprives us of victory, and brings upon us other wars and troubles; for the presence of what is not of God always opens the door to Satan. This, perhaps, is not so much felt when all is in vigour in the soul; but when there is decline, then the evil and consequence is felt. In the days of David there was a famine three years; it was for Saul and for his bloody house, because he had slain the Gibeonites. All this arose from the little act of not taking counsel with God. When all was war, it appeared a convenient thing,

* Copied.

a blessing, to find some peace and recognition from those who said, 'The Lord your God.' It sounded like Rahab's believing voice; and *in appearance*, with these far distant travellers, there was nothing wrong in peace—they were not of the forbidden and accursed race. But they asked not counsel of the Lord; and it turned out they were of the accursed race, and it went nigh to separate between Joshua and the people. So cunning is the enemy, it is almost as bad, or worse, to lean for one's wisdom on the ways of God, as on one's own strength for the battles of God: peace with Gibeon and war with Ai end in defeat, or in confusion and shame."

THE PASSAGE OF THE RED SEA.

HEB. xi. 23—29.

WE have, in these verses, a little picture, drawn by the Spirit of God, of the ways of God in bringing up His people out of Egypt by the hand of Moses. And, we may say, it is just a picture of the deliverance of the Church from the power of Satan, of the salvation of God, and the means by which it is brought about.

Verse 23;—God had taken the tenderest care of Moses in his infancy. So, in the days of our unregeneracy, God's care has been over us, in a thousand ways.

Verses 24—26;—A word here, as to guidance through the providences of God. Many cling to providences, as though they were to be the guide for faith. Nothing could be a more remarkable providence than that which

I am going to a place to preach, and I find, when I get to the terminus, that the train has started, God has ordered things about me, (and I may have to be thankful for the overruling), but it is not God's *guiding* me; for I should really have gone, had the train not left; *my will was to go*. All we get of *this* guidance of providence is very blessed; but it is not guidance by the Spirit of God, not guidance by the "eye," but rather, by the "bit" of God. Though providence overrules, it does not, properly speaking, guide.

OBEDIENCE, THE SAINT'S LIBERTY.

HEB. xiii. 17—25.

THE spirit of obedience is the great secret of all godliness. The spring of all evil from the beginning has been independence of will. Obedience is the only rightful state of the creature, or God would cease to be supreme—would cease to be God. Wherever there is independence, there there is always sin.

This rule, if remembered, would wonderfully help us in guiding our conduct.

There is no case whatever in which we ought to do our own will; for, then, we have not the capacity, either of judging rightly about our conduct or of bringing it before God. I may be called upon to act independently of the highest authority in the world,

but it ought never to be on the principle that I am doing my own will. That is the principle of eternal death.

The liberty of the saint is not licence to do his own will.* If any thing could have taken away the liberty of the Lord Jesus, it would have been the hindering Him in being always obedient to the will of God. All that moves in the sphere of man's will is *sin*. Christianity pronounces the assertion of its exercise to be *the principle of sin*. We are sanctified unto obedience (1 Pet. i. 2),—the essence of sanctification is the having no will of our own. If I were as wise (so to speak) as Lucifer, and it ministered to my own will, all my wisdom would come to be folly. True slavery is the

* An entire self-renunciation (and that goes very far when we know the subtlety of the heart), is the only means of walking with the full blessing that belongs to our happy position of service to God, our brethren, and mankind.

being enslaved by our own will; and true liberty consists in our having our own wills entirely set aside. When we are doing our own wills, self is our centre.

The Lord Jesus "took upon Himself the form of a *servant*," and, "being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became *obedient* unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. ii. 6—8). When man became a sinner, he ceased to be a servant, though he is, in sin and rebellion, the slave of a mightier rebel than himself. When we are sanctified, we are brought into the place of servants, as well as that of sons. The spirit of Sonship just manifested itself in Jesus, in coming to do the Father's will. Satan sought to make His Sonship at variance with unqualified obedience to God; but the Lord Jesus would never do any thing, from the beginning to the end of His life, but the Father's will.

In this chapter, the spirit of obedi-

ence is enforced towards those who rule in the Church—"obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves," v. 17. It is for our profit, in every thing, to seek after this spirit. "They watch for your souls," says the Apostle, "as they that must give account." Those whom the Lord puts into service, He makes *responsible to Himself*. That is the real secret of all true service. It should not be *right** that guides, either those who rule, or those who obey. They are servants,

* "Right," in the human sense of it, is some title to exercise his own will in man, unimpeded by the interference of another. *Now Christianity entirely sets this aside.* It may be very speciously maintained, by dwelling only on the latter half of the definition, because grace does give a title against the interference of another; *but that title is in, and by virtue of, responsibility to God.* But the light which Christianity sheds on this, is not my meddling with the will of that other, but my obligation to do the will of God at all cost.

and that is their responsibility. Woe unto them if they do not guide, direct, rebuke, &c. ; if they do not do it, "*the Lord*" will require it of them. On the other hand, those counselled, become directly responsible to "the Lord" for obedience.

