

A Lecture.

By the late REV. ALEXANDER GUNN, WATTEN, Caithness.

Delivered on 6th July, 1890.

[This is a discourse by the second Mr. Gunn of Watten, who was over 80 years old when he delivered it. He died on the 14th December, 1892, in the 83rd year of his age, and 55th of his ministry. – Ed.]

(Taken verbatim by a hearer, and hitherto unpublished.)

“Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance, as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost. So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything. For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.” 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10.

I may say that the Apostle, in this Epistle to the Thessalonians, gives us a picture of what the Church of Christ ought to be – abounding in faith and in good works, striving to spread abroad the kingdom of God among the surrounding nations. In the foregoing verses, which we were considering last Sabbath, the Apostle gives thanks to God for the work of saving grace that was wrought in the hearts of the Thessalonians, remembering their “work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope” in God in the midst of many trials; and from these fruits that appeared in them he observes their eternal election of God to grace and glory – to life everlasting. A tree is known by its fruits, and the tree of God’s election is known by its fruit. It cannot be a barren tree; it must of necessity bring forth the fruits of righteousness, just as the Church of the Thessalonians did. This is shown in the fifth verse – that the Word of God in the hand of the Holy Spirit came with such saving power into their hearts as to give evidence that they were truly partakers of grace, and of the graces of the Holy Spirit, namely, faith and hope and love – the powerful work of the Gospel in the heart and life.

I say that in these things the riches of the soul consist. The soul that has these graces and fruits is rich towards God. It was generally in those times the poorest of the people that became converts to Christianity, and no doubt this was the case in regard to most of these Thessalonians – they were among the poorest of the people; as the Apostle James says, “God hath chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him.” All are on a level before God. There are neither rich nor poor, high nor low, because all are infinitely below Him. Usually the Church of Christ is made up for the most part of the poor rather than of the rich. The rich have so much to take up their hearts, and so much to take them away from religion. But the lot of man is well balanced upon the whole; the poor have their drawbacks, and so have the rich. But I say in these graces of the Holy Spirit the riches of the soul consist. They came from the electing love of God, and they call for continual thanksgiving, such as Paul offers here to the Lord for the grace he witnessed in the Thessalonians.

Now, my friends, there must have been very clear evidence of the truth and reality of the religion of these Thessalonians to draw forth from such a man as Paul such strong commendations as he here gives them. He was not a man to give praise where it was not deserved. He might say as Elihu said to Job, “I know not how to give flattering titles to men.” There is no false praise here, strong as the commendation is. Self flattery and flattery of others usually go together, and they were never more abundant than in the present time. You can hardly take up a magazine or paper, religious or otherwise – and, indeed, I would say,

especially religious magazines – but you will see very exaggerated praise given to very ordinary men, so that we might be tempted sometimes to think that these magazines were written by a mutual admiration society. But, my friends, where the grace of God is in the heart it will modify and subdue, and it will mortify and destroy the disposition either to give or receive flattery. It is a dangerous thing to give, and a dangerous thing to receive, but the grace of God will certainly deliver men from it. Paul’s praises, therefore, were not empty compliments to the Thessalonians. They proved in their Christianity and conduct the reality of true religion, and, indeed, Paul was moved by the Holy Ghost to declare this of them, and, therefore, there could be no mistake. There is no Church that received from Paul more commendation than that of the Thessalonians.

The Apostle says in the fourth verse: “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.” How did he know that? Well, he tells us. Because of the assured faith with which they received the Word, “in power and in the Holy Ghost.” “For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.” That was one proof of their election of God. “No man can receive anything except it be given him from above.” It was an evidence that they had God’s effectual call when they inclined their heart to receive the truth as it is in Jesus; and another proof of their election was this, that the Word had become the rule of their conduct.

In the sixth verse he says: “And ye became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Ghost.” What are we to understand by that – “ye became followers of us and of the Lord”? Well, there appear to be two things implied in it. The first is, that they made a public profession of Christ – a public profession that they had received Christ, and received the doctrines of the apostles as the true doctrines of Christ – the only means of salvation. They renounced all the foolish opinions of the heathen around them, and joined themselves to Christ. He says in the second chapter: “Ye became followers of the Church of God, which in Judea are in Christ Jesus,” for they had united themselves publicly to the Church of Christ. This is what Christ requires of all Christians, of all His followers. “Whosoever, therefore, shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.” And, again, in the eighth chapter of Mark: “Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” Thus every Christian is bound to make a public confession of Christ. Now, my friends, lay this to heart. There are some whom I would wish to see making a public confession, but they do not do it. Another meaning we may take out of the words, “Ye became followers of us and of the Lord,” is that they followed the Apostles, not merely in making a profession, but they followed them in their life and conversation also. They followed them in holiness, while formerly they followed the devil, the world, and the flesh, being led away by divers lusts, hateful and hating one another, with their lives opposite to God and His ways. But now there was an entire change, and they became followers – or as the word is more literally rendered “imitators” – of the Apostle, and not of the Apostle only, but also of Christ, as Paul says in one place: “Ye became followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.” Even the apostles and prophets are not primarily examples of Christianity. Christ Himself is the great example; you must look to Him who has left us a pattern. We can only follow holy men so far as we see they follow Christ, for the Word says: “Whom he did foreknow, them he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.” The apostles themselves were not blameless. You see how that Paul says he withstood Peter to the face because he was to be blamed. “There is not a just man upon the earth that doeth good and sinneth not.” Now, this following implies a new heart and a holy affection – an affection set on things above, not on things on the earth. It manifests itself in a holy life and actions,

and in a cleaving to the commandments of God and the ways of God, through the power of the Word, coming from the hand of the Holy Spirit with much assurance into the heart. That was the way in which the Thessalonian believers were regenerated and renewed, and made to lead such lives as were exemplary to all around them.

Now, this profession and following of the apostles on the part of the Thessalonian believers were in spite of “much affliction” and much opposition. If a man sets his face resolutely to follow that which is good, he may certainly look for opposition in some shape or another from the devil, the world, and the flesh. The devil stirred up much opposition to the Thessalonians when they began to lead holy lives. He stirred up much persecution and affliction from the heathen around them, and more especially from the Jews. The Jews were scattered abroad over all Asia Minor at this time, and they were the most deadly enemies of all to the Christians. As we see in the second chapter of this Epistle: “For ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they (the Churches in Judea) have of the Jews: who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.” The Jews were given over of God now, and were established in all quarters as the most determined enemies of Christ and Christianity. And they have ever continued in that state for 1800 years, for in their synagogues every Friday Christ is publicly cursed by their priests.

Persecution from men, incited by Satan, in all ages has been the lot of Christ’s Church and of those who embraced the truth. And it is a great evidence of a man’s sincerity that he is ready to endure persecution for his profession, and to bear the cross for Christ’s sake. So it showed the sincerity of the Thessalonians. That was one clear and convincing evidence of Paul’s assurance of their election of God. Persecution followed the first planting of the Church of Christ everywhere, as you see in the case of the apostles. The more so was the case at the Reformation, when the Gospel was planted first in Europe, or rather the second time, because it was planted first by Paul in Philippi and Thessalonica. But it dwindled away, and was almost quite dead at the time of the Reformation in the 16th century, and then great and sore persecution was raised up. And, my friends, the reason why we have less persecution now may be that the character of the modern Church is not so decided and steadfast as was the Christianity of the earlier Church, and that it is more in conformity with the world and its opinions and practices. I think that is one great reason why the Church of Christ is comparatively free from persecution. For the Word says: “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”; and that Word cannot be broken. If the Church would live a more godly life, there would be more persecution. And another reason why there is no persecution is that there is so much lukewarmness.

The Thessalonians endured much persecution, and not only did they endure it, but they endured it with joy, and it was not merely joy, but joy of the Holy Ghost. And Christ Himself says: “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven.” Thus the Thessalonians looked to Him for their reward, and believed that there was a good time coming for them, although they had an evil time now. That was the work of faith. And we find various instances of the same thing in the Church of Christ, for Paul says to the Church at Rome: “And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience, experience, and experience, hope”; and of the Hebrews: “Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.” That was the reason why they rejoiced, because they looked forward to “the recompense of the reward.” Christ also says that all the sufferings of believers for the truth would turn unto them for a testimony. “These

are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” They were willing to bear the cross for Christ, and to bear it joyfully. Now, this is a picture for the true Christian Church, and it is recorded for our instruction and imitation that we may “be followers of them who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises.”

There is another evidence of their election in the seventh and eighth verses. They “sounded out the word of the Lord.” What does that mean? It means that the Church of Thessalonica was an active, energetic missionary Church, for they “sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia.” That was an evidence of the truth of their religion. And it is one of the chief duties of the Church of Christ, as we see from Christ’s parting command: “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). “Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:19,20).

There was great missionary zeal in the first and second centuries. Those that were scattered by the persecution that arose in Jerusalem went everywhere preaching the Gospel. It appeared as if at first they were too much disposed to stay at home and were lacking in enterprise and enthusiasm. And how did God deliver them from this snare? He sent persecution among them. Everywhere there were great persecutions. For the first two hundred years (A.D.), every man that was caught and proved to be a Christian was sure to be thrown to the lions in the amphitheatre at Rome. There thousands and tens of thousands were murdered because they were Christians. Those who escaped were scattered abroad throughout the whole world, and some, it is believed, came as far as Scotland preaching the Gospel, and to the extremes of the Roman Empire, in order to hide themselves from the wrath of the Emperor. Then, again, there came a time when the Church was very much at rest. They became rich and wealthy, and became worldly and carnal and proud and covetous, until the true Church almost died out. Then there was an awakening in the fifth and sixth centuries, especially in Scotland and Ireland, and parts of France. Patrick, Columba, Gregory, and others, were truly zealous men who spent their lives in devotedness to the Church of Christ, and spread the Church, having been remarkably successful in their labours. There was a wonderful blessing which accompanied the labours of Patrick and Columba. Columba not only planted the greater part of Scotland with preachers, but even went as far as Orkney and Shetland. Then, again, there was a great revival in the middle ages, at the time of the Reformation. They were very zealous then. And from the beginning of the present century, the Church has been awakening more and more to its duty as a missionary Church, to a great extent in America, as well as in Britain. And among many shortcomings, there is this token for good, that the number of missionaries and the amount of contributions to missionary work are yearly increasing. But O how short does the whole Church of Christ on earth come of her duty in this respect! We are told that the whole amount of money contributed for missionary work throughout the world does not exceed *two millions* of money in one year, and that the amount spent in Great Britain alone in intoxicating liquor in the same time is *one hundred and fifty millions*. This is a sad disproportion – £2,000,000 spent in spreading the kingdom of Christ, and the greater part of £150,000,000 in spreading the kingdom of Satan. O what need there is for a time of revival from on high!

Now, there were other Christian Churches in Macedonia before the Church of Thessalonica, for Paul planted a Church in Philippi, and a very large Church it was, and there were other younger Churches, but they were not alive to their missionary duties. The Lord then sent a special time of zeal and devotedness to the Thessalonian Church, and that was the means of quickening the zeal of the others. The Thessalonians were not only examples of Christianity to the heathen population around them, but they helped greatly to quicken the ardour of Churches older than themselves, so that their zeal provoked many. The work of God's grace was so manifest in them, that it commanded the respect of all the Churches around.

How, still further, did the work of grace show itself? It did so, not merely by outward profession, not merely by the observance of religious ordinances and talking about religion. No; there may be much of that, and much outward profession, without any grace. It showed itself by the patient endurance of affliction and by undaunted suffering for the cause of Christ and obedience to the Gospel, like Moses, who chose rather to suffer affliction for the cause of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, and forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king. That is the example of grace which the Thessalonians followed, and by their steadfastness, zeal, well-doing, and self-denying labours through much tribulation, they spread the gospel of Christ among the surrounding nations.

These things, it would appear from what the Apostle says here, were so manifest, that when he came to other places, he found that the good report of the Thessalonians had always got before him. He did "not need to speak any thing" in their favour, for in every place their "faith to God's Word was spread abroad." They were living epistles of Christ, and they carried their religion with them wherever they went, so that every Thessalonian who went abroad was a missionary, and, indeed, there is something of this kind happening now in China. The Chinese converts are among the most zealous missionaries that the world has seen, the most self-denying and enthusiastic in spreading the Gospel.

Oh what a good report there would be of a Church, if every member was a missionary! But oh, my friends, see what a lack of zeal has come upon the Church of Christ, and upon nations that are called Christian nations. Paul says in his epistle to the Romans, "that when the Jews went among the Gentiles, the name of God was profaned." They brought an evil report upon the Jewish religion because of their ungodly lives, and caused the name of God to be profaned among the heathen. And that is much the same way with a multitude of the people of Britain when they go abroad. The Indian missionaries in their reports tell us that the ungodly lives of British officers is one of the chief hindrances in India to the spread of the Gospel. And the same is more or less the case in all British colonies. The same is also true of the greed of British merchants. Many of them are sending shiploads and shiploads of rum and gin into Africa, and are doing their utmost to make the poor African nation drunkards. And what can be thought of Christian men who send cargoes of opium to China, notwithstanding the remonstrance of the Chinese government, for their debasing and ruining the souls and bodies of multitudes of the people.

