

A Sermon.

By the REV. D. MACFARLANE, Dingwall.

Preached on Sabbath, 12th June, 1909.

(Taken down by a Hearer.)

“Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure: for this is all my salvation and all my desire, although he make it not to grow” – 2 Samuel 23:5.

We are told in the first verse of this chapter that these were the last words of David. He was now about to finish his course in the world, and we have the last words he spake kept on record. The last words of godly people will be remembered and repeated by their friends. In his last utterances we find David complaining, and drawing comfort from the word of God. He was complaining of his house, and looking to the everlasting covenant for consolation and support. He was complaining of his house: “Though my house be not so with God.” There were *four houses* of which David might complain.

First, his soul. – Though he was ripening for glory, yet he felt that he was not yet perfect. All within him was not so with God as he would desire. Sin still dwelt in him, and till he is completely delivered from sin in his nature, he must continue to complain. He began to complain for this reason when the Spirit of God convinced him of his sinfulness by nature and by practice, and from that time till now, on his death-bed, let us suppose, not a day passed without this man of God mourning that the house of his soul was not so with God as he would wish.

Secondly, his family. – We know that David’s family were not all on God’s side. His children were not all godly persons: some of them were very wicked, and this must have caused him much grief of heart and vexation of spirit. David was assured of his own salvation, but he could not but mourn to the last moment of his life for those of his family he was leaving behind him “without Christ, without hope, and without God in the world.”

Thirdly, the Church. – David identified himself with the cause of God in his day. The Church is God’s house, but it was David’s house also. He was interested in it, prayed and laboured for its prosperity, and felt concerned about it now drawing near his end. Although there were signs of prosperity, yet the Church was not so with God as he would like.

Fourthly, the kingdom. – Although David knew that his son, Solomon, was to succeed him on the throne, and that there would be much peace and prosperity during his reign, yet the kingdom as he was leaving it, was not so thoroughly on God’s side as he would desire.

These thoughts afflicted David and aggravated his last illness. He was suffering in mind and body, and pressed down because his house was not so with God. His bodily suffering was, in his estimation, we may believe, insignificant as compared with that. But in the midst of his complaint he remembered the covenant or rather, God brought the covenant before his view. We may imagine this saint laid on his death-bed, burdened in body with his last illness, depressed in soul on account of the state of his *house*, that he could not raise his head from the pillow, but when he remembered the covenant he sat up in bed with a beaming face, so that his friends around him asked, “What do you mean, David? We thought every moment would be your last in the land of the living.” “I mean,” says David, “to speak my last words. I mean to preach to you before I leave you.” “What is your text?” “My text is the everlasting covenant,” – the greatest of all themes. When he remembered the covenant he ceased to complain and began to preach. “He preached as a dying man to dying men,” as Baxter, who was in delicate health all his lifetime, used to say. Now, we are to consider for a little David’s

text and his sermon. We have both before us in this portion of God's Word. His sermon, though brief, is comprehensive; it is short, but rich in matter. Let us notice: –

- I. – The covenant spoken of.
- II. – The parties to this covenant.
- III. – The conditions of the covenant.
- IV. – The blessings of the covenant; and
- V. – David's satisfaction with the covenant.

I. – The *covenant*, – What is the covenant? There are two covenants spoken of in Scripture, which God made relative to mankind – the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Although the covenant of works comes first in respect of revelation, yet the covenant of grace was made long before it; it was made from all eternity.

(1) It is a covenant of grace; it is grace from first to last, grace all through. It originated in God's good pleasure and love; its blessings are freely given "without money and without price" to guilty sinners. "By grace are ye saved." Every mention that is made of this covenant in the Word of God speaks of it as a covenant of grace. Some understand this covenant, of which David speaks, as that made with himself concerning the kingdom and the perpetuity of the throne in his line. God, indeed, did make such a covenant as that with David, but this is a different covenant. That was not a covenant of salvation, but this one is, for David says of it: "This is all my salvation." It was therefore the grand source of comfort to him in his dying hour. The covenant of royalty was confined to a certain tribe, and it came to an end, but this covenant embraces "a great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues."

(2) It is an everlasting covenant. The covenant of works was made in time and ended in time, but this covenant was made from all eternity, and it shall never come to an end; it lasts for ever.