The great guardian principle of all conduct in the Church of God, is personal responsibility to "the Lord."

No guidance of another can ever come in between an individual's conscience and God. In popery, this individual responsibility to God is taken away.* Those who are spoken of in

* The authority of the Church is confessedly antecedent to the authority of the word in Romanism, and the saints are not, all of them, allowed to be the immediate objects of God's own word, nor act upon it, that is, be subject to it. They are to be subject to the Church. Let the Church allow it or not, that makes no difference. He who allows, can hinder ; that is, hinder God's addressing the saints. For this is the true question of protestantism, not man's title to the bible

this chapter, as having the rule in the Church, had to "give account" of their own conduct, and not of souls which were committed to them. There is no such thing as giving an account of other peoples' souls; "every one of us," must give an account of himself to God" (Rom. xiv). Individual responsibility always secures the maintenance of God's authority. If those who watched for their souls had been faithful in their service, they would not have to give account "with grief," so far as they were concerned; but, still, it might be very "unprofitable" for the others, if they acted disobediently.

Wherever the principle of obedience is not in our hearts, all is wrong, there is nothing but sin. The principle which actuates us in our conduct should never be, "I must do what *I*

merely, but God's title to address man directly by His word; more particularly, to address each of His own servants, or those professedly such.

think right ;” but, “ *I ought to obey God*” (Acts v. 29).*

The Apostle then says, “ Pray for us : for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly” (v. 18). It is always the

* Peter’s answer seems to meet both of two great classes by whom the true principle of obedience is lost sight of and abused—those who plead obedience, and those who plead liberty. The one plead liberty—rights—the title to do, as regards men, what they please. The other claim obedience, and plead frequently the principle ; but it is still to men, and not to God. “ We ought to obey God,” is the Christian’s answer to both. “ *We ought to obey,*” I say to the man who claims rights ;—“ *We ought to obey God,*” to the man who pleads the principle of obedience in defence of that which rests merely on the authority of man and his ways—“ *We ought to obey God, rather than man.*” How perfect is Scripture in setting in order the ways of men, the narrow path which no other power detects, as revealing the principles of the human mind, and judging them. Self-will is never right. Obedience to man is often wrong—disobedience to God.

snare of those who are occupied with the things of God continually, not to have a "*good conscience.*" No person is so liable to a fall, as one who is continually ministering the truth of God, if he be not careful to maintain a "*good conscience.*" The continually talking about truth, and the being occupied about other people, has a tendency to harden the conscience. The Apostle does not say, 'Pray for us, for we are labouring hard, and the like;' but that which gives him confidence in asking their prayers is, *that he has a "good conscience."* We see the same principle spoken of (1 Tim. i. 19)—"holding faith, and a good conscience, which some having put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck." Where there is not diligence in seeking to maintain a "*good conscience,*" Satan comes in and destroys confidence between the soul and God, or we get into false confidence. Where there is the sense of the presence of

God, there is the spirit of lowly obedience.* The moment that a person is very active in service, or has much knowledge and is put forward in any way in the Church, there is the danger of not having a good conscience.

It is blessed to see the way in which, in verses 20, 21, the Apostle returns, after all his exercise and trial of spirit, to the thought of God's being "the God of peace." He was taken from them, and was in bondage and trial himself; he enters, moreover, into all the troubles of these saints, and is extremely anxious, evidently, about them; and, yet, he is able to turn quietly to God, as "*the God of peace.*"

* The sense of the presence of God will keep every thing in its place. The same Lord has said, "All ye are brethren;" and, "strengthen they brethren." In order truly to strengthen them, some painful experience of self will always be necessary, as in the case of Peter. It is not thus that man would have appointed; but God has so ordered.

We are called unto peace. Paul closes his second epistle to the Thessalonians with, "Now the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always by all means." There is nothing that the soul of the believer is more brought to feel than that he has "need of patience," (Heb. x. 36); but, if he is hindered by any thing from finding God to be "the God of peace," if sorrow and trial hinder this, there is the *will of the flesh* at work. There cannot be the quiet doing of *God's will*, if the mind be troubled and fluttered about a thousand things. It is completely our privilege, to walk, and to be settled, in peace; to have no uneasiness with God, but to be quietly seeking His will. It is impossible to have holy clearness of mind, unless God be known as "the God of peace." When every thing was removed out of God's sight, but Christ, God was the God of *peace*." Suppose then, that I find out that I am an utterly worthless sinner, but see the Lord

Jesus standing in the presence of God, I have perfect peace. This sense of peace becomes distracted when we are looking at the ten thousand difficulties by the way; for, when the charge and care of any thing rests on our minds, God ceases, practically, to be "the God of *peace*."

There are three steps

I. The knowledge that God has "made peace through the blood of the cross" (Col. i. 20). This gives us "*peace with God*" (Rom. v. 1).