What a contrast the Church of Thessalonica was to this! Their whole efforts were directed to the good of their fellow creatures, to the spread of the Gospel of Christ among them, to the saving of their souls, and to the glorifying of God by living holy lives. The testimony borne by all around them to the grace and Christian zeal of the Thessalonian believers, was an evidence of what Paul here says of them, and what they themselves showed. What did they show? They showed the power with which Paul had preached the Gospel. When he was in Asia, he beheld in a vision a man of Macedonia inviting him to come over to Europe and help them. He came over first to Philippi, where Lydia and many others were joined to the Church. But the people rose up against him – the heathen incited by the Jews, perhaps – and he had to leave Philippi. Then he came to Thessalonica, and the Word was accompanied by

much of the power of the Holy Ghost, so that we are told that some of the Jews were converted to Christianity, and of the devout women not a few. That was the founding of the Church of Thessalonica. These things were known to all the Churches, and they indicated the authority and power of the Apostle, and were a great cause of thankfulness, and the means of quickening the zeal of the Churches. And they were not only a great testimony to the Apostle, but also an evidence of the almighty power of the Gospel, then accompanied by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, to awaken men altogether, and to make them holy, and new creatures in Christ Jesus.

“And how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” There, see the wonderful change that was made; they “turned to God from idols.” Idolatry was deeply engrained in them. They were trained up for many generations in the practice, and they were remarkably devoted to it. I have often been struck in reading Herodotus with the fact that no Greek ever engaged in any public business without first sacrificing to the gods. That was their invariable practice, and any man who neglected the worship of their gods was looked upon as an infamous person, with whom no one should hold any acquaintance.

O what a reproof they are to professing Christians! And what a reproof also the Papists are! You find Christian churches almost empty, and the Popish churches overflowing. None of them ever think of neglecting the church. The same is the case on the Continent. In many Protestant churches in Berlin and Hamburg, there will be only a few women, while the Popish churches are comparatively crowded. It shows that, whatever kind of religion they have or not, they are in earnest, and it shows on the contrary, the practice of professing Christians, that they are not in earnest, when they forsake, as so many do, the assembling of themselves together. They “turned to God from idols” when they received the gospel in faith, and shook off all their connection with idolatry, in spite of their education and life-long universal custom, and in spite of the commands of their laws, and the influence that it had been having on them from childhood. But this is what the Lord promised would take place: when the Spirit of the Lord would come, He would utterly abolish the idols. And this is the universal result where the gospel comes with power. Thus, in the South Sea Islands, they made a bonfire of their idols, and if we had the same Christianity, we would do like them. We would say, “What have I to do any more with idols?”

“To serve the living and true God.” Now, a man may turn from his evil practices, and yet may not turn to God. For instance, the drunkard may turn from his drunkenness, and yet be far from God and as graceless as ever. But these Thessalonians turned from idols to serve the living and true God. We read of some that were like a deceitful bow; they turned from their former practices, but they did not turn to God. The Thessalonians turned to give Him both their outward and inward reverence, worship, and obedience, and without this, men may change their habits, but they do not change their master. The devil is still their ruler. A man may hate and forsake the superstition and foolishness of his former ways, and yet remain a child of the devil, destitute of the living God.

Another effect of the gospel received in faith was this: “To wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.” Their great business was to serve God, to wait for His Son, to serve Him here that they might enjoy Him hereafter. They looked to the endless happiness of eternity, that eternity which awaits all who serve God. They looked to Christ’s second coming, to Christ as their deliverer from the wrath to come, and to the resurrection of Christ as the bridge to life everlasting.

Now, my friends, what lessons are here for us! Oh what important lessons! One of them is this. Every sinner needs the same change as that which came over the Thessalonians. Sinners need to receive the true grace of God, the gospel of Christ, in such a way as shall turn them from their idols to the service of the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven. God calls us to this: “Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?” Then do you, like the

Church of old, turn all His commandments into prayers; and when He says, “Turn ye, why will ye die?” say in reply, “Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; turn away my eyes from beholding vanity, and turn my heart from sin, from the world and from all idols, to serve the living and the true God, and to have the blessed hope of waiting for Christ’s second coming, as Christ has already a people, who shall come to Him as a willing people in the day of His power.” Let each seek the Lord while He may be found, and call upon Him while He is near. “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”

[November 1909]

A Sermon.

By the late REV. JOHN KENNEDY, D. D., Dingwall.

“The sword of the Lord and of Gideon” – Judges 7:20.

The history of Israel under the Judges is composed of a series of epitomes of the whole. In each epitome there are four stages – Israel sinned – Their enemies prevailed against them – They turned and cried unto the Lord – The Lord sends them deliverance, and they again have rest.

To prove His people the Lord left remnants of the old nations in the land of Canaan. They remained there that Israel might be more mindful of their dependence on the grace and power of their God. “Slay them not, lest my people forget,” He said in arranging His providence as to this. Israel were thus tested as to whether they would refrain from unlawful fellowship with the nations that knew Him not. If there was no command to go among the nations to teach them, there certainly was a command forbidding them to go among them to learn their ways. God’s design in those days of old was to keep His chosen people peculiar among all besides in their nearness and faithfulness to Himself. His design may be differently represented by those who would ascribe to Him a universal fatherhood, and who are averse to think that the riches of His goodness are under the control of His sovereign will. But though God often rebukes them for learning lessons from the heathen, He did not command them to go forth as missionaries among them, and I know not where to look for His rebukes of Israel for neglecting to enlighten them. The whole course of His dispensation then was one continued display of His sovereignty, and of the difference resulting from “His purpose, according to election,” being carried into effect in behalf of “a peculiar people.”

Israel’s declensions resulted, during the greater part of their history, from their failing to keep aloof both from the fellowship and from the idols of the heathen; and as it was in other days, so was it in the days of the Judges; and then, as at other times, the Lord did not fail to chasten them for their backsliding. The King of Mesopotamia first oppressed them, then the King of Moab; and thereafter the King of Canaan was their oppressor, from whom, through Barak and Deborah, the Lord delivered His people. But again they turned aside from the ways of the Lord, and the Lord allowed the Midianites to oppress them, till their condition became most pitiable. In “dens, and caves, and strongholds” the people of Israel then found their only homes within their own land. When they sowed their fields they were not allowed to reap them, for “the Midianites and Amalekites came up,” and “encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth,” “and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass.” The people of Israel could then only timidly peep out of their hiding-places to look on their land covered and laid waste by “the tents,” and “cattle,” and “camels” of their enemies. “Israel was greatly impoverished,” and only then “Israel cried unto the Lord.”

This is still realised in the experience of the Lord’s people. They become proud – elated because of the very greatness of the Lord’s goodness to them – they think they can be independent of the Lord; sin obtains the advantage, they forsake the Lord, becoming formal in their worship, and unwatchful in their daily life; idols are taken back into the Lord’s place; He is provoked to anger; He leaves them under the power of the sin that drew them away from Him, and they lie bewitched and torpid under its spell. But He leaves them not always so. He chastens them, and chastens them sorely, for the soreness is required in order to express His holy displeasure because of their sin, as well as His desire to do them good. “Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble.” He brings them to a sense of the evil which they have brought upon themselves. How like their souls then are to the wasted land of Israel. What desolation has spread over their state of feeling! How hidden what is of God within them! Where are the hope, and zeal, and penitence, and joys of other days? All is a waste, and from the sway of the sin that has caused this, they have no power to deliver themselves. And the guilt of their backsliding is brought home to their conscience, as the fruit of it is felt by their heart. But the Lord quickens them to call on Him, and then and thus He turns them to Himself, and then begins to “turn” their “captivity” “as the streams in the south.”

The Lord began to answer Israel's cry by sending a prophet to them to rebuke them for their sin in turning away from Him to the gods of the Amorites. This is His way of bringing back His people when they forsake Him. "Return thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you; for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever. *Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God.*" In no other way would it become Him, or be good to them, to restore peace to them. There must be the confession and the forsaking of sin ere they taste again of His mercy.

But if He raised a prophet to rebuke their sin, He raised a Gideon to be their deliverer from oppression. While the son of Joash was threshing "wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites," "the angel of the Lord appeared unto him and said unto him, the Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." It seemed strange to Gideon that he should be thus addressed. It seemed strange to him that he should be told that the Lord was with him, for there was in the present condition of the country much that made it very unlikely to him that the Lord's presence could be enjoyed. "If the Lord be with us," he asks, "why then is all this befallen us?" And it seemed to him strange also that he should be called a "mighty man of valour," and that the Lord should say to him "Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites." To this word of command his reply was – "Oh, my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."

Because of his felt weakness before the great work of saving Israel from the hand of the Midianites, he asks a sign from the Lord, and it is given. As a memorial of the Lord's wondrous grace towards him he builds an altar and offers sacrifice thereon. But the Lord's altar could not be restored without the altar of Baal being cast down. This was signified by the Lord's requiring him to "offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove" which marked the high places of Baal's worshippers. This roused against him the ire of the men of his own city and nothing would satisfy them but that his father should deliver him up to them in order that they might slay him. Joash most wisely answered those who demanded the life of his son. Let Baal settle his quarrel with my son; I call him Jerubaal, thus marking him out as the person with whom Baal has to contend. "Let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar."

But Gideon does not seem to have been afraid of Baal's wrath nor of the ire of the idolaters whose grove he had destroyed, for there was something more formidable before him. "All the Midianites and the Amalekites, and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel." Towards these he had to look, for their destruction was the work which the Lord had given him to do. It was well for him, when he beheld their countless hosts, and observed their grand array," that the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon." Inspired with fresh courage, "he blew a trumpet" and gathered Israel "after him." But before going to meet the great army the Midianites he asks for two signs from the Lord. It is easy for men who fight their battles on their bed to find fault with Gideon for asking any sign seeing that the Lord had promised to be with him. Ought he not to be content with the Lord's word as a ground of hope? they ask. It is not difficult for men who are conscious of no opposition to their carnal faith to rear it up to the pitch of assurance, and having no Midianites to meet, they can, without the quiver of a nerve, mouth big words of confidence, and regard with contempt those who are always afraid. But let us not be hasty to blame Gideon for asking what the Lord was pleased to grant him.

At last "Jerubaal, who is Gideon," has an army of thirty-two thousand to follow him to do battle with the Midianites. But "the Lord said unto Gideon, the people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against Me, saying, mine own hand hath saved me." The soldiers are then tested. The cowards who were afraid were sent back to their hiding-places, and then the laggards, and of the two-and-

thirty thousand only three hundred are left. Then, and not till then, are they weak enough for the Lord to give them the victory. That little band then moved, each one with victuals and a trumpet in his hand, towards the great host of Midian. Still another sign, unasked, the Lord gave to Gideon when he brought his weakness quite beside the strength of Midian, as the huge host “lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand of the seaside for multitude.” Dividing his little army into three companies, “he put a trumpet in every man’s hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers.” He put no sword into their hand, for the swords of the Midianites sufficed for their own destruction. A trumpet to be blown and a pitcher to be broken was all the armour given to, and all the fighting required of Israel. This surely was the “foolishness” of warfare. It is a most fitting emblem of “the foolishness of preaching,” which is mighty through God to the pulling down of the strongholds of sin and Satan. The trumpet is blown, and the “earthen vessel” no longer hides the light of the gospel – the power of God is displayed, and sinners are “turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God.”

THE BATTLE-CRY of Gideon’s little band, as they moved towards the camp of the Midianites, was “THE SWORD OF THE LORD AND OF GIDEON.” Another version of the cry is proposed – “*For the Lord and for Gideon.*” But in so far as the teaching of the cry is concerned, it matters not which version we adopt. If their battle was *for the Lord*, it was His to equip them and to give them the victory; if it was *for Gideon*, then it was his to lead and to direct them. Gideon was chosen to be deliverer of Israel, and he must have the place which the Lord assigned to him. O, believer, what a grand battle-cry thine is, as thou goest forth to do battle with thy spiritual foes, FOR JEHOVAH, AND FOR HIS CHRIST, WHOM HE HATH APPOINTED THE SAVIOUR OF ISRAEL. Let there be no coward quiver in the voice that utters this cry, however many and mighty the enemies may be.

There must be a battle-cry and a destroying weapon of some kind, and in some hand, for there is to be a conflict, and a deadly one, with an army that is countless.

REMARK I. *It is not the sword of Gideon alone.* What would it avail if it were? Think of the hosts opposed to him. Why the flanking company of one of the many divisions of the great Midianitish army would find it easy, if no other sword than Gideon’s opposed them, utterly and speedily to destroy both him and his followers. Even if he had with him all that first gathered around his standard, and were these all valiant men, what would they be against such an army as that which was opposed to them? Gideon knew this right well. He was no mad enthusiast. He did not, he could not, reckon on victory being by his sword. How could he when he looked on his three hundred men, with their trumpets and pitchers, and then surveyed the ground covered by the hosts of Midian. There they were, a countless multitude, fully equipped for battle, conscious of their might, flushed with conquest, and bent on the utter destruction of Israel. In such circumstances he would not bid his followers to raise the cry, “THE SWORD, OF GIDEON,” as they went to meet the enemy.