(3) It is ordered in all things. A Mediator was appointed in it, set up from everlasting; the children of the covenant were set apart, and given to Christ to redeem them; it was arranged that each of the Persons of the glorious Trinity should have His own peculiar share in their salvation, and that all things – grace and providence – should work together for their good; the means of salvation were appointed, and the instruments of the conversion and edification of the redeemed were set apart. Withal, it was so well ordered that sinners would be saved in a way consistent with divine justice, and that God would be glorified in their salvation.

(4) It is *sure*. The covenant of grace is sure, strong, steadfast, unchangeable, and may be depended upon. It is ratified by the law of heaven; it is confirmed by the blood of the Mediator. Its promises are sure; its blessings are sure; everything in it is sure. Grace is sure and glory is sure, so that the heirs of the covenant may be as sure of going to heaven as if they were already there. They often doubt this themselves, but this arises from their own infirmity and not from the covenant. There are many doubts in their heart, but there is no doubt in the covenant.

II. – The *parties* to the covenant. – In any covenant there must be two parties. One individual is sufficient to make a vow, but in a covenant there must be at least two persons. In the covenant of works there were two parties – God and man. But in the covenant of grace the parties are God the Father and God the Son. This makes the covenant sure. The covenant of works failed on the part of man, who was one of the parties to it. It did not fail on God's part – it stood firm on His part; and although man lost his ability to obey God, God did not lose His right to demand obedience, or to punish the transgressors. But this covenant shall never fail, seeing that the contracting parties are the Father and the Son. The salvation of the Church is not left doubtful; it is made secure in an everlasting covenant between God the

Father and God the Son. It does not rest on an arm of flesh, but on the arm of Him who is mighty to save. When we consider that this covenant was made before the foundation of the world – before the creation of men or angels – it will be seen that no creature could be head thereof. It is important to observe this that we may see that salvation is of the Lord and not of ourselves in the least degree. When David says that the covenant was made with him, we are not to think that he meant by that that he was a party to the covenant, or a head thereof. He is indeed spoken of in Scripture as a type of Christ, but here he speaks as the mouthpiece of the Church. The covenant was made with the Church in her covenant head, Christ. If any mere man were head thereof it would fail, like the covenant of works, and no sinner could be saved in virtue of it. But the salvation of the Church was not left to rest on such an unstable foundation as that: the Father laid help upon One that is mighty – His own co-equal. This much on the parties to the covenant.

III. – The *conditions* of the covenant. – In every covenant there are conditions attached to it. In the covenant of works there was a condition. “When God had created man, he entered into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of perfect obedience.” *Perfect obedience* was the condition on which man was to enjoy life. The promise of life was suspended upon the fulfilling of the condition. Man failed to fulfil the condition, and thereby forfeited God’s favour and made himself liable to death, the wages of sin. Now, in order that those whom God elected from all eternity to everlasting life, might be delivered out of the estate of sin and misery and brought into an estate of salvation, He entered into a covenant of grace with His Son, Jesus Christ, the second Adam. There were certain conditions which must be fulfilled in order that those so elected might be delivered from the state of sin and misery into which the breaking of the covenant of works brought them, and that they might be brought into an estate of salvation. These conditions they could not fulfil themselves, but God provided a substitute for them in the Person of His only begotten Son. For this reason, among others, it is a covenant of grace. He was under no obligation to make provision for the salvation of any of our fallen race, but He did it out of His own good pleasure and sovereign will. In this covenant Christ willingly undertook to fulfil the solemn conditions required. What were these conditions? There were two things in them – first, perfect obedience to the precept of the law, which mankind failed to perform; second, perfect satisfaction to justice for the transgression of the law. In order that the Son of God might fulfil these obligations, under which He, of His grace, came, it was necessary that He should come under the law, and in order that He should come under the law He takes to Himself human nature, for as God He is above the law; it is only creatures – reasonable creatures – that are under the moral law. It is as God-man – “the word made flesh” – that He begins to fulfil the conditions of the covenant. That which is a covenant of grace to His people was a covenant of works and sufferings to Him. He is made under the law, not as the first man was when God created him. So long as man continued in the state of innocency, the law had nothing for him but blessings; but having broken the law, it at once began to curse him and all his posterity, for whom he stood as covenant-head. “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them,” was the awful but just language of the law against them. It was under the law in this awful aspect Christ was made. O what love and grace that prompted Him to come under the curse of the law! Adam and his posterity came under the curse of the law for their own sins, but Christ came under it for the sins of others. He took the place of His people under the broken law, and rendered perfect obedience to the precept of the law, and perfect satisfaction for the transgression of it. This He did by His obedience unto death. Their sins were imputed to Him by the Father as Judge, and the punishment of their sins was laid upon Him. He thus fulfilled the conditions of the covenant so completely that He left nothing of these conditions for His people to perform. He cried on the Cross, “It is finished.” The law was satisfied; the Father was glorified; and His sinful people were redeemed from the curse of the law, He

being made a curse for them. “This is the doing of the Lord, and wondrous in our eyes.” “Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