II. As it regards all our cares and troubles, the promise is, that, if we cast them on God, "*the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*" See Phil. iv. 6, 7. God burdens Himself about every thing for us, yet, He is never disturbed or troubled, and, it is said, that *His* peace shall "keep our hearts and minds." If Jesus walked on the troubled sea, He

was just as much at peace, as ever; He was far above the waves and billows.

III. There is a further step, viz., He, who is "the God of peace," being with us, and working in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure.. See v. 20, 21. The holy power of God is, here, described, as keeping the soul in those things which are well pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ.

There was war—war with Satan, and in our own consciences. That met its crisis on the cross of the Lord Jesus. The moment that He was raised from the dead, God was made known, fully, as "the God of peace." He could not leave His Son in the grave; the whole power of the enemy was exercised to its fullest extent; and God brought the Lord Jesus into the place of peace, and us, also, who believe on Him, and became nothing less than "the God of peace."

He is "the God of peace," both as

regards our sins, and as regards our circumstances. But it is only in His presence that there is settled peace. The moment we get into human thoughts and reasonings about circumstances, we get troubled. Not only has peace been made for us by the atonement, but it rests upon the power of Him who raised up Jesus again from the dead; and, therefore, we know Him as "the God of peace."

The blessing of the saint does not depend upon the old covenant, to which man was a party, and which might, therefore, fail; but upon that God, who, through all the trouble and sea, and the power of Satan, "brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus," and thus secured "eternal redemption" (Heb. ix. 12). All that God Himself had pronounced as to judgment against sin, and all the wicked power of Satan, rested on Jesus, on the cross; and God Himself has raised Him from the dead.

Here, then, we have full comfort and confidence of soul. "Nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord," argues faith (see Rom. viii. 31—39), "for, when all our sins had been laid upon Jesus, God stepped in, in mighty power, and brought again from the dead that Great Shepherd of the sheep, *through the blood of the everlasting covenant.*" The blood was as much the proof and witness of the love of God to the sinner, as it was, of the justice and majesty of God against sin. This covenant is founded on the truth and holiness of the eternal God having been fully met, and answered, in the cross of the Lord Jesus. His precious blood has met every claim of God. If God be not "the God of *peace,*" He must be asserting the insufficiency of the blood of His dear Son. And this, we know, is impossible. God rests in it as a sweet savour.

Then, as to the effect of all this on the life of the saint, the knowledge of it produces fellowship with God, and delight in doing His will. He "works in us," as it is said here, "that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ."

The only thing that ought to make any hesitation in the saints' mind about departing to be with Christ, is the doing *God's will* here. We may suppose such an one thinking of the joy of being with Christ, and then being arrested by the desire of doing God's will here. See Phil. i. 20—25. That assumes confidence in God, as "the God of peace," and confidence in His sustaining power whilst here. If the soul is labouring in the turmoil of its own mind, it cannot have the blessing of knowing God as "the God of peace."

The flesh is so easily aroused, that there is often the need of the word of exhortation — "I beseech you, bre-

thren, suffer the word of exhortation," (v. 22). The spirit of obedience is the only spirit of holiness.

The Lord give us grace to walk in His ways.

The notes to this paper are mainly extracts; in some places, slightly altered.

THE REJECTED MAN.

GEN. iii.

IT is a good thing, seeing the great levity of our hearts, that we should, all of us, sometimes, look at our *origin*, at what we were, and at the actual corruption of the stock whence we are derived. Thus shall we see what *God* has done, and the revelation He has made of Himself, in what we are.

The Israelite was instructed to remember the day that he came out of Egypt all the days of his life (Deut. xvi. 2); and the confession made by him, when presenting his basket of the first fruits of the land, was this, "a Syrian ready to perish was [not I, but] my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty and populous; and the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us,

of Jesus Christ; and because it sees that glory and knows its expression, it walks before God in holy confidence. Instead of being happy and at liberty with Satan, in Satan's world, the Christian dreads Satan because he knows himself. At ease in the presence of God, he there drinks into the spirit of that which befits the presence of God, and becomes the "epistle of Christ" to the world, showing out to all that he has been there.

Well, what a difference! May we more and more make our boast in Him, in whose face all this glory is displayed—the Lamb, who has died for us, and cleansed away our sins by His own most precious blood.

The Lord give us hearts freed by Himself, whilst still in the midst of this poor world that is walking in a vain shew.

JACOB A DYING.

GEN. XLVIII.

It is interesting to mark the comment of the Holy Ghost Himself on the history which He Himself has penned. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope." As the Holy Ghost knew what particulars were to be recorded in the lives of those of old, so He can best fix our souls on the special points of instruction, which their histories are designed to afford. In the enumeration of the saints of old, borne witness to for their faith, we find our attention called to circumstances which we might hardly have noticed. The notice, in Heb. xi., of the eventful life of Jacob, refers to this chapter of Genesis. "By faith, Jacob, when he was a dying,

blessed both the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff." We see here that the Holy Ghost fastens on those instances in the lives of the saints of old, which especially evinced faith. He characterizes faith as being precious. "By faith, Jacob, &c."