And yet, feeble though he was, he must not hold back his sword in fear. *His conscious weakness must not make him a coward.* His heart must not sink as he comes in his feebleness near to the foe. He can do nothing, and yet he must aim at all being done. A few swordsmen from the Midianite camp would soon lay him and his followers low, and yet he must enter on a conflict with the whole formidable forces before him. *He must not make his weakness an excuse for sloth.* He must not be like the laggards, any more than like the cowards who had ceased to follow him to the fight. And yet if ever there was “a lion in the way,” there was one now before Gideon. But he was no sluggard. He trusted in the Lord, and had no slavish fear. He was zealous for the glory of the Lord and for the good of Israel, and would not lag behind when he was entitled to do battle for Jehovah and His people, and when he had a promise of victory through help from heaven.

REMARK II. *It was not the sword of the Lord alone.* It was *first* the sword of the Lord, but it was next that of Gideon. There was no need of Gideon's sword – the Sword of the Lord would by itself suffice. True, one word of power from the Lord's mouth could in a moment dispose of all the hosts of Midian. Why then, it may be asked, was Gideon's sword there at all? Because, according to the divine arrangement for discomfiting the foes of His people, the Lord reserved a place for the weakness of a Gideon, as well as for His own power. The weakness must be there that the power might be made perfect therein.

It was a great honour to Gideon that his sword is allowed a place in the conflict. This honour the Lord puts on human nature in connection with the dispensations of his grace. It is a meet following up of the alliance of the human and the divine in the work of redemption. In the person of Emmanuel, the Redeemer, the divine and human natures were together. The work was so done by Him that all He did was done by Him as a divine person in human nature. This is the grand feature of the work of redemption. And in the work of application there is also an alliance of the divine and human. Those who are called to serve Him are "fellow-workers with God." This honour have all His servants.

It was a great benefit to Gideon, as it is to all who are represented by him, to have a place along with the Lord in conflict with the enemies of God and of His people. It was thus that Gideon learned to be truly humble. He never without this had known how very feeble he himself was, and how true it is that there is nothing "too hard for the Lord." And in the measure in which he was weak in his own consciousness, had he an opportunity of knowing how faithful, how wise, and how gracious the Lord was in His way of putting forth His power. These are useful lessons; and they are learned just in the measure in which, aiming at the attainment of what the Lord has promised, one feels his own utter inability to reach it, and leans trustingly on the Lord for "help in time of need."

This was the way utterly to confound the foe. All that they could see was the weakness of Gideon as opposed to their great power. The more disposed they were to despise his weakness the more humiliating was it to be defeated by him. To be utterly routed before a man who had but three hundred followers, armed only with trumpets and pitchers, was a most mortifying defeat. Long were these Israelites under the heel of their sore oppression, and now before a mere handful of them they are utterly discomfited. Is not this like the shame and confusion which Satan has to endure when a sinner once his slave and victim attains to be more than a conqueror over him?

But the BATTLE-CRY was "THE SWORD OF THE LORD AND OF GIDEON." This was the battle-cry of Gideon's little army, this should be the battle-cry of the Church of Christ in every age and place, and of each individual soldier of Jesus Christ. In this cry there are –

1. *The union of majesty and meanness.* Divine majesty is here, for the Lord is here, and human meanness is here, for Gideon is here. *If divine majesty is here, there must be the meanness to veil its glory.* Only through the little company of men, with their trumpets and their pitchers, is Jehovah to show forth the glory of His power. And the greater the meanness the more transparent is the veil to the eye of faith. It cannot hide from that keen eye the omnipotence of God as active in the destruction of the foes of Israel. A hidden God discomfits the Midianites, but all true believers behold the glory of His power and reverence the infinite greatness of His majesty, as they consider the victory won in the valley of Jezreel. And if divine majesty be here there must be the meanness *in order to an opportunity of shewing what divine condescension is.* For it is by His dealing with the lowly that Jehovah can shew His condescension. He associates feeble Gideon with Himself, that He may shew what tender care He can take of him; and thus instead of Gideon's fellowship with Him being to His dishonour it is to the praise of His glory. *And if the meanness be here it requires the majesty.* Gideon cannot dispense with the Lord. And in the circumstances in which he is placed he cannot be at rest without realising the majesty of the Most High. He requires Him

in His infinite greatness; and it is only when he looks on the hosts of Midian in the light of Jehovah's glory that his heart ceases to be afraid of the conflict. The more the divine majesty makes him conscious of his meanness the easier is it for him to hope that the oppressors of Israel shall be utterly destroyed.

2. *This is the union of strength and weakness.* The strength there must be, for without it there can be no victory – great strength – divine strength. This is not away, for the Lord is with Gideon, and goes down with him to the valley of Jezreel. “The sword of the Lord” is going to smite the host of Midian. He has pledged Himself to this. This is enough. He is pledged to exercise His Almighty strength. Will He then not go down to the valley of Jezreel? Will He go down alone? He will go, but He will not go alone. He brings weak Gideon with Him. Of what use can he be? What can he and his little band do? They can be weakness, and that is all they are asked to contribute to the victory which is to be won. Let them give themselves in their weakness to the Lord. True, they are nothing in the great work to be done – God is all. But He must have them so to work by them that “His strength” shall be “made perfect in” their “weakness.” It is a fine sight which is before our eyes as we see the Omnipotent Jehovah, with Gideon as His fellow-worker, going down to the hosts of Midian – Omnipotence and impotence – a worm in the hand of Jacob's God.

3. *This is the union of grace and unworthiness.* Yes, there is grace to chosen Israel to be expressed in judgment inflicted on their oppressors. And there is unworthiness, for as surely as unworthiness cannot dispense with grace, grace cannot dispense with unworthiness. *It becomes “the God of all grace” to have sinful Gideon with Him* when He is working out deliverance for guilty Israel. Thus alone can He show forth the riches of His grace. And this surely furnishes Him with an occasion of doing so. *And unworthy Gideon cannot face the foe apart from the grace of God.* Let not his sinfulness cause him to shrink back from the work to which the Lord has called him. Let him rather be a willing debtor to His grace for all He needs to make him a good soldier, and to secure to him victory as the result of the conflict. The more he is a debtor to divine grace, the more fitted for his place as a fellow-worker with God, and the more willing he is to be nothing in the relation in which he stands to the Lord, the stronger will he be found to be in the day of battle.

4. *This is the union of the invisible and the visible.* The majesty, the might, the grace are all invisible. The eye, that sees “things unseen” to all other eyes on earth, alone can discern them. All from which came the victory, and the power by which it was achieved, were unseen. By those who saw not these what could be expected but defeat for Gideon and his tiny army. He was visible, and so were his three hundred followers, and their trumpets, and their pitchers – these and no more. But the visible weakness was connected with the invisible might, though unseen by all who were faithless. If Gideon had been unbelieving, what he saw of weakness would have melted his heart with utter cowardice. But “He endured, as seeing Him who is invisible,” and He, with His majesty, power, and grace was as present to his mind through faith, as were his own meanness, weakness, and unworthiness. How worldlings, who cannot rise above grovelling amidst things seen, would mock his hope of victory through the wonder-working power of the God of Israel! But they could not despise him when the victory over the Midianites was complete.

APPLICATION.

1. *This is the battle-cry of every true Christian.* He has right to reckon on the Lord's being on his side. He obtained that when first he came to Christ, for then he was “made the righteousness of God in Him,” and having been justified and adopted, the Lord promised to be his God and Father, to supply every want, to preserve him from every enemy, tenderly to bind up his wounds, and to bring him at last to the rest prepared for His Israel. Friend, you are sometimes afraid that you have no right to reckon on the Lord being on your side. You are

afraid of this because of what you remember of unfaithfulness in the past, because of what you presently feel in the state of your heart, and because of how dark the providences are of which you have experience. But did it not look very like as if the Lord had forsaken Israel, when he allowed the Midianites to invade and lay waste their land? Did not even Gideon say to the angel, "Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all His miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? but now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites." But even in this dark hour the Lord had not forsaken His people, for "the Lord looked upon" Gideon, and said, "go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites; have not I sent thee?" True, the children of Israel were in a most dreadful plight, but why were they so? It was because of their own backsliding and not because of any lack of faithfulness or grace on the part of their God. He hid His face till He brought them to acknowledge their iniquity, and then the glory of His power shone forth in their deliverance. Friend, when you fear that the Lord is against you, come as a death-deserving sinner to Him in whom there is "redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins," and laying your hand in faith on the head of the "Lamb slain" confess your sin to the Lord, and anew dedicate yourself to Him, and He will turn your captivity as streams in the south. And always remember that it is an enemy's work to be keeping a poor sinner away from Christ, or to be trying to induce him to distrust Him by whatever difficulties his hope may be tried. O, trust in Christ at all times and in all circumstances, and follow Him, the New Testament Gideon, to any work, or trial, or conflict to which you may be called, assured that if you are with Him, the God of Israel shall be with you, and that you may reckon on His gracious help in every "time of need." Take up, then, the battle-cry, and shout it in front of all you have to encounter.

1. Let this be your battle-cry *in the conflict with the sin that dwelleth in you*. Weaker in yourself, before the enemies within, you are, than was Gideon before the hosts of Midian. He might, at any rate, have slain a few Midianites before he was struck down, if he went to the battle without the presence of the Lord; but you cannot "mortify" any one sin except "through the spirit." This you will feel whenever your desire rises against the power of sin within you. But remember that you have the Lord, with His riches of grace, and His omnipotence, and His wisdom, and His faithfulness to fall back upon. A right to victory is yours in Christ on the ground of His accepted sacrifice, the Lord has promised His sanctifying grace, and He hath said that He will never leave nor forsake you. Seek grace to give you as much faith as shall keep you from fainting, and as much zeal as will keep you from sparing any sin, and you shall have your desire against all the Midianites who infest and oppress your soul.

2. Let this be your battle-cry *in view of all that the world and the powers of darkness can do against you, because you are a follower of Christ*. Your great anxiety should be to know the path of duty prescribed by the Lord. Let this be your care, and not what you may have to encounter while you walk in it. Be anxious to hear the Lord saying, "have not I sent thee?" and harbour no anxiety about what awaits you when you go to do His bidding. Know this and you may reckon on the Lord's being with you. But if He is with you, then be certain that you will find yourself, in yourself, utterly weak before work and conflict. It is the fruit of His presence that you be kept consciously and willingly dependent on Himself for all needed strength. Be careful to see more and more of the greatness of the work to which you are called, and do not neglect to measure the strength of the enemy you are required to subdue; but, as you do so, be leaning your weakness on the arm of the Lord. Let Him have His place of pre-eminence, give Him nothing but yourself and your weakness, be content to be nothing, and then, raising your battle-cry, go forth to meet all that awaits you. In the light of His glory, who is your Leader and Saviour, what puny hosts seem those who have risen against you, and

what but victory over them can you expect, when “the sword of the Lord” is drawn to destroy them.

3. Let this be your battle-cry *as you go down to meet the last enemy in the dark valley of death*. You have to go, for “it is appointed to all men once to die.” You have no alternative but to go down. In view of that last conflict, how often has your heart sunk within you, as you thought of being cut in twain, and of being ushered as a naked spirit into Eternity. How much there seemed to be between you and passing into the Father’s house! All your past sins, as unforgiven, seemed marshalled against you, all the corruption within you seemed to be utterly unmortified, and in unbroken strength, and your heart melted with fear as you looked into the darkness before you. But, Friend, you then forgot that there was one who promised to befriend you, even unto death. You looked to yourself and not to Him, and hence your sinking of heart. You forgot that you were called to follow the New Testament Gideon, in whom you have a right to victory over death, who went for you through the suffering of an accursed death, that death might have no sting for you, that He went before you through it to His place within the veil, that by the power of His life He might save you “to the uttermost,” and that His presence and sympathy can be yours, till at last He makes you more than a conqueror. And wonder not, Friend, that yours should be Gideon’s experience, who became weaker and weaker the nearer he came to the foe. Thus may you expect to feel the nearer you come to your dying. More and more will you be weaned from all self-confidence by all being removed that would interfere with simple dependence on the Lord. Like the ship which carried Paul, from which its cargo was cast into the sea, you will be self-emptied, as you never were before, as death is approached. And like that vessel, too, which broke up where the two seas met, you will have experience of dissolution when to you time and eternity meet, and your last experience may be to be cast on the further shore, clinging to some word of grace that warrants a sinner to hope for salvation through grace by Jesus Christ. But leave the mode of your dying, and all else that makes up the morrow which the Lord appointed for you, and crying, “the sword of the Lord and of Gideon,” go forward, leaning on the Lord, to the last struggle, and expecting the victory through Him who is “ALL IN ALL.”

4. *This is the battle-cry of the true Church of Christ*. The Lord is her leader, the Lord is her strength. After Him, and leaning on Him, she goes forth to her work. She cannot but have battles to fight, for she cannot be following the Lord without having to endure persecution from the world. There are churches that provoke not the wrath of the enemy, and that, instead of contending with an opposing world, have all their battles within their own pales. But neither Satan, nor the world can sleep beside a faithful church, neither can she sleep while they are busy in persecution. Better, far better, to encounter the fierceness of the foe than to win exemption from suffering by yielding to his demands. But if she is bent on doing the Lord’s work in the Lord’s way she may reckon on the Lord being with her.