IV. – The *blessings* of the covenant. – Christ satisfied God’s law for the sins of His people, so that in the eyes of the law God has nothing against them. Christ made an end of their sins; nothing more is required of them to atone for their sins. They shall not perish for any sin they have committed. God is for ever satisfied with Christ’s atonement on their behalf. But He did more than this. He merited blessings for them. These blessings were stored up in the covenant of grace. But the door of this covenant was shut, so that no blessing contained in it could be dispensed to sinners till Christ opened the door by His death. If sinners received out of the fulness of the covenant – as they certainly did – before Christ died, it was in connection with blood which typified His death. It is important to observe this, that we may see that it is on the ground of Christ’s meritorious death, and that alone, the blessings of the covenant can be communicated to sinners. Christ’s death is the only death that merits salvation. But what are the blessings of the covenant of grace? The blessings which God bestowed upon us in our original creation, and which we lost by sin, are included in it. He created us in His own image – in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, and we had God Himself as our portion. Unspeakably great were the blessings we had. But we lost all that by sin. Nothing is ours now in our fallen state but sin and misery for time and eternity! But Christ restored that which He took not away. This is our remedy, our hope. In the covenant of grace, there is a gracious provision made, whereby our loss may be made up, and more than made up, on account of the price by which the blessings were secured – the price of the meritorious death of Christ. The blessings of the covenant are presented to us in Scripture, first in the form of promises, and then as actually bestowed on the heirs of the promise. These promises are absolute, without any condition annexed to them. They shall therefore be fulfilled without fail. These blessings are given by the Father to Christ, who fulfilled the conditions of the covenant to be through Him as the one Mediator conferred on undeserving sinners. “Ask of me,” the Father says to Christ, “and I will give thee.” “Christ ascended upon high, and received gifts for men, even the rebellious.” No blessing of the covenant shall be imparted to sinners but through the mediation of Christ. This honour the Father put upon Him because of the work which He finished, whereby He glorified the Father and redeemed His Church; and the blessing is doubly sweet and precious coming to hell-deserving sinners from the liberal hands which were nailed to the cursed tree when securing it. As Joseph in Egypt was appointed steward of the provision, which he was the means of preparing in view of the famine, so that none received of that provision but as he was pleased to give, so Jesus Christ was appointed by the Father steward of the provision of the covenant of grace, so that no sinner or saint shall receive of that gracious provision but as He gives. This He told the Jews (John 6:27), and this He tells us in the Scriptures. He merited salvation for His covenant people, and He makes them partakers of His salvation by the agency of the Holy Spirit and by means of His Word. They are effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and ultimately glorified, according to the arrangement of the covenant of grace. The blessings of the covenant include God Himself, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. With all other blessings, God promised to be their God, their portion. “I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people” (Hebrews 8:10). The Father is theirs; the Son is theirs; and the Holy Spirit is theirs. This is the crown of their bliss. What more do they need or desire?

V. – David’s satisfaction with the covenant. “This is all my salvation and all my desire.” – He was not satisfied with himself, but he was satisfied with the covenant. From the day on which God convinced him of his sinfulness till now on the brink of eternity, he had reasons to complain of himself; but from the time in which God revealed to him the covenant of grace