There is great force in that word, "rich in faith" (James ii. 5). The soul which knows the God with whom it has to do, is very "rich." It has pleased God to reveal Himself in all the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus, and these riches can alone be appreciated and possessed by faith. The Holy Ghost reveals them to those whom He has quickened to believe in Jesus. These are the riches which faith can call its own; they are inalienable. On this ground, we find the Apostle Paul taking the high standing of one, who was able to confer more than he had received, at the very moment he is thanking the Philippians for

their liberality towards him. "*My* God shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. iv. 19). The Apostle had been well trained in that school which makes its scholars "rich in faith." He had, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, stripped himself of every thing which might have been reckoned either a natural, or an acquired, advantage (Phil. iii. 7, 8). But he had learned the difficult lesson, "in whatsoever state I am, to be content." The Philippians had lovingly supplied his want; but he, in his eager pursuit of winning Christ, was "rich in faith." He knew what riches he had in Christ, and what riches were still to be had in Him; and, therefore could confidently return the Philippians a far greater blessing, than that which he had received from them. "My God," says he (that is, he reckons upon having God for *his* God, for *his* portion, and, therefore, he can say, *my* God),

“shall supply all *your* need.” Surely this same ground is open to ourselves to take; but we have made little progress in that school, wherein the Apostle was so great a proficient. In order to become “rich in faith,” many of us have to be beaten out of confidence in our own advantages, as Jacob was, rather than to learn their worthlessness by faith, as Paul did.

It was, when Jacob fled from his brother Esau (Gen. xxviii.), when his “staff” was his only portion—his all—(as he says to the Lord, chap. xxxiii. 10, “with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands”) it was, when “the stones of the place” were his pillow, that Jacob had his most wondrous vision—“the ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it.” Then, it was, that the Lord stood above it, and revealed Himself to Jacob, as the God of his

fathers Abraham and Isaac—and He engaged also to be his God. Jacob had his “staff” as a pilgrim wanderer, but Jacob had the God of Abraham and Isaac for his God. And how rich he was, had he only known it. He was never richer all his life through, than at this moment. He started then, not to seek his fortune, but with his fortune already made. He had God for his portion. And if Jacob is to take the higher place of the *blessed* (“without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better”), it must be, by learning the riches he was in possession of, when he had only his “staff” in his hand, and the stones of Luz for pillows; he must learn to be “rich in faith,” in having the Lord for his God.

Is it not hard, beloved, for us, to realize, that, as poor ruined sinners in ourselves, the moment we are, by the grace of God, brought to receive Christ, we are rich indeed—and not only rich, but, like Jacob with his “staff,” poor,

yet making many rich? It is hard to realize, that our fortune is already made. We start, on our christian career, as blessed of God, and as having Him for our exceeding great reward, as well as for our shield. And we become "rich in faith," when we experimentally know this, and can attach more value to the blessing of a poor saint, than the gift of a great man.

Here, in this chapter of Genesis, we have Jacob presented to us, after all his many wanderings from place to place. He had proved the God with whom he had to do. How manifestly had God shewn His faithfulness to Jacob, in all the engagements He had made to him, when, on leaving his father's house, he was a houseless, homeless, pilgrim at Luz. God had graciously provided for him, in giving him "meat to eat, and raiment to put on." We find him here (not in Canaan, but in Egypt), on his death-bed,

and, as we are told, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "leaning on the top of his staff."

Behold every thing in keeping with the dying pilgrim.

He is a stranger in a strange place. He has his "staff" to lean on, but he has God for his portion. Surely Jacob now realized, that he had been substantially blessed at Luz, that he was really enriched then ; and never, at at any period of his life, was he so fully enriched, as when he had only his "staff" in his hand, and heaven opened over him to bless him. He had been well stripped of all his confidence, by the way ; and, now, is about to close his career, with no more than that with which he had set out ; his "staff" in his hand.* Doubtless, his

* The only mention made in the chapter of any temporal thing, is that of the portion he had taken out of the hand of the Amorite, with his sword and his bow (v. 22) ; but Jacob is not now in the land of the Amorite, he is not in actual possession.

“staff” had been with him in all his wanderings—it now brought the early scene of Luz, vividly, to his recollection. And, when weighed down with weakness, in the full confession of his pilgrim character, he takes the high place of the blessing. He can, now, with far greater confidence, bless both the sons of Joseph, than he could have done, when possessed of temporal riches. “*By faith*, he blessed both the sons of Joseph.” He had an insight into the Divine counsels, and learnt the Divine order. Without any thing but his “staff,” in the attitude of a worshipper, he could say, with an intensity of meaning, “I know in whom I have believed.” He had learnt the God with whom he had to do. “God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads” (v. 15, 16). It was, by *faith*, that Jacob blessed both

the sons of Joseph. The retrospect of faith leads the soul to rest on the proved faithfulness of God, and to reckon on all the fulness of God. And "God is faithful;" that is enough. "He is faithful that promised." Such, is the portion of *faith*. "Leaning on the top of the staff;" destitute of outward means; but able to speak very confidently because faith leads to God, and brings in God. "My God shall supply all your need," says the Apostle—"the God who *fed* me all my life," says the Patriarch, "bless the lads."