When this is truly a church’s battle-cry, she must be careful to trust only in the Lord. She must be impressed with the greatness of her work, and must wisely count the cost of opposition by the powers of darkness and by the world. Only when her heart is zealous for the glory of the Lord and for the good of souls, can she either realise the greatness of her work, or experience the mighty power that is at work against her. Only then can she truly feel her need of trusting in the Lord. But, however weak she may feel herself to be before her serving and her soldiering, let her lean on the Lord, and let her be given to importunate and believing prayer.

And she will, like Gideon, ask her people to follow her only to a work to which the Lord hath called her. She has no right to expect followers except in the ways of the Lord. But let her be fully persuaded that she is moving in the path of duty and then let her take up the battle-cry, and the Lord of hosts shall be with her.

But there are churches who profess to have this as their battle-cry, that are dishonest in their shout. They are not “for the Lord” therefore they care not for “the sword of the Lord.” Instead of aiming at doing what is the Lord’s will, they do according to their own pleasure. They pass measures which they dare not ask the Lord to bless. If the thing they propose be what they cannot justify, they proclaim the doing of it to be expedient for the sake of peace. And they expect that the sword of the Lord will be on their side notwithstanding. But let it be remembered that the sword of the Lord was the sword of the Gideon who went because the Lord sent him to do a work which the Lord prescribed to him. Let no one, let no church, dare to say “the sword of the Lord and mine” if the path in which the individual or the church is moving is not one which the Lord prescribed.

It would be well if our own church remembered this. The time was when she seemed willing to do battle for the Lord of Hosts. But, alas, this zeal has waned, a faithful defence of the truth is not attempted, even when error is flaunted before her face, no care to keep pure the worship of God is evinced, and all the testimony which made her position distinctive is abandoned. One step of declension has led to another, till a depth has been reached that marks as almost unique the speed of her decline.

But notwithstanding of all this degeneracy there is still a claim to use the battle-cry of Gideon. To minds that are more ignorant of the power of godliness than moles are of astronomy, superficial movements called revivals appear as tokens of the Lord’s presence, and these are cast as a veil over the many tokens there are of His departing from us. Thus, in departing from the Lord they venture to reckon on His countenance and aid. Leading churchmen will put themselves at the head of a band of Midianites to oppress the Lord’s heritage, by introducing what to them is loathsome in the worship of God, and yet they claim a right to use the battle-cry of him, whom the Lord sent to deliver his people from the power, with which these choose to be allied.

[December 1909 and January 1910]

A Sermon.

EPISTLES OF CHRIST.

BY THE REV. D. MACFARLANE, DINGWALL.

Preached to his Congregation in the Free Presbyterian Church there,
on Sabbath, 10th October, 1909.

(Taken down by a hearer.)

“Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart” – 2 Corinthians 3:3.

The Apostle here speaks of believers in figurative language. Having spoken of letters of commendation, he tells the Corinthians that those of them who were converted through his instrumentality, and that of his fellow-labourers in the Gospel, were the best letters to

commend them as Christ's ambassadors. "Ye are our epistle." They were their epistle as instruments of their conversion, but they were "the epistle of Christ," as He was the Author of that important change. The word *epistle* is the Greek name for "letter."

In addressing you from the words of our text, as the Lord may enable me, I shall keep to the metaphor the Apostle uses here in comparing believers to an epistle or a letter, and I shall mention as I proceed the various things suggested by the figure.

I. – The *Writer*. No letter is written without a writer. We have several epistles in the New Testament, and, as a rule, the names of the authors of these epistles are given. There are epistles by Paul, epistles by Peter, epistles by John, and one by Jude. Who is the writer of the epistles mentioned in our text? The writer is Christ, for the Apostle calls believers "the epistle of Christ." But it may be objected that the Apostle says that the epistle is written "by the Spirit of the living God." That is true, but men in high positions in the world have their secretaries to write their letters. The earthly king has his secretary for that purpose. He may write some of his letters with his own hand, but he writes the most of them through his secretary, and those written by his secretary are all the same the king's letters. Christ has His secretary, so to speak, to write His spiritual epistles. Who is that secretary? It is the Holy Spirit, called in our text "the Spirit of the living God." The secretary of an earthly king is inferior to the king himself, but not so here. The Holy Spirit is the "same in substance, and equal in power and glory" with Christ. In the arrangement of the everlasting covenant Christ became the Servant of the Father to work out everlasting redemption, and the Spirit was given to Christ to apply His redemption to those given Him in the covenant. Hence the Spirit is called "the Spirit of Christ." It is to be borne in mind that Christ employs the Spirit in writing His epistles, not as an instrument but as an Agent.

II. – The *Pen*. In writing a letter a pen is necessary. However good a writer you may be you cannot write without a pen. Christ uses means and instruments in carrying on His work in the world. What are the pens He uses in writing the epistles under consideration? The prophets of old were His pens, the Apostles were pens, and all Gospel ministers, and others, are His pens. In the 45th Psalm the Psalmist calls himself a pen in the hand of the Spirit: "My tongue is the pen of a ready writer" (verse 2). The Psalmist here calls his tongue a pen. The tongue is necessary to speak; necessary to preach the Gospel. The tongue was given to man to declare God's glory, though many employ that member of the body in the service of sin. You need not only a pen but a *good* pen in order to make good writing; you cannot make good writing with a bad pen. Christ always writes with a good pen. He never writes His epistles with a bad pen. His ministers were by nature bad – "the children of wrath even as others," but Christ made them good. You know that pens are made. In my younger days pens were made of quills. How were they made? They were made by the writer himself with a sharp tool called "the pen-knife." What is the pen-knife which Christ employs to make His pens? He employs His own Word – a two-edged sword – cutting both ways – Law and Gospel. By this sharp instrument, in the hand of the Spirit, He prepares His ministering servants to serve Him in the ministry of the Gospel. You cannot make a good pen of a bad quill, but Christ can make good ministers of the worst of men. He made persecuting Saul one of the best ministers that ever served Him in His Church on earth.

Christ does not write all His letters by the same pen. He uses different pens. In Old Testament times He used Prophets: in the New Testament time He used the Apostles and others as His pens; and He still makes new pens to serve His purpose in converting sinners and in building them up in holiness till they are made meet for heaven. When you need a new pen you throw away the old one which served you so long in writing. You throw it away as a useless instrument. But Christ does not treat His old pens – after they have done all the work they were able to do on earth – in that manner. They are more precious to Him than that. He

has work for them to do in heaven. Not, indeed, to write any more letters with them, but to declare His praise for ever. These old pens are perfectly new there. Think of this when you throw away your old pen. Where are the Prophets? Where are the Apostles? Where are the Reformers? Where are the Gospel Ministers that were in Ross-shire fifty years ago? They are in heaven. But Christ makes new pens, and He will continue to do so to the end of time, till all His redeemed are gathered into His fold on earth, and then He shall not make any more pens. His work on earth is “finished”; all His letters are written, and well written.

Each believer is an epistle of Christ, and it is not the same time He takes to write all His letters. He writes some of them in a few minutes. The thief on the cross, whom He saved, is an instance of this. Others might be mentioned who were effectually called, justified, adopted, and sanctified like that thief in a very short space of time. On the other hand, Christ takes many years to finish some of His letters – some 40 years, some 50 years, and some 60 years. We have an account of aged Christians who were in the state of grace for the period of sixty years; and in Old Testament times there were some in that state for several hundred years, and Christ was writing these epistles all that time.

III. – Another thing you require in writing a letter is *ink*. Although you would try to write with a pen without ink, you could not do so. The dry pen would not leave a word or a sentence behind it. Ink is necessary in writing a letter. What is the ink Christ uses in writing His own letters? We are not to guess in this matter. We must go to “the law and to the testimony” for the answer. Well, what is the means the Holy Spirit takes in His work of applying the benefits of Christ’s redemption to sinners? You say, “The Word of God.” That is the correct answer. Then, the Word of God is the ink. As you dip your pen in the ink in order to write, so Christ dips, so to speak, His ministering servants, who are His pens, into the Scriptures – into the Word of God. “The entrance of Thy Word gives light.” Christ leads His ministers into the meaning of God’s Word, and opens their understanding to understand the Scriptures. And then He uses them as His pens to write, and the mark of the ink – God’s Word – is left behind on the hearers of the Gospel to whom the Word is blessed, and that through them, as pens in the hand of the Spirit. If you are Christ’s epistles, you bear on your soul the mark of God’s Word. The Word of Christ dwells in you in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. The saving work of the Spirit agrees with the Word of God. And the work that does not agree with that Word is a delusion – a delusion under which the great majority of professing Christians in the present age are. But we are speaking about the ink in which the pen must be dipped before it can write. There are *fountain pens*. These pens have a small fountain of ink in them. So have Christ’s ministers; they have the Word of God in them. Christ gave them that Word. “I have given them the words which Thou gavest Me, and they have received them” (John 17:8). But as the supply of ink in the fountain pen does not last always for the work it has to do, and it requires a new supply again and again in order to write, so it is with ministers. They feel themselves sometimes dry without the ink of God’s Word; they sometimes cannot find even a text of Scripture to preach from. In that condition they cannot preach. If you begin to write with a dry pen, you injure both the pen and the paper on which you write. In like manner, if ministers preach when they are thus dry, they hurt their own feelings and the feelings of the Lord’s people, and they would rather not have preached at all in that *dry* frame of mind. This will teach them to cry to Christ for a new supply of His blessed Word. When they get that in answer to prayer, they shall then say with the Psalmist: “My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.” Their own souls are benefited by their preaching, and the “poor and needy” are refreshed with the dew from on high, and fed with “the bread of life.”

IV. – Another thing you need in writing a letter is *paper*. What is the paper on which Christ writes? The Apostle tells us. It is the *heart*. “Not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables

of the heart.” The material of which writing paper is made undergoes a great change before it is fit for writing purposes. Of what material is it made? Some say that writing paper is made of *old rags*. However that may be, it is a fact that the heart of man by nature is much worse than old rags. It is spoken of in God’s Word as “filthy rags.” “We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). This being the case, the heart of man must undergo a great process of preparation before it can be used by Christ to write upon. The tables of stone on which God wrote the law were first prepared for that purpose. They were hewn by Moses with a chisel, dressed and prepared, and then God engraved the law upon them with His own hand (Exodus 34:1). The writing was the writing of God, but He used Moses as His instrument to prepare the tables. In like manner, God uses the law, of which Moses was the representative, in preparing the heart of the sinner. Indeed, He uses law and Gospel in that work. The law is the chisel that cuts and wounds, the Gospel is the polishing instrument whereby the heart is finally prepared for writing on. The change necessary is spoken of in Scripture as “a new creation,” a taking away of the stony heart, and giving a heart of flesh. This is done in the case of every sinner that is saved by the effectual work of the Holy Spirit, and the Apostle speaks of it in our text. He says that the writing is made “not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.” The natural heart is not only corrupt, but also hard as a stone, while the new heart is soft and tender as flesh. There is a heart of stone in all men by nature, but Christ by His Spirit effects such a wonderful change in His own people that they have now a tender heart. This is then the paper on which Christ writes. He does not write upon it as it is by nature. He changes it; as the material on which paper is made is changed by the manufacturer, so is the heart changed by the Spirit of God.

One thing more before I leave this part of the subject. You buy the paper you use in writing a letter. What is the price you pay for it? “Not much,” you say; “I can get a packet of paper for one penny.” Ah, Christ did not buy His paper at such a cheap rate as that. What did He give for it? He gave Himself, He gave His precious blood, He gave His obedience unto death. Oh, what a price! The wonder is intensified when you bear in mind that it was when His people were like “old filthy rags” He bought them at such a cost. If the stationer were to offer you old rags for your penny instead of fine white paper, you would refuse to buy such stuff. But Christ did not refuse to buy His people when there was nothing in them but sin. “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

V. – We now come to *the writing*. A letter is something written. You all know what it is to write a letter. What is the first thing you write in a letter? You write the *name* of the place from which it is written. If you write a letter in this town, the first thing you write is “Dingwall.” In like manner, the first thing Christ writes in His own letter is the *name* of the place. Where does He write His letters? In His Church on earth. He writes all His letters there, and as He writes all His letters there, He writes first the name of the place. And, therefore, He says, in Revelation 3:12, “I will write upon him (the believer) the name of the city of my God.” Zion is the name of the city of God. It is there the Holy Spirit converts sinners, and prepares them for glory. In the eighty-seventh Psalm and fifth verse we read: –

“And it of Zion shall be said,
 This man and that man there
 Was born; and He that is Most High
 Himself shall stablish her.

When God the people writes, He’ll count
 That this man born was there.
 There be that sing and play; and all
 My well-springs in thee are.”

The second thing you write is the *date*. You write the *day*, the *month*, and the *year*. Christ does the same. The date of the sinner’s conversion is written down by Him. The people of

Israel were commanded to remember the month *Abib* as the time of their deliverance out of their bondage in Egypt. In the 22nd chapter of Acts we find the Apostle Paul telling the date of his conversion. Not only that he could tell the day, but the exact *hour* in which the great change took place. It was, he says, “about noon,” when the sun was at its meridian height, shining brightly, indicating, as it were, that the new convert was to be “a burning and a shining light” in the Church, as really he was. Not only that Christ knew the *date* of Paul’s conversion, and wrote it down, but Paul himself knew it, and probably wrote it down in his diary as a time to be remembered. Some of the Lord’s people remember the *day* of their conversion, others remember the *month*, and others the *year*. Those who know the time of their conversion have, what may be called an *anniversary*. Some observe an anniversary of their birth – their natural birth – and they have on that occasion a feast and rejoicing. The Lord’s people – some of them – observe an anniversary of their *new birth*, and they feast and rejoice in the company of Christ, who comes to them to remind them of His loving-kindness to them in saving them. Some poor one may now say, “I am afraid I am not one of the Lord’s people because I cannot tell the *date* of my conversion, though I cannot deny that a change came over me, and that Christ is precious to me, and that His people are my people, and His cause is my cause.” But you are to remember that you are not the writer of the epistle at all, but Christ. He knows the date, and wrote it down. If you bear the marks of His people in other respects as you do by the confession you have just now made, you need not be so much perplexed about the date. If you see a tree growing and bearing good fruit, you may be sure that it was planted some time, though you cannot tell *when*. There are some of the Lord’s people in whom the work of grace begins so small, like the little leaven in the parable, that they cannot tell *when* the leavening process began till the whole lump of the *dry meal* is leavened. By their *fruit* they are known. There is, however, in the case of all God’s people, a certain period of their life in which they turned from sin to God, a time of their conversion, a time of their embracing Christ by faith, a time when they enjoy spiritual comfort from the Word of God in the private and public means of grace, though some of them are for the most part during their lifetime kept in darkness about their interest in Christ. Such have the *faith of adherence*, but want the *faith of assurance*. They cannot say, “My beloved is mine, and I am His,” but they can say, “To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.”

Let us now come to consider what is written in the body of the letter. You do not finish a letter by stating by your pen the *place* and *date* of writing. That is only a beginning. Neither does Christ. For “He that hath begun a good work in you will perform it” – bring it to perfection. What more does Christ write? Well, to put it briefly, He writes His law in the minds and hearts of His people. He draws by His Spirit and Word the image of God, which was effaced by sin, on their souls again, never to be obliterated any more for ever. He restores that which He took not away. The law of God was written on the soul of man at his creation. By sin he lost that treasure. Christ regained it at a great cost, and He restores it to His redeemed people. It was a token for good that this was to be done when the law was written on tables of stone. It intimated that although their hearts by nature were as hard as the stone, yet they would be so changed that the law would be written again on them. I have already spoken of the change that was made by the Spirit in the souls of God’s people by making them a “new creation.” Their state was changed by the Father when He justified them. But their change of nature is effected by the Spirit. They are perfect in their justification, as perfect as ever they shall be. But they are not perfect in their sanctification. That work is only begun. When God created man he was perfect in His image all at once. God’s image was not put on him by degrees. But in restoring the image of God to His redeemed, the work of the Spirit is gradual. It is a change “into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Corinthians 3:18) – that is, from one degree of sanctification to another. This work shall be carried on gradually by the Spirit till they are made perfect in holiness at death. They shall then be, with

respect to their souls, as perfect in their sanctification as they are now on earth in their justification. This is, in short, the writing that Christ makes in the body of His epistle.

Before I proceed to notice the last thing that He writes in the letter I may remark that all Christ's letters are *public* letters, so that, as Paul says, they may be read and known of all men (verse 2). Public letters are open to all men, and all may read them. There is nothing in Christ's letters, so far as His *writing* is concerned, that needs to be concealed. It can stand the light of day, and the gaze of all men, good and bad. Christians are not shut up in monasteries and nunneries, where their fellow-creatures cannot see them, but are public in the world, and associate with their fellowmen in their lawful callings, so that all may see them. They may be read and known of all men, as it is written, "All that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed" (Isaiah 61:9). Even their enemies were constrained to acknowledge this. We have an account in history of those who burnt some of the Lord's people at the stake confessing afterwards that those they so cruelly put to death were God's people. They were compelled by the force of conscience to make this confession, though their enmity to God and His people impelled them to continue in their persecuting work. How may those who are Christ's letter be read and known? You cannot see Christ's writing, for it is inward in the heart or soul. The work of the Spirit is there. "The kingdom of heaven is within you." But grace in the heart manifests itself outwardly. You may read and know them in their lives – in their holy walk and conversation in the world. They were thus read and known in all generations. They are "*manifestly* the epistle of Christ." Their conduct is manifest to all, though grace in the heart is invisible to creatures. The eye of God only can see it.

What is the last thing you write in a letter? You write your *name*, so that the person to whom you write may know from whom the letter is. Christ does the same. He writes His name. So He says Himself. "I will write upon him My new name" (Revelation 3:12). There are anonymous letters, but none of Christ's letters are anonymous. He writes His name; He owns the letter as His. His name is a *new* name. As the Saviour, a new name was given Him, and this new name is "Jesus." "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins" (Luke 2:21). He signs the letter by His name "Jesus."

After you write your name in the letter, what more do you do? You enclose it in an envelope. So does Christ. After He has finished, by His Spirit, the work of sanctification in His people, He will at death enclose them in His own envelope, so that they are no more to be seen in their persons in this world, or read or known by their fellow-creatures on earth except by their memory.

After you enclose your letter in an envelope, what more do you do? You write the name and address of the person to whom you wrote the letter, on the back of the envelope. So does Christ. To whom does He write these letters? To His Father. What is the Father's address? Heaven. "Our Father who art in heaven." Do you do anything more before despatching your letter? Yes, you put a postage stamp on the envelope. What kind of a stamp do you put on? One bearing the image of the king. So does Christ. His own image is the postage stamp He puts on all His letters. That insures their safe arrival at their destination. The royal stamp is enough to pay cost of carriage to any part of our kingdom. It is enough for the carriage of believers to the kingdom of glory. He who made them His epistles put that stamp upon them. It is the writer, and not the letter itself, that puts the postage stamp on the letter.

The last thing you have to do now is to send away your letter. How do you do this? You either post it in the post office or hand it to the letter-carrier. Well, it is the latter way Christ takes to send away His own letters. He does not put them in the post office, to lie there for any time. He hands them at once, without any delay, to His letter-carriers. Who are these? They are the holy angels. We read that these angels carried the soul of Lazarus to heaven as soon as he died (Luke 16:22). The holy angels are waiting at the death-bed of God's people to

carry their souls to heaven when Christ hands them to them immediately after death. The angels are thus waiting, just as you see postmen waiting at the Dingwall Post Office to receive letters which they are to carry to their destination, according to address. On the other hand, evil angels are waiting at the death-bed of the unconverted, to carry their souls to hell as soon as they die! As soon as Christ hands His letters to the holy angels, they set off at once, and although the distance they have to travel is so long – no man can tell how long – their motion is so swift, and their errand so delightful, that they are at the end of their journey in a very short time. The time is so short that it is but “to be absent from the body and present with the Lord,” as Paul speaks of it. “As it does not yet appear what we shall be,” we cannot at present enter within the veil to behold the happy reception the Father gives to the letters of His beloved Son, in whom He is well pleased. Let each of us seek to be the epistle of Christ.

THE EPISTLE OF SATAN.

As people are at times cheated by spurious letters, it will be proper, in conclusion, to give a word of warning on the subject. Satan, in order to deceive, transforms himself into an angel of light, and in that shape he writes letters – (I keep to the metaphor) – purporting to be written by Christ, and by this device he deceives many, especially in this age. Do you ask, “How can I distinguish between Satan’s letters and Christ’s letters?” There is a great difference between them. Take the following marks of distinction: –

1. The handwriting of Satan is different from that of Christ’s. A letter-forgery tries to imitate as much as possible the hand-writing of the person in whose name he writes. But if you receive a letter from a forger, purporting to be written by your friend, whose handwriting you know so well, you may know at once that the letter was not written by your friend. In like manner, you who know the handwriting of Christ will not be too readily deceived by Satan, however he may try to imitate the handwriting of Christ. The handwriting of Christ is inimitable. As no creature ever spoke like Christ, so no creature ever wrote like Him.

2. The *pens* that Satan uses in writing his letters are quite different from those Christ uses in writing His own letters. While Christ employs *converted* ministers for that purpose, Satan employs *unconverted* ministers as his instruments to do his own deceptive work. When, in an evil age, the enemy sends forth a host of ministers from his college to deceive congregations, he “transforms them into the apostles of Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:13). Under that disguise he knows that his messengers are more readily received by ignorant people than if he had sent them forth in their natural form. He has thousands and tens of thousands of ministers of this description in the present day, so that congregations need to be on their guard lest they be deceived. “Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:2,3).

3. There is a difference in the *ink*. The *Word of God* is the ink Christ uses to write His letters; the *word of man* is the ink Satan uses to write his own, and if he dips his pen sometimes in Scripture, it is in order to deceive. Although he quotes Scripture to suit his purpose, yet he often misquotes it, and always gives a wrong interpretation of it. His key to expound Scripture is not Scripture itself, but the *opinions* of men. How much of this way of interpreting Scripture is to be seen among Satan’s ministers in our own day!

4. There is a difference in the *paper*. To speak plainly, while Christ prepares His people by regeneration in order to write His image upon them, Satan makes good Christians of his own children without that essential change, without which no man can enter the kingdom of heaven (John 3:3). Or if he acknowledges that such a change is necessary, he will tell them that they were “born again” when they were baptised. He deludes some of his subjects by making them believe that man did not fall from the state in which God created him, and that

therefore all men shall go to heaven after they leave this world. Some of his ministers, who are his pens, declare openly that it is “difficult,” if not impossible, for man in his state of nature “to go wrong.” In their view, under the teaching of Satan, men are good enough as they are born into the world, and there is no need of the regenerating work of the Spirit to make them better. This is the kind of material on which Satan writes his epistles.

5. There is a difference between what Satan writes in his letter and what Christ writes in His own.

(1) With regard to the *place* of writing. Although it would appear that the *place* is common to both writers, viz., the *Church*, yet we learn from Scripture that the place from which Satan writes is different from Christ’s. For we read of a place of worship, which was called by men a *Church*, called by Christ “the synagogue of Satan.” It is by calling his place of writing the *Church* Satan deceives many. If he gave its appropriate name – “the synagogue of Satan” – people would not be deceived by him. But as he is a forger, he pretends to write from *Zion*, Christ’s writing place. But from what has been already pointed out, it is clear that Satan’s place of writing and Christ’s are different, although the evil one performs his work of deception with more plausibility within the pale of what is called the “Visible Church.”

(2) With respect to *date*, that is, the date of conversion. Satan has his converts as well as Christ. Does he convert sinners to himself? There is no need for that, for he has all from their birth. But you are to bear in mind that he pretends to convert sinners to God, and he knows that by his way of conversion he has a firmer hold of them than before their conversion. At what date are Satan’s converts converted? In the case of some of them they are converted when they are baptised: others are converted when they partake of the symbols of the Lord’s body and blood in the Sacrament of the Supper: others are converted when they give up the grosser forms of sin and become moderate in their habits; and so on. But in all these ways of conversion Satan may reckon his converts as his own still, and, as already stated, he has a firmer hold of them than he had before their conversion.

(3) With regard to what is written in the body of the letter. While Christ writes His own holy image on His people – implanting in them the graces of the Spirit, working spiritual thoughts, desires, and affections, which lead to corresponding actions – the devil is so far content to see his image still remaining on his own people under the cloak of a Christian profession. His image is on them from the womb. But although they are born into the world bearing his image, yet he may be said to still write his image on them deeper and deeper, inasmuch as he works in them, prompting them, by manifold temptations, to actual transgression, which more and more blinds the eyes of the mind, hardens the heart, sears the conscience, and corrupts the affections. Thus evil men wax worse and worse in their *nature* as well as in their practice.

(4) Satan’s epistles are *public* epistles as well as Christ’s, and may be read and known of all men. “The children of the devil are *manifest*,” as well as the children of God (1 John 3:10). How may they be read and known? You cannot see what is in their heart except as it manifests itself outwardly in their actions; and as they profess the Christian religion, and perform religious exercises, you are to look at them in that aspect of their character in order to know them. Follow them to their places of worship, and observe *how* they worship. Some of them adhere to the outward form of worship instituted by Christ in His Church, but as they were not regenerated by the Spirit, they know nothing of the *power* of godliness, and consequently they rest in the mere outward form, without seeking to worship God in the spirit and to hold fellowship with Him. They have gone through the outward form exactly as prescribed by the Head of the Church, and they are satisfied with that. These we call *Formalists*. But there is another class of Satan’s converts (and they form the great majority of present-day worshippers bearing the Christian name) who have, to a large extent, ceased to worship God in manner prescribed by Himself because they consider it antiquated, and have

invented another way more agreeable to the carnal mind. What these aim at in their worship is not to please God but to please themselves. You have only to read newspaper reports of their religious services and you will see that these so-called worshippers have usurped the place of God as the object of worship. These we call *Self-worshippers*.