And if we, beloved in the Lord, were on our death-bed, what should we find? We, in God's mercy, may have proved, as Jacob did, our own riches; but we shall not find ourselves a bit richer, than, when first we started on our pilgrim course. We were, then, only, sinners saved by grace—but what riches are ours, as such? The highest riches, even "riches of glory"—

as it is written, "that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore-prepared unto glory" (Rom. ix. 23). We have much, very much, to learn, by the way, deeply humbling to ourselves, yet redounding to the praise of the glory of His grace. But that which a Christian dies with, is, not the experience gathered by the way, but the faith which led him at the first, as a ruined sinner, to the Cross of Christ. The first truth is the last truth. The grace of God, as revealed in the Cross of His Son, is the truth to live by, and to die with.

Jacob was a dying. He says boldly—"Behold ! I die, but God shall be with you." He speaks of death, "leaning on the top of his staff," as if still pursuing his pilgrim career, and about to remove from one place to another. He desired only to take possession of the land of Canaan, by death, as Abraham and Isaac had done (chap.

xlvi. 29—31). This is all. God does not die. God is the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac. He is, still, in covenant with them. He has never dissolved His relationship with them, but is unchangeable towards them in it. Jacob had faith in God. Death would not dissolve his relationship to God, even “the God of Bethel.” He, as his fathers, “died in faith, not having received the promises” (Heb. xi. 13), but having so “embraced them,” that he could reckon on God making all good, in resurrection. Yes, “He is not a God of the dead, but of the living, for all live unto Him.” Here, was the confidence of Jacob. Here, were the riches of Jacob. Here, the expectation of Jacob. It was what God was to him, even the Living God, —“Behold, I die, but God shall be with you.”

Happy pilgrim ! the “staff,” on which he leaned, led his soul back to Luz—and what was Jacob at Luz ?

nothing but a houseless, homeless, destitute wanderer; but to him, in these circumstances, Luz is changed into Bethel—the house of God. There God found Jacob, and God blessed him, as a pilgrim, having nothing but his “staff.” And, as Jacob received the blessing, so, now, he gives it to both the sons of Joseph. Jacob had *no claim* on God for a blessing. He was a fugitive from his elder brother, Esau, to whom, by *natural right*, the blessing belonged. But God allows of no rights. He acts according to the counsels of His own will. He can challenge the assertion of man’s rights. “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? saith the Lord, yet I loved Jacob” (Mal. i. 2). And now, Jacob, blessing, in the name of God, by faith, has such intelligence in the mind and ways of God, as to bless *both the sons of Joseph*; and, in doing so, again to traverse the order of nature. He could look at his grand-children, and see the

blessing of God coming on them, as freely, from the grace of God, as it had come on himself.

Surely the thoughts of Jacob were fully occupied with God. His own life would have afforded him but a sorry retrospect. He had tried to get the blessing in his own way, but it had only led him into trouble; and he had learned, by bitter experience, that the ways of God were both higher and better, than his own. How faithful had God been to His "worm Jacob." And what must be the thoughts of every dying saint? Surely, not of themselves, but thoughts of God, of original grace taking them up when dead in trespasses and sins, and making them sons and heirs of God. Such are the thoughts of the soul, if it be in a healthy tone, at such a season. It will pass in solemn review all its failures. This will indeed humble; but it will, at the same time, lead the soul to see all these blotted out by the God, with whom we have to do.

“Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see” (v. 10), never, it may be, since he had received the name, by having the hollow of his thigh put out of joint (chap. xxxii.), did he, so fully, realize, that he had power with God and man, as on his dying bed. He had, now, “no confidence in the flesh.” Dim, as to his natural eye, but clear-sighted, by faith, he guided his hands “wittingly.” Jacob had exercised his own natural shrewdness, in many ways, in his past life; but now, in the fading away of his natural powers, faith is very keen in the discernment of the ways of God. “And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim’s head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh’s head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh was the first-born; and he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which *fed me all my life long, unto this day*, the

angel *which redeemed me from all evil*, bless the lads" (v. 14—16). Joseph, the interpreter of God's ways to Pharaoh, could not, in this instance, see, as clearly, as Jacob (v. 17, 18). It needs an exercised soul, as well as a spiritual gift, to see clearly the way of grace. Preeminent, indeed, does Joseph stand, both as to gift and moral worth, above his father, Jacob. But Jacob had been well sifted, and had learnt, experimentally, his need of grace. Parental fondness, the right of primogeniture, &c., may occupy the mind, where there is distinct gift, and that from God; but the soul well exercised in grace, knows that one great truth, "No flesh shall glory in His presence." Faith in Jacob could see clearly into God's ways. Jacob had learnt, it must be all of grace. "I know it my son, I know it" (v. 19). He knew it was not the elder; and he did it "wittingly." And where have we often found the wisest council? In the gifted