By these, among many other marks, they may be read and known of all, except such as are under judicial blindness. As there are multitudes of our fellow-creatures illiterate, who cannot read – not a few still in our own kingdom – there are many more who have no spiritual discernment to distinguish between true Christians and the great multitude who are so only in name. But the people of God, who are taught of Himself, are able to make the distinction: and while they cannot associate with false worshippers in their religious services, they pity them, and give glory to God who made themselves to differ.

(5) There is a difference in the *signature* adhibited to the letter when it is finished. As already stated, Christ writes His own name at the end of His letter, as the author of all that was written in it. Satan does not sign his own name, but, as a forger, he signs the name of Christ. And how can it be proved that the letter has never been written by Christ, though His name is to it? It can be proved, *first*, by the great difference there is between the *handwriting* of Christ and that of the forger. However Satan may try to imitate Christ's writing, he cannot do it, for it is *inimitable*. *Second*, by *internal evidence*. Spurious letters are proved to be genuine by this test. There are writings attributed to some of the fathers who succeeded the apostles in the Christian Church which have been proved to be spurious by internal evidence. By comparing these writings with other writings which were well known to have been written by those fathers, it was found that they did not agree, and therefore it was concluded, on good evidence, that the fathers to whom these writings were attributed were not the authors of them. On the same principle, when you compare what Christ has written in His own epistle – His work of grace in the souls of His people – with what Satan has written (including the signature) in his own epistle, you will find that they do not agree; on the contrary, that there is as much difference between them as there is between light and darkness. But as a deceiver of souls, Satan makes his dupes believe that his work in them is the genuine work of the Spirit of God, and he keeps them under this delusion till he gets them with him down in the pit of destruction.

(6) Satan imitates Christ in addressing his letters to *God, the Father in heaven*; but if he should, through temporary failure of memory, omit to write this address on them, he has agents in his service who will, through the telegraph of prayer, wire the address to eternity when burying the dead. These agents are so full of false charity that they send all men to heaven, making no difference “between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God, and him that serveth Him not” (Malachi 3:18).

(7) There is a difference in the *postage stamp*. The stamp Christ puts on His own letters is, as already mentioned, His own holy image, in which His people are made perfect at death, so far as their souls are concerned; but the stamp Satan affixes to his letters is a counterfeit – an imitation of Christ's image in one form or another, as suits his purpose in deceiving immortal souls. So long as he sees that his postage stamp is different from Christ's stamp, he is content to allow his dupes to pass on to eternity in the hope of entering heaven, while he knows that hell is their place of abode for ever!

(8) Lastly, there is a difference in the *letter-carriers*. Holy angels are Christ's letter-carriers. They carry the souls of believers to heaven immediately after their death; but evil angels, of whom he is the prince, are Satan's letter-carriers, and they carry the souls of all the wicked – that is, all that die in an unregenerate state – to hell as soon as they die. As there are two classes of men in the world – the righteous and the wicked – there are two places (and two only) in eternity – heaven and hell; and the souls of the former class shall go to heaven, and the souls of the latter class shall go to hell immediately after death, and both parties shall

remain in their respective places for ever and ever: the one party enjoying perfect blessedness in the full enjoyment of God to all eternity, the other party enduring the greatest misery for ever.

I have in this lecture spoken of these two classes under the titles of “the epistle of Christ” and “the epistle of Satan.” I now appeal to you, in the name of God, to examine yourselves as to which of these epistles you are. You must be either Christ’s epistle or Satan’s. There is no intermediate position for you to stand in between these two. There are a few of you of whom I am persuaded that you are the epistles of Christ, but the larger number of you by far are still in your natural state, and if you continue in that state till death, Satan shall claim you as his own, and the justice of God shall see to it that you shall have your portion with him in everlasting torment. But you are still in the land of the living, where mercy may be found, and where God waits to be gracious to sinners that come to Him by Christ as the way; and we beseech you in Christ’s stead, “Be ye reconciled to God” on the ground of Christ’s atonement. Oh, seek by earnest prayer that the Holy Spirit make you, by His effectual and saving work, the epistle of Christ, that you may live to His glory during your time on earth, and that when you die you may be carried by the holy angels to heaven, to be for ever with the Lord.

[February 1910]

A Sermon.

By the late REV. CHRISTOPHER MUNRO.

Preached at Strathy, 16th August, 1873.

“And the Holy One of Israel is our King” – Psalm 89:18.

Here we read one of the numerous confessions of the Church concerning her God, and as in every one of such confessions there is a declaration of some of the relations which He sustains towards her, so here likewise we have one or two of these declared.

He is said to be “the Holy One of Israel.” His holiness may be known from the manner in which it is described in His Word. He is of purer eyes than to behold sin, which statement we have elsewhere in these terms: “Do not commit that abominable thing which I hate.” Holiness is that property in God by which He is necessitated to abominate and hate sin. There are some objects which, when presented, give rise to that feeling that is characterised as abominating. If putrid food were laid before a man of a tender stomach, this feeling would at once arise and render it impossible for him to partake of it. Hatred is combined with this feeling to teach us how the Supreme One regards sin. The sinner hates the good man, and would have him cut off. God, who is love, hates not as man hates. He hates sin, but has no pleasure in the death of him who dies. In the sinner there is malevolence, but of this God is altogether free. He is angry at the sinner, but His anger is holy and pure. There is no unrighteousness with Him in being angry; no malevolence when He punishes sin, when He casts out the sinner from His presence and renders unto him according to his doings. He is unchangeably holy – eternally and gloriously holy.

He is “the Holy One *of Israel*” – of His redeemed people, to whom He says, “Be ye holy, for I am holy.” “Without holiness, none,” no, not one, of Israel, whom He loves with an

everlasting love, whom He has redeemed with His blood, whom He freely pardons and brings into His family, and to none of whom His promise shall be broken – without holiness none of them shall see the Lord. But He not only assures them of the necessity of being holy, and exhorts them to be holy, but He has purposed to make them so, and Christ, whose petitions or intercessions for them are always heard, prays for their sanctification, and the Holy Spirit is given them, and He dwells in them and works mightily for accomplishing this change.

The Holy One is their “King.” The human race has, from an early stage of its history, been divided into different tribes and nations, who found it necessary to appoint a ruler over them, to administer the laws of the community. He was called the chief, or their king, which title God in His Word, assumes to Himself, in order to teach men, naturally ignorant, some important truths concerning Himself.

In considering this topic we may confine our observations to the person of the Son, on whose shoulders is the government, and who is called King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the eternal Son, the Father’s equal, and all power in heaven and on earth is given Him. To Him belongs the exercise of all power. He is, as King, a lawgiver, one jot or tittle of whose laws shall not fall to the ground. To Him all judgment is given. All responsible beings are, therefore, to be judged and rewarded according to their doings by Him alone.

He is in a peculiar manner the King of Israel, or of the redeemed – of the saved. He is called the King of Righteousness, by which we are to understand that He is not only righteous in Himself and in His government, but that He is their righteousness: “the end of the law for righteousness” – “the Sun of righteousness.” “In the Lord Jehovah have I righteousness and strength.” In this relation He is King, and as a king is, or should be, rich, generous, and royally liberal, so is He as their righteousness. Angels and all holy creatures have no righteousness but what they need for themselves, and therefore cannot give to another. The wise virgins said to the foolish, “Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you; but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.” He brought in an everlasting righteousness, not for Himself, but for others who had none, who were poor and naked and miserable. There was a people given to the Son to reign over them, and when given they were in the condition just mentioned – poor, naked, and miserable, and while in this state, He could have no honour and glory in connection with them. An earthly king can have no glory from poor and miserable subjects living in poverty, rags, and deep wretchedness, and still less if they continue in this state, and if he makes no effort and adopts no means to raise them up and make them prosperous and happy. Earthly kings have in all ages many subjects of this sort, and it is to be feared that they are little concerned about them. This is not, however, the case with Christ as King of Israel. All His people shall be righteous, for His infinite righteousness is sufficient to cover them all. The King’s daughter is clothed in garments wrought in gold, and shall be brought to the King in raiment of needlework. And hereby we may see His riches in being able to clothe them in this manner. All the riches of the world could not have bought the garment and robes in which Christ’s people are clothed before God, however poor they may be in the eyes of those who are rich among men. In thus clothing them He acts as a King who is holy and pure, for He takes off their filthy garments and washes them with the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, and commands, with royal bountifulness, kindness, and dignity, to put on them this robe of needlework. It is a royal garment, to be worn by none but one who is a willing subject. All His people are made willing in a day of power, and therefore are clothed so that they are made perfect in Him; and when inspected, so to speak, by the pure eye of God, in this garment, He sees no spot, He sees no iniquity, in Jacob, nor perverseness in Israel. He is well pleased for His righteousness’ sake.

He is King of peace. There is by nature a breach of the peace between God and man, and no creature can make it up. He has made peace, and made it like a King. He is our peace, and

as it is in Him it passeth all knowledge. It is like a rich storehouse that can never be emptied; and so this royal treasure can never be emptied. He bestows it also like a King. "My peace I give you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me." Hear how He gives peace, and this peace He will not break. "I will not suffer the covenant of my peace to be broken." "I will keep him in perfect peace." The riches of this peace are known in part by those whose consciences have been awakened to a sense of sin and of God's anger against sin, and who, on believing, can say, "We have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ." It is experienced too in after life, but especially in the fact that is written – "Behold and see that the latter end of the righteous is peace" – peace in departing to meet with their God, to judge them. Simeon understood that one seeing the salvation of God could depart in peace. The Psalmist clearly saw the same thing when he sang, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me." And at the great day of judgment, when the wicked shall cry unto the mountains, "Fall on us," they shall lift up their heads with joy, because the day of their salvation is near.

There shall be peace *during His reign*. His gospel is the gospel of peace, wherein peace is declared and the effect of which is to produce peace – to make His people lovers and doers of peace. "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God."

He is again called the King of Glory. His own personal and immanent glory is that of the Son of God – "the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person." But who can search and find out this glory, for it is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable? He dwells in glory, and this makes His dwelling place glorious; this constitutes heaven. Wherever He makes Himself known and satisfies with His likeness, there is heaven. He bestows glory on His people. When He shines into any heart, by nature dark, and reveals Himself there, there He begins to bestow glory on them; and as this light is increased, the more glory He bestows, for they are "changed from glory to glory as by the Spirit of the Lord." "The glory thou hast given me, I have given them." This is a most marvellous saying. He has received it from the Father inasmuch as He was appointed by the Father as Mediator, as Prophet, Priest, and King, to glorify the Father. He was glorified by being thus put in a position where He had to shew forth His infinite and varied riches of grace, power, love, pity, truth, justice, and holiness in redeeming, saving, teaching, training, comforting, and sanctifying His own people. When they see this glory so as to change them from darkness to light, they are, as already said, made to share it, and this participation of it shall be complete when He will bring them where He is, that they may see it, not darkly as in a glass, but with undimmed eyes, as He sits on His throne, around which is a rainbow in colour like an emerald; not to become as if dead by its eternal weight; not to be terrified and overwhelmed; oh, no; but to be filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Here He bestows like a King of Glory, bestows richly and upbraids not, but rejoices in all His works, rejoices that they are washed in His blood, that they are delivered from all their iniquities, that they are holy, filled with peace, and with love; their cup overflowing at the table in His Father's house, and their hearts full of gratitude that will never cease to flow forth in songs of praise to God. "To him that loved us and gave himself for us." Thus they shall see His glory in all His works in which He rejoices. What was dark in this world is becoming clearer and clearer. What puzzled and perplexed them shall be seen in such light as will effectually remove all difficulties, and all risings of heart, and all murmurings of spirit. There will be none there saying, like Jacob, "All things are against me;" none like Heman mourning all day long; none saying, "Why hast thou cast us off?" "O how long wilt thou hide thyself?" or, "O that I knew where to find him!" none saying, "I pine with thy blow," or, "Take thy stroke from me"; none asking, "Why does the wicked prosper, and the righteous are afflicted?" All shall with one mouth proclaim in the gates of Zion above, "He hath done all things well. Well, when He redeemed us and when He

saved us from death; well, when He afflicted and chastened us and put us in the furnace; well, when he pruned us and plucked away darling idols, and when He made us feel to be in a dry barren wilderness. The Lord has done great things for me; blessed and holy is His name.”

Ah! yes, this shall be the language of those who are now for the most part complaining of their poverty and cannot believe that He hath done great things for them. They feel themselves so ignorant, so graceless, so poor and miserable that they fear there is not the least likelihood of His showing any mercy to them.