teacher, or in the ungifted, yet experienced, saint? Where have we found real spiritual discernment?—has it not been among the simple-minded believers, who have been learning their need of Christ in their own souls? How “wittingly,” have we found the hands guided, where there has been faith in God, in the very case, where, even, the possessor of a real gift might mislead us. Joseph thought his father was making a great mistake; and we often, when walking by sight, and not by faith, do the same, calculating upon some human claim or other, whereas God has ever shown, that “His ways are not our ways.” “The elder shall serve the younger.” Jacob was sent forth in life, to learn this lesson, and, having learnt it, experimentally, at the close he is able to guide his hands “wittingly.”

Have we, yet, learnt this lesson, the entire setting aside of the flesh and the *all-sufficiency* of God? Were we to

live, and learn, for a hundred years, it could only be, to get this lesson by heart. Jacob's history is written for our admonition ; but *we* ought to learn the lesson more quickly, and more deeply too, because we know the risen One and our union with Him. Our very axiom, is—"the flesh profiteth nothing."

What a blessed testimony does Jacob bear to the faithfulness of God —"the God which fed me all my life long, unto this day." When Jacob walked by sight, he did not so clearly see God feeding him, and caring for him ; but, "leaning on the top of his staff," he retraces all God's ways, by faith.

If any one character could have set aside the faithfulness of God, it is that of Jacob. It was marked by low cunning, and crookedness of policy, from the outset, with regard to his brother Esau. But this did not, at all, interfere with God's fidelity to him.

Looking back, he sees, and, I doubt not, sees with joy, the failure of all his scheming and policy. Jacob is absorbed in one single thought, the grace and faithfulness of the God with whom he has to do. He was never saved from a single danger, by his own policy—but Jacob can pass over all his own failures, in the overwhelming thought of God's grace towards him.

And, beloved, will not our souls be able to rejoice in seeing the failure of every work of our own, in which we might have confidence at the time we did it? Shall we not be glad to see all that we have done in the flesh burnt up? that that, alone, which was of the Spirit, and done to the glory of the Lord, might remain. And, if we are "wise after the flesh," the penalty is sure, God will take us in our craftiness—For neither by strength nor by wisdom, shall man prevail.

And what a blessing the lads got from the dying pilgrim. There was

great faith in Jacob, to be able, in holy confidence of soul, to transfer the blessing from himself to them. He was "rich in faith," himself, and bequeathed his riches to Joseph and his sons. "Behold, I die, but *God* shall be with you, and bring you again to the land of your fathers." Even, as another pilgrim, "rich in faith," said to the elders of Ephesus, "ye shall see my face no more,"—but, "I commend you to God, &c." (Acts xx.)

Jacob did not say, 'Because I have not *dwelt* in the land, I have not got the blessing'—no!—he had it, by faith. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, *and embraced them*, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." God is always the same to faith. Faith raises us above all human thoughts, and gives us to rest in God. Surely, surely it is blessed, when, strip-

ped of every confidence here, we are able to look above circumstances, and trust in God Himself.

And is not this the way in which God is now leading our souls? He is not only showing us the emptiness of every thing here, in order to prove His all-sufficiency, by leading us to the fulness which is in Christ Jesus; but He is, also, shewing us how prone we are to misuse the very blessings which He has given to us, by resting in them, instead of living by faith in God. The process of stripping is, indeed, painful, under all circumstances, but it is peculiarly so, when, even what we have is taken away from us, because of our misuse of the blessing. Surely, the experience of many of our souls, is, that we have been entrusted with blessing and did not know how to use it aright. It has pleased God to strip us of all our ornaments, that He may know what to do with us. And having, thus made room for Himself to come in,

His grace has abounded again over our sins, in leading us, more practically, to "live the life we now live in the flesh, by the faith of the Son of God," bringing us to know the immense blessing of His presence, by the way, in reviving our faith in the abiding presence of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, when every thing entrusted to man's responsibility has failed.

"Blessed is He that hath the God of Jacob for his help; whose hope is in the Lord his God.....which keepeth truth for ever.....which giveth food to the hungry.....The Lord raiseth them that are bowed down: the Lord loveth the righteous—the Lord preserveth the strangers—the Lord shall reign for ever and ever" (Ps. cxlvi.)

May we know more and more of "the God of Jacob." And then, if the Lord delay His coming, and we have to gather up ourselves on our

beds, we shall be able to say, with Jacob, "Behold, I die"—"but God liveth."

The work which His goodness began,
The arm of His strength shall complete;
His promise is Yea and Amen,
And never was forfeited yet:
Things future, nor things that are now,
Nor all things below nor above,
Can make Him His purpose forego,
Or sever our souls from His love.

THE SPIRIT, NOT OF FEAR, BUT
OF POWER.