Is He your king then? Have you made choice of Him? Have you kissed the Son? Trust in Him; commit yourself to Him. Make known all your wants, all your requests; come near, and touch His sceptre. Hear Him say, “What is thy request and prayer and it will be given?” He has gone to receive a Kingdom; He has received it and is coming again and now making a willing people. What message do you send after Him? All must be sending some message or other. Whether then dost thou say, “Come, Lord Jesus, take Thy great power with Thee and reign in my heart, reign in Thy house, in Thy kingdom”; or do you send this daring, rebellious, and blasphemous message after Him, “We will not have this man to reign over us, ‘Not this man, but Barabas;’ we shall have no king but Caesar, the world, the devil, and the flesh. These we obey and follow, but will not obey Thee.” Consider, poor sinners, what must be the end of this. Hear it from His own lips. “Bring hither mine enemies who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me. Bind them hand and foot.”

[March 1910]

A Lecture.

By the REV. JOHN R. MACKAY, M.A., Inverness.

“The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” – GENESIS 2:7.

Dr. David Smith, lately United Free Church minister of Blairgowrie, and now Professor of Theology in the Presbyterian College, Londonderry, in a recent number of the *British Weekly*, makes this confession: “Heaven would be a poor place for me, lacking dogs and horses and the rest of the dear tribes.” One has, before now, met occasionally with eccentric persons who seemed to believe in the immortality of the lower animals; but Dr. Smith’s extravagance appears to surpass that of all his predecessors, when he proposes to introduce dogs and horses into the realms of eternal bliss. Dr. Smith’s attitude to this question is not only unbiblical but anti-biblical. His utterance is sadly only one, however, of many which may be heard or read nowadays, revealing how far from their former moorings the children of what was once the Free Church of Scotland have drifted.

The utterance adverted to is a fresh call to us to consider what God in His Word teaches us as to the constitution of human nature, and as to the impassable gulf which divides mankind from dogs and horses and such like. We shall find that the keynote of the worth of the human soul is struck with great distinctness at the very openings of the oracles of God; and that, with an insight which, in its consistency, its solemnity, its essential beauty, is divine, that worth of the human soul is insisted on by prophets and apostles throughout the entire length of the Old and the New Testaments. Dr. Smith’s way of looking at the questions now under consideration, we believe, only reveals the wreck which the adoption of the evolutionary hypothesis is bound to make of definite Christian doctrines. For our own part, we consider that next in importance to the urgency of retaining correct, that is, Biblical, conceptions of the Triune God, is the importance of retaining correct, that is, Biblical, conceptions of man, and of what is essential to the constitution of human nature, and hence our present protest.

The words of our text teach us that man draws one part of his nature from the earth, for “the Lord God,” we read, “formed man of the dust of the earth.” But there is a part of human nature which is not, and, in the nature of things, could not have been, derived from the earth, but which entered into his constitution, according to the teaching of our text, by the Lord God breathing into his nostrils the breath of life, or more literally, lives. It was in this way that – to use the words of the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 15:45 – “The first man, Adam, was made a living soul.” It is true that, since the Fall, mankind have become corrupt in the faculties of their soul and in the members of their body, but although the Fall has changed much in human nature – and that for the worse – it has not made a change in the essential constitution of human nature. Man fallen, like man in innocence, is, as to the constitution of his nature, made up of spirit or soul and body. The body of sinful man, when death intervenes, returns to the dust whence it was derived; the spirit of sinful man, which in its very nature is not derivable from the earth, returns unto God, its Creator, its Judge, its true Source. It is in this connection, we believe, with some of the most accomplished and solid Christian scholars of modern times, we ought to interpret the words of Genesis 2:4, “These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created.” For the word “generations” has not here respect to the origin or the creation of the heavens and of the earth, as the destructive Higher Critics – contending that at the fourth verse of the second chapter, a second account of creation commences – would wish us to believe. No; the word “generations” here most certainly means not origins – it means offspring. That the understanding may be established in the sureness of the truth of what we assert, consider that Genesis altogether consists of an introduction, extending from Genesis 1:1 to Genesis 2:3, together with ten sections following that introduction, every one of which sections commences with a formula like to that with which the first of the ten sections, in chapter 2:4, begins, to wit “These are the generations.” Compare Genesis 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2. Now, we are not left in doubt as to the meaning of the word “generation” or “generations” at the head of the nine sections which follow that section beginning with the words, “These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth,” in Genesis 2:4. Everyone must see that the generations of Adam, in chapter 5:1, look forward to his offspring in Seth, Enos, etc. Similarly, in chapter 10:1, the generations of the sons of Noah – Shem, Ham, and Japheth – are Gomer and Magog and Madai, etc. The generations of Jacob are not the parents of Jacob, but the children of Jacob. The case is equally obvious in the other six cases in which the formula occurs. We are bound, therefore, to construe the words with which Genesis 2:4 opens by no means as announcing that here commences a somewhat diverse account of the creation of the heavens and of the earth from that which is given us in Genesis 1, but rather as announcing that here we have an account of the history of the offspring of the heavens and of the earth, of whose creation, indeed, we have a most sublime account given us in that portion of Genesis which we have ventured to speak of as introductory. It is, in a word, the history of man, created in the image of God, ruined through the abuse of his free will, and redeemed through sovereign grace, which is here about to be given. Man, in this account, appears as the offspring not of earth only but of heaven also. It is this that makes him to differ from the lower animals. When God created fish and fowl, He but commanded the waters to bring forth those creatures abundantly (Genesis 1:20); when He created cattle and creeping things and the wild beasts of the earth, He but commanded the earth to bring forth those creatures after their kind. But it was otherwise in the case of mankind. Mankind is not the offspring of the waters and of the earth, as the lower animals may be taken as being. Mankind is the offspring of the earth and of the heavens. As we have said, he derives, in virtue of divine power, part of his nature from the earth, but the nobler part of his nature he did not and could not derive from the earth. He is, on the higher aspect of his nature, related to the world of spirits, to immortality; yea, to God Himself. It is this fact that constitutes the awful solemnity attaching to our belonging to

the human race. It is from this the necessity of a never-ending self-conscious existence arises. It is in the light of this that the worth of the human soul can be appreciated; it is in this light that the horribleness of a lost soul is seen.

Reason itself corroborates what the Scriptures teach, not only of the value of the human soul, but of the essential difference that exists between human beings and the very highest of the lower animals. Indeed, I have often thought that there is a sense in which mankind is capable of making a nearer approach to affinity with the Creator, than the lower animals can make in regard of affinity to man. Let me briefly explain what I mean. Sun and moon and stars are placed under laws which they obey. These laws are, to use an expression of Dr. John Duncan's, "not over God but still are from Him." These laws are from God and they are on the material universe; but, of course, that material universe is not conscious of those laws which it obeys, nor of Him whose laws they are. But it is not those inanimate objects alone that are under laws which are from God. God has made the lower animals under laws, but they as little perceive the laws under which they live and move and have their being, or Him whose laws these are, as do the inanimate objects – sun, moon, and stars. But it ought not to be so with man. Differently from the lower animals he is capable of something better than this. Even in his fallen, natural state, he, if he be not under a perverse, malign influence, is capable in a logical sense, of rising from the laws under which he himself is as to his body in common with irrational, yea, inanimate creatures, of rising, we say, from these laws to the Creator, from whom they come. And man restored, that is, regenerate, not only, as a logical inference, rises from the laws to the Lawgiver, but, through these very laws, has fellowship with the Creator. Was it not so with Job when he said of wisdom (Job 28:23-27) "that God understood the ways thereof and knew the place thereof. For he looketh to the ends of the earth and seeth under the whole heaven; To make the weight for the winds; and he weigheth the waters by measure. When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder; Then did he see it; and declare it; he prepared it, yea, and searched it out." Man may thus be seen to recognise that he himself, as to his bodily frame, is under laws which are identical with those which obtain in the irrational and inanimate world. And, by this recognition, he virtually acknowledges that he derives his nature in part from the earth, from the material world. But the very fact of his being capable to rise, by means of these laws, to fellowship with the eternal Lawgiver, proves that his whole nature has not been derived from the material world; that, in a word, by the higher aspect of his nature, he is properly related to the world of spirits. Nay more, may we not, with the second chapter of 1 Corinthians before us, say, that man, through the teaching of the Holy Spirit, is capable of having sympathy with the deep things of God, although that God is infinitely above him; whileas none of the lower animals are capable, by the very nature of their creation, of having sympathy with the deep things of man, although man be not infinitely above them?

Inasmuch as a correct view of the words of our text is fitted, not only to expose the fallacy which is at the root of those unworthy notions concerning the constitution of human nature which are so rampant at the present hour, but also to expose the presently prevalent perverse views of the beginnings of the oracles of God – views which are so much akin with degrading conceptions of human nature – we shall take this opportunity, as we have already indicated the scope of the actual words of the text, of now indicating their connection with the Bible as a whole. The view that the section of the Bible, beginning with verse 4 of chapter 2 presents us with an account of the creation, which, in many respects, differs from the account of creation given in Genesis 1, we have seen to be based upon an interpretation of the word "generations," which, in this case, is an impossible one. With the destruction of the basis of the false theory, the theory itself is destroyed as a matter of course. If, then, the writer does not intend to give herewith a new and diverse account of creation, what is his aim? What plan is he pursuing? In order to answer that question we have to observe the purpose of

Moses in the opening introductory section of Genesis. His intention there is to state the doctrine of man, as the direct product of God's creation at its highest level. This he effects in two ways. (1) He represents mankind as the apex of God's work of creation on this earth. Starting from the inorganic material base, he lifts tier upon tier, the vegetable world, the irrational animate world, with its fish and fowl, its creeping things, its wild beasts of the earth and domestic animals, and finally, places mankind as the uppermost tier, as the summit of the whole. (2) He effects the same purpose, when he intimates to us that the project of the creation of man called forth the counsels and consultations of the Triune God, and that man thus consulted about appeared when created in the image of God, according to the likeness of God. But man, who was created in such an exalted condition, brought himself very low. And there can be no question that as it was the Writer's purpose in the introductory section to represent mankind to his readers at their highest level according to the scheme of creation, so it is his purpose in the first of these ten sections, which, together with the introduction, constitutes the whole of Genesis, to give a vivid and most profoundly interesting account of the fall of man, with its doleful consequences. Nay, the view point is still vaster. For we may well believe that sinners of mankind had not been favoured with Divine oracles, opening up so marvellously the dignity of our origin and the shame of our self-destruction, if it had not been the Divine purpose from these ruins to redeem man, to connect him with an order higher than the order of the natural creation at its highest apex, and thus exalt him to a state of exaltation to which he should never have been raised if he had not come in need of redemption, and if he had not been actually redeemed. Viewed in this light, the section beginning Genesis 2:4, appears as one of remarkable beauty, and as one the significance of which is extraordinary. It begins to dawn upon us why this section, the first objective of which is the Fall, and the further objective of which is Redemption, should make so much of the locality where man, under probation, was placed, of the inter-dependence and intimacy of relationship subsisting between Adam and Eve, and to come nearer to the words of our text, of the essential constituents of human nature, the dust of the earth and the breath of lives. The living soul, which is man, may thus be more easily understood by us as one whom death temporal or death eternal could never molest, did not death spiritual, in the form of sin, take the precedence.

The oracles of God make much of the transcendent worth of the human soul. We see that in Christ's own valuation of the life of man when He tells us that the whole material world would not counterbalance it. We see it in the several places in which the downward course of those who mind earthly things, whose glory is in their shame, whose God is their belly, whose end is destruction, is contrasted with the upward course of those whose affections are set on the things that are above, whose not-to-be-disappointed hope is, that when Christ shall appear the second time they shall be like Him, not only in spirit, but even in their very bodies. The lower animals are not capable of going down to the bottomless pit of self-destruction as mankind are capable, neither are the lower animals capable of rising to the third heavens as mankind are capable. Destruction as well as salvation throws a light upon the capabilities of human nature, and certainly if we should maintain the truth of the impassable gulf between mankind and the lower animals, we should need to measure the capacity of human nature by the difference which is between the lowest hell and the right hand of God. But upon this essential worth of the human soul the oracles of God laid emphasis from their very beginnings. That conception and feeling about man runs through the whole Scriptures, and it is a conception and feeling that has taken hold of the mind and heart of every true ambassador of God from the days of the Apostles down to the present day.

The Scriptures have much to say of the effects of sin both upon the soul and upon the body of man; they have much to say of the ways in which the effects and fruits of sin are seen in the soul and body even of the redeemed for a season, but all that the Scriptures have to say

of these matters would for us have but a confused meaning, if what the constitution of the nature of man amounts to were not clearly set before us at the outset. But this desideratum is exactly what our text supplies.

Man is a living soul, but he is that, not in the sense in which that is said of fish, fowl, and land animals, wild and tame; he is a living soul, which became so by the Lord God breathing the breath of life into the nostrils of that which had been formed from the dust of the ground. This living soul would therefore never again have been broken up into its elements of body and spirit, had not sin entered into the world, and death by sin. This view of the matter must be held by us, if we perceive the significance of the separation of soul and body which took place when Christ Himself died, and in dying bore the penalty of sin. Man is a living soul made up of spirit and body, and inasmuch as through sin these two elements are in death separated from one another, redemption takes to do with spirit and with body in turn, and with their both being finally brought together again in a union never to be put asunder.

If we do not get a glimpse of what man was intended to be as having fellowship with his Maker, we shall never be suitably affected by the awfulness of the ruin which we have brought upon ourselves. When we are suitably affected by the ruin which we brought upon ourselves, we are in a fitter frame of mind to appreciate that great salvation which, as we have said, is the further objective of Moses in opening this section, as he has done by giving this account, to which our attention is being drawn, of what constitutes human nature. When man fell there was no ray of hope as to a way of deliverance out of our misery. When the first ray of hope dawned upon us, it was like a thing taking an absolute beginning. In the history of redemption, there was never such a time again, never such an absolute beginning again. We find the tide of gracious life, to use a different metaphor, becoming very low, as before the flood and as at the time of the calling of Abraham, but through Noah and Abraham a new impulse was imparted to this tide of life, which, for the regeneration of sinners of mankind, was flowing down through the ages. In the bringing up of the children of Israel out of Egypt, it received an impulse greater than ever before in the history of the race, and in the coming death and resurrection of the Lord of Glory, it received an impulse which caused it to spread unto the ends of the earth, and caused that these glad tidings of salvation should be still with us. This is the only fact that prevents us from falling into despair when we realise what a high end it was for which we were created, and how deplorably we have fallen from this end. But if we be found embracing Christ in the Gospel as our Deliverer from despair, we shall wonder more at the kindness of God towards us than though we had never fallen. May He bless to us our meditation upon His Word!

[March 1910]

Notes of a Sermon.

By the late REV. DONALD MACDONALD, Shieldaig.

(Taken from his MS. and hitherto, unpublished.)

“The officers answered, Never man spake like this man” – John 7:46.

The enemies of Christ sent messengers on this occasion to apprehend Him. On their return, the chief priests and Pharisees put the question, “Why have ye not brought Him?” “The officers answered, Never man spake like this man.” It is evident that they were restrained that they could not touch Him until His hour would come. They were struck not only with the order and wisdom wherewith He spoke, shutting the mouths of His adversaries, but with the works done by Him in a miraculous manner. They observed that He had nothing to do but to speak, and the dead were restored to life. He healed all manner of diseases, cast out devils, and restored the dumb, the deaf, and the blind to their respective senses. They were struck also with awe at His holy appearance and language, and probably a divine restraint was exercised to keep them in check, so that it was not in their power to touch Him.

We shall observe some of the times at which Christ spoke, *both before and after* He came into the world.

1. He spoke as God before the world was created. He called into existence by His word a world of holy beings, such as angels, cherubim and seraphim, some of whom are in their order and rank higher, brighter, and more glorious than others, the same as exists among the Church in earth and in heaven. Yet they are perfectly happy in the rank in which God placed them at their creation. It appears that angels are the highest in rank of the various orders of created beings. Christ, as the eternal Son of God, spoke when He commanded these holy beings to be created and delighted in.

2. He spoke in the eternal counsels, when the scheme of Redemption was devised. God foresaw man’s fall, and made provision for the redemption of the elect, as Joseph made for the years of famine in Egypt to keep his brethren alive. Christ spoke then, and was filled with joy when the plan of redemption was delineated by divine wisdom, and spread out, as it were, in the council of peace, and God set Him apart as the Redeemer of His people. Then they entered into the covenant of grace. Christ spoke, when He acquiesced in all its conditions, and undertook most willingly to become man, and to suffer and die and perform every work implied therein. He spoke consenting to God’s

proposals and rejoicing at the prospect that His people would be redeemed, and that He would possess additional glory by becoming man and working out their redemption (Proverbs 8:30-31; Ephesians 1:18).

3. He spoke when the time of the world's creation came, according to the eternal decree. He was the Word by whom "all things were made" (John 1:3). It was the voice of the eternal God that was then heard accompanied with infinite wisdom and power, and as He stood at the womb of non-existence, the dawn of the visible world appeared. Every material object came forth in order, as it was previously arranged in the divine mind. On the first day the heavens and the earth were created, and the work of each day came forth in succession, until the great object for whom all these things were, was made, with more solemnity than anything else. The Three Persons assembled, and man was made in the divine image. The world was filled with all kinds of creatures useful to man – the heavens were garnished with lights, and the sea was filled with fishes – all showing forth the power and glory of God (Psalms 107:28, and 104:25-26). Nobles among men build castles, and make many improvements on their estates, not merely for their own comfort, but for the benefit of their heirs that they may possess all and be comfortable. So God created all things, not only for His own glory, but for the benefit of His Church who were to be His heirs, "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17).

4. He spoke in time. Christ spoke to the Church in the Old Dispensation, before He assumed human nature. He spoke to the patriarchs, to Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon and others with an audible voice. He assumed the appearance of a man, and spoke the language of man, and yet had not the tongue of man. He that made the tongue of man and put language into it, could easily speak without the aid of man's tongue. But there was a time coming when He was to speak with man's tongue in our nature.

Christ spoke when He came into the world. He spoke then, not only as man, but as the great God in human nature. He became "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," but His words were different from those of other men. His was the voice of the eternal God, accompanied with irresistible power and wisdom. A veil was drawn over His divine glory, so that He could associate with men. For the measure of infinite glory He displayed in heaven would have been intolerable to men on earth. Moses said to the Lord, "Show me thy glory," but the Lord said, "Thou, shalt see my back parts; but my face shall not be seen." A little of this glory was seen on the Mount of Transfiguration, and in the Isle of Patmos (Revelation 1:12-17).

At times the Lord Jesus laid aside the veil and spoke with double power. He spoke to the grave and to death, destroying their power, and restoring life to the dead. He spoke to devils, and they were obliged to leave their prey which they had in their possession, going to hell. He spoke to all kinds of bodily diseases and healed them – the deaf, the blind, and the lame. He spoke to them who had spiritual diseases, such as ignorance of God, unbelief, hardness of heart, and healed them who were wallowing in the mire of the carnal mind. He imparted salvation to the most notorious sinners that others guilty of the same sins should not lose hope of being saved – such as the Samaritan woman and Saul of Tarsus (1 Timothy 1:13).

Christ first speaks generally through the terrors of the law. "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." He speaks to man's reason, and awakens the sinner to a sense of his awful danger, and then imparts spiritual life. He opens up the memory and enumerates his sins, the most aggravated first. Then guilt fastens upon the conscience and God's fiery wrath goes over his head. Some souls in this condition continue long to view and mourn their misery. They carry *three burdens*, a burden of guilt, a burden of God's wrath, and a burden of fear of being lost (Psalm 116:3).

The Lord spoke to Elijah with the stormy wind which brake the rocks in pieces, but the Lord was not in it. He then spoke by the earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; “and after the earthquake, a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire” (1 Kings 19:11-12). So, He passes in His terrors of wrath through the soul, but does not speak as a God of comfort. Godly sorrow and repentance, however, go on in the soul.

When the soul is entirely lost in his own estimation, then God speaks after the storm, the earthquake and the fire of His wrath have abated, with “a still small voice,” in the promise, imparting all needed comforts. The power of the remission of sins is in that voice, and the virtue of the blood of Christ which extinguished the fire of His wrath, restores peace to the troubled conscience. The light of God’s face shines in the heart, giving the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Such souls behold that glory with their understanding, and embrace Christ and believe in Him. They behold Him in His death, meeting the demands of the law in their room and stead as their surety.

God in Christ continues to speak to them, like a father whose affections are yearning over them with love. A father frowns, and smiles, and gives. So does Christ. He frowns upon them when they go astray; He smiles upon them when they walk in the truth and keep His commandments. He speaks to them when cast down and deserted (John 14:1-3). They find themselves so filthy that they are wondering that He ever spoke to them. They are surprised that He continues to speak and to convey life to them, comforting them with His presence. Christ shall never give up supplying your wants and speaking comfort to you. Although all the angels in glory, and all His servants on earth would speak to me, they could not satisfy me without Christ. Still, when His servants speak, Christ often speaks through them.

5. Christ’s voice shall be heard at the judgment day. “All that are in the graves shall hear his voice” (John 5:28). He shall come in the clouds of heaven, and, as on Mount Sinai, fire shall go before him, to destroy the heavens and the earth. He shall sit on a great white throne, which shall not be fixed upon the earth, but set between heaven and earth (Revelation 20:11,12). He will not thus honour the world in which He was crucified, and which wicked men and devils have polluted. He shall be accompanied by a number of angels to minister to Him. All believers shall be with Him whose bodies have been mouldering in the dust. Then death and the grave shall hear His voice. They kept the human race under their power for ages, but Christ’s voice shall raise first all the bodies of the saints: neither death nor the grave can keep them. “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes” (Hosea 13:14). The bodies, that were useful in spreading the Gospel, shall rise, whose members were engaged in advancing His kingdom. The tongue, the feet, and the hands shall rise to partake of the enjoyments of glory. Their bodies were weak and diseased on earth, but they shall leave all their deformities in the grave. Being now holy and free from sin, the diseases that came in through sin shall go out with it. Their bodies shall be spiritual, refined by divine power out of the corrupt bodies that were buried in the grave. When you sow any seed, it is not the seed you sow that grows and bears fruit, but its substance. So their bodies shall be spiritual and glorious, like Christ’s (Philippians 3:21). As they were adapted for this world – to work, to eat, and to drink – so shall they be adapted to the nature of heaven. Their souls shall meet their glorious bodies at the grave, and shall enter into them. Both shall be happy to meet one another in such a holy and happy condition in Christ’s possession. Then they shall meet the Lord in the heavens. Their bodies shall be strong to bear the glory of eternity. Moses will not need to go to the rock to hide; John will not fall at His feet as dead. Being perfectly holy, they can bear the glory of the heavenly host. One of them could kill thousands, as the angel slew the army of the Assyrians. They shall be of a bright appearance, like a shroud of crystal on a mountain-top, when the sun shines upon it; its brightness shines all over. They will be a fit company for the exercises of heaven.

Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, shall shine in and upon them, and they shall shine as the stars for ever and ever (Daniel 12:3). Being heirs of God, they shall enjoy the inheritance after gaining a full victory over their enemies that caused them sighs and tears on earth. No dart from Satan, no blasphemous word from the world, no poison from sin, can ever molest them. They shall never mourn after Christ's face; He shall be the companion and joy of their hearts eternally. When they met Him first, their joy was inexpressible; that joy shall never abate. Their bodies and minds shall be fitted to worship Him eternally without weariness, and they shall feel no pain, no poverty, no fears of death. Christ, and what He has done for them, shall be the subject of their contemplations. Their obscure knowledge shall be made perfect, and they shall increase in their understanding of the scheme of redemption. All the mysteries in the Bible shall then be opened up to them; the Bible shall be in their hearts; and the reasons of their trials on earth shall be revealed.

In that day of the Lord, the heavens shall be on fire. The air between heaven and earth shall be in a flame, mingled with the smoke rising from the earth and the sea which shall be on fire (Revelation 6: 14,15). Every living thing on land and sea shall die, except man. The palaces, castles, and strong forts shall be on fire. All the cities with their ungodly citizens shall be terror-stricken and changed. All warehouses and banks shall be on fire. All the vessels in the seas shall be in flames, and all that were drowned in the ocean shall rise from the dead. The wicked everywhere shall rise from their graves, and shall find themselves between three fires – the fire of conscience, the fire of the wrath of the Judge, and the fire of the body. The fire in the conscience shall be most intense. Their memories will revive their sins, and this shall be most intolerable with Christ, the judge, frowning upon them. The justice of God in the exercise of infinite power shall drag their souls from hell, and cause them to re-enter their bodies, which shall curse one another for meeting. The soul will blame the body for being so active in sin, and the body will blame the soul for making it its slave to yield to its suggestions to sin, and to expose both to eternal torments. God shall make the bodies of the wicked like iron, to be able to bear the intensity of the fire of hell. Then they shall begin to weep and to pray to the mountains to fall upon them and to hide them from the face of the Lamb (Revelation 6:15-17).

The books shall be opened. The book of God's omniscience which contains a record of all things shall be opened; the book of man's memory and conscience shall be opened; and the book of Scripture, by which the hearts and lives of men shall be tried, shall be opened. (Revelation 20:11-15). The condition of the lost at the judgment seat shall be most awful – speechless and trembling before God, whose holy face frowns upon them, and looking at the devil at their side in whose possession and company they are to go to hell. Satan shall be condemned for all the evils he has done in dishonouring God and destroying so many of the human race, and in tempting the saints and persecuting them through the instrumentality of wicked men.

Christ as the glorious judge shall then speak and say to the righteous, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," while all the ungodly shall hear the final sentence from His mouth, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:34-41). All the saints shall also be judges, and shall put their Amen to the condemnation of the ungodly. It is likely there shall be degrees of suffering in hell according to degrees of guilt. Some sins are more heinous in the sight of God than others. Persecutors of God's people, and despisers of Christ in the gospel shall be subject to more torments than others who never heard of Christ, and shall have their portion with drunkards, murderers, adulterers, and all unclean persons in the place of woe. The treasures of God's wrath shall be let loose upon them in outer darkness, and the smoke of their torment shall ascend for ever and ever.

“Never man spake like this Man” in a past eternity or in the days of His flesh; no man speaks like Him now as He does by His Word and Spirit; and no man shall speak like Him at the great day of judgment.

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