2 TIM. i. 3—8.

SUCH exhortations are never given unless there are circumstances to require it. They are intended to meet some tendency in the flesh, that we may guard against it in the spirit. It is well to remember how the Lord deals with us, just as we are; how, in all His ways, He takes into account the circumstances we are in, and does not, like philosophy, take us into other circumstances.

With regard to our cares and trials, Christ does not take us out of them. "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world." While He leaves us in the world, He leaves us liable to all that is incident to man; but, in the new nature, teaches us to lean on God. The thought with us often is, that (because we are Christians), we

are to get away from trials ; or else, if in them, we are *not to feel* them. This is not God's thought concerning us. The *theoretical* Christian may be placid and calm ; he has fine books and nice sayings ; but, when he has something from God to ruffle his placidity, you will find he is a Christian more conscious of the difficulties there are in the world, and of the difficulty of getting over such. The nearer a man walks with God, through grace, the more tender he becomes as to the faults of others ; the longer he lives, as a saint, the more conscious of the faithfulness and tenderness of God, and of what it has been applied to in himself.

See the life of the Lord Jesus, take Gethsemane, what do we find ? Never a cloud over His soul, uniform placidity. You never see Him off His centre. He is always Himself. But, take the Psalms, and do we find nothing, *within*, to break that placidity ? The Psalms bring out what was pass-

ing within. In the Gospels he is presented to man, as the testimony of the power of God with Him, in those very things that would have vexed man. He walked with God about them; and so, we find Him in perfect peace, saying, with calmness, "Whom seek ye?"—"I am He." How peaceful! how commanding! (for peace in the midst of difficulties does command.) When by Himself, in an agony, He sweats as it were great drops of blood. It was not a placidity, because He had not heart-feeling within. He felt the full trial, in spirit; but God was always with Him in the circumstances, and, therefore, He was uniformly calm before men.

We are not to expect, never to be exercised, or troubled, or cast down, as though we were without feeling. "They gave me also gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." He *thoroughly* felt it all. The iron entered into His soul. "Re-

proach," He says, "hath broken my heart." But there is this difference between Christ, in suffering and affliction, and ourselves ; with Him, there was never an instant elapsed, between the trial and communion with God. This is not the case with us. We have first to find out that we are weak, and cannot help ourselves,—*then*, we turn and look to God.

Where was Paul, when he said, "All men forsook me?" His confidence in God was not shaken ; but, looking around him, by the time he got to the end of his ministry, his heart was broken, because of the unfaithfulness. He saw the flood of evil coming in (chap. iii., iv.), and the danger of Timothy's being left alone, looking at the evil, and feeling his own weakness ; and, so (lest Timothy should get into a spirit of *fear*), he says, "Stir up the gift that is in thee, &c.,*for

* This passage connects the exercise of

God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of *power*, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou, therefore, ashamed of the testimony of the Lord, nor of me His prisoner; but be thou a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel *according to the power of God.*" If we have got the spirit of fear, that is not of God, for God has given us the spirit of *power*. He has met the whole power of the enemy, in the weakness of man, in Christ, and Christ is now set down on the right hand of the majesty on high.

"Be thou a partaker of the *afflictions* of the gospel, *according to the power of God.*" What! a partaker of afflictions? Yes. Of deliverance from the sense of them? No—a partaker of

gift, with the spiritual state. "God has not given us the spirit of fear," therefore, do not be discouraged, though the state of things is so melancholy. Again, in Philippians, they were to be "in nothing terrified by their adversaries."

afflictions that may be felt, as a man, but, "according to the power of God!"

This is not, in not feeling the pressure of sorrow and weakness. Paul had a "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. xii.), and did he not feel it, think you? Aye; he felt it, daily; and as "a messenger of Satan to buffet him," withal. And what did he say? "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my *infirmities*, [in those things in which I am sensibly weak], *that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*" The power of God, coming in on our side, does not lessen the feeling to us; but we "cast all our care upon Him, for He careth for us." Not, that, at the very moment we refer it to God, we shall get an answer; Daniel had to wait three full weeks, for an answer from God; but, from the first day that he set his heart to understand, and to chasten himself before his God, his words were heard (Dan. x.) With us, the first thing often is, to

think about the thing and begin to work in our own minds, before we go to God. There was none of this in Christ. "*At that time, Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, &c.*" (Mat. xi.) We weary ourselves in the greatness of our way.

"Be *careful* for nothing" (Phil. iv. 6). That is easily said, but what! not be careful about the state of the Church, or about the pressure of a family, &c.? "*Be careful for nothing.*" Whatever produces a care in us, produces God's care for us; therefore, "be careful for nothing, but *in everything*, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God," so, "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Jesus Christ"—not your hearts keep the peace of God; but the peace that God Himself is in, *His* peace, the unmoved stability of all God's thoughts, keep your hearts.

Further, when not careful, the mind set free, and the peace of God keeping the heart, God sets the soul thinking on happy things—"Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest—just—pure—lovely—of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you." God is there, the companion of the soul; not, merely, "the peace of God," but "the God of peace."

When the soul is cast upon God, the Lord is with the soul, in the trial, and the mind is kept perfectly calm. The spirit of love, the spirit of Christ is there; if thinking of myself, that is the spirit of selfishness.

IN GOD OUR HELP.

Hos. XIII. 9.

“ I BEGAN, and have always gone on, with the sense, that all was ruined, and that we must look to GOD, who cannot fail us, in and out of the ruin.but the Lord suffices for all the states of His Church and people. *He cannot fail.* And it is there faith has its hold—a hold no power of Satan, or any thing else, can affect, for GOD is its force, and Christ has already accomplished the victory. Our position and circumstances may be changed; sorrow may accompany our march; but *faith* rests always the same, because it rests on GOD, who changes not; and, with intelligence of the circumstances (for it is thus with faith), rests on GOD, for them. For, it is of *what is*, that GOD occupies Himself, not of *what is not*. If I descend to

prayers of all saints, because he had more cares than others (v. 19, 20). He always wanted their prayers, as we see, Phil. v. 19. Walking in full affection himself, he reckoned upon people caring for him (walking as Paul did, this is taken for granted). Both here (v. 21, 22), and to the saints at Colosse, he speaks of having sent Tychicus, to declare his state—“*that ye may know my affairs, and how I do.*” He takes their love for granted. We also, if walking in the love of the Spirit, can always count upon others being interested in our “affairs.” It would be pride in the world, to suppose others anxious about our concerns; but the saint knows, and counts on, the love of the spirit in the saints.

To come back to the first great principle—“Be strong IN THE LORD, &c.” Spite of Satan, and all he may do to hinder, we have the privilege of individual dependance upon God. Every thing may be dark, but the Lord tells us

“to be strong.” This is always accompanied with lowliness of heart. Come what will, when the Lord is rested on, we are strong. But our dependance must be simply, and singly, on God.

H Y M N .

Just as I am—without one plea,
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bid'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God I come!

Just as I am—and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God I come!

Just as I am—though tossed about
With many a conflict—many a doubt,
“Fightings within, and fears without;”
O Lamb of God I come!

Just as I am—poor, wretched, blind,
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea, all I need in thee to find,
O Lamb of God I come!

Just as I am—thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God I come!

Just as I am—Thy love I own
Has broken every barrier down:
Now, to be Thine, nay, Thine alone,
O Lamb of God I come!

THE WORK OF THE HOUSE OF GOD
AND THE WORKMEN THEREIN.

EZRA III.

THE books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zechariah hang together. In Ezra, we get the temple built and worship restored; in Nehemiah, the restoration of the city; Haggai opens out the secret of the hindrances to the work; in Zechariah we have truth presented by which God strengthened the hearts of the remnant.

Truth meets persons in our days in external things; it is common to see Christians opening the Scriptures and being struck with the fact of how unlike the things there presented are to what they see around them. Man would set to work to put *things* in order. God's remedy is to meet practical departure in *oneself*, to begin with *self*. We have "the word of the

beauty and comeliness of the Church, and yet of her failure, there will be great humbleness and tenderness of spirit towards the Lord, and towards one another.

The Lord grant we may not sit down, content, in wretched coldness of heart, with evil in ourselves, or in our brethren. The waters of God are at the root of the plant however miserable the pruning. (How precious this!) May we rise up, in the sense of the beauty we have in God's mind, to delight ourselves in Him, who is our comeliness, to glory in Him, who is God's delight, and our joy and glory. Amen.

THE WAY OF THE LOVE OF JESUS.

“THE more perfect *love* is, the more entirely and without distraction will it regard its object. And this will give it, at times, a very different bearing. Because its way will be determined by the condition and need of its object. Its way, therefore, at times, may appear harsh and decisive; as when the Lord rebuked Peter (Mat. xvi.)—as when He reproached the two disciples (Luke xxiv.) But this is only because love is perfect, and, therefore, is undistractedly considering its object. Imperfect love will shew itself otherwise; more attractively at times; but far, far intrinsically, less true. Because imperfect love will not, in this way, unmixedly consider its object, but itself. It will be set upon *enjoying* its object, rather more than on *servi*ng it. And this will give it a

more tender, and considerate bearing, at times, and get for itself more credit, while perfect love has all the while forgotten itself and its enjoyments, and ordered its course and its actings in more undistracted concern and desire to have another blest and profited,

“Where do we see this perfect love, but in Jesus—in God? A mother has it not, but will, at times, enjoy her child. But Jesus had it. He considered His disciples, when He was with them, and ordered His way with them to their profit, and not to His own gratification.

“He will gratify Himself with them in that coming age, when He need no longer care for them as in a place of instruction and discipline. He will have no occasion then, in the exercise of perfect love, to consider only their profit, for their profit will have been brought to its accomplishment, in that place of their Lord’s delight in them.”