and salvation till now on his death-bed, he was perfectly satisfied with the covenant. The covenant was the ground of his hope, and the source of his comfort beginning his pilgrimage towards the heavenly city; whose builder and maker is God; it was his support in every step hitherto, and now, when he is about to finish his course on earth, his hope rests on it, and on it alone. He did many good works, but he makes no mention of these, but he makes mention of the covenant. He sees in the covenant all he needs to make him meet for the inheritance of saints in light, and all he is capable of receiving of the blessings of glory throughout eternity. Looking at it with eyes which look at the things which are not seen, he says, "This is all my salvation, and all my desire." There is nothing in it that he would have out of it, and there is nothing out of it he would have in it. It is perfect as a covenant contrived by infinite wisdom, designed for the salvation of lost sinners in a way consistent with divine justice, as well as with love and mercy, and giving all the glory of salvation to the Triune God. To acquiesce thus in the covenant is faith. If this covenant is all your salvation and all your desire, it is yours. In saving faith, there is the assent of the understanding enlightened by the Spirit, and the consent of the will renewed by the Spirit. All God's people in all ages and places are of the same mind with David about the covenant of grace. They close with it as it is proposed to them in the Word of the Gospel; they see in it all they need to be saved and to be made happy for ever; all their hope is placed in it, and they say, "This is all my salvation and all my desire." But sinners in their natural state are of quite a different mind about it. They quarrel with the covenant, they find fault with it, and they think they would make a better covenant of salvation themselves than God made. They are too good to need the blood of the covenant, and too rich to need the grace of the covenant. But this is the only way God, in His infinite wisdom, devised for the salvation of sinners of the human race, and those who will not be saved in God's way must perish for ever.

In conclusion, I shall make a few remarks by way of illustration in regard to the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace. The covenant of works may be compared to a bank which was at one time rich in money, but failed, and there is nothing in it now to help a needy person. Adam squandered all the riches that were entrusted to him, became a bankrupt, and entailed poverty, heavy debt, shame, and liability to punishment on his posterity. The bank was closed and locked, and a public notice was written on the door in these words, "By the deeds of the law no flesh shall be justified in God's sight." This notice was intended to warn people who needed money against going for it to a bank where not even a farthing could be found, though it were searched through. But notwithstanding this public notice, posted on the door by the authority of Heaven, Adam's posterity from generation to generation run to this empty bank every time they feel need of money either to buy food to feed them and clothes to cover their nakedness, or to pay their debt. Not only that they are naturally disposed to go to this bank to get their needs supplied, but they are told by agents that Satan set up that there is abundance of money in the bank to supply their needs. These agents have prepared counterfeit money, and spurious bank notes, which they readily give to their customers, who have to pay exorbitant interest. The Apostle Paul dealt with this bank till he discovered by the teaching of God's Spirit that there was no money in it, and so did all God's people during the days and years of their ignorance. But when they were taught of God, they withdrew their custom, and they would advise their fellow-sinners to do the same. They withdrew their custom when they found out that there was another bank full of the purest gold, and of unsearchable riches; and that bank is the covenant of grace of which we have been speaking. The banker of the covenant of works was the first Adam, and he failed; the banker of the covenant of grace is the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall never fail. He has wealth in His bank which is incalculable, unsearchable, and inexhaustible. He invites the poor and the needy to come as they are, sinful and unworthy, to receive according to their needs, of His riches, which cost Him His humiliation unto death. He gives freely, liberally, and He

upbraideth not; He will not cast up to them the evil they had done against Him; the only security He requires of them is to plead the merit of His name. "If ye ask anything in my name, I will do it." He will not give as much as one penny in their own name, or in the name of the greatest saint in heaven or on earth. He Himself is worthy as the Lamb that was slain. He gives freely on the ground of His own atoning sacrifice. He charges no interest, and if the recipients render Him praise and service it is not in the way of payment for what they received, but rather as the spontaneous outward action of His grace in them under a sense of the unspeakable obligations under which He laid them. Their continued sense of unworthiness preserves them from thinking that they merit anything. They always come to His door as the chief of sinners, encouraged to approach Him only on the terms of the covenant of grace – to receive of its provision "without money, and without price."

The bank notes Christ has are the promises of the Gospel. You know that a bank note is a promissory note. It is not real money, but if you go to the bank with it, you will get real money or cash for it to the amount stated in the paper note. In order to this there must be in the bank a sufficient amount of cash to meet the demand. Accordingly, there is in the covenant of grace all blessings for the fulfilling of the promises, numerous as these are. There is a promise in the Gospel to suit the case of the greatest sinner that seeks to be saved, and to suit every case in which the believer may be, however desperate in his own view, and there is an all-sufficiency in the covenant for the fulfilling of the promise. Therefore, "Take with you words," – the promises – "and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips" (Hosea 14:2). Go to Christ's bank with the promises, and He will cash them or fulfil them to you. He will give you the blessing promised – the very blessing you need.

Another thing I wish to point out on the subject before I close is this: You will find that there are several branches or sub-offices connected with a bank. These are opened and stationed in suitable districts throughout the country for the convenience of customers. This is also true of the covenant of grace. It has many such branches. There was a time when there was only one Bank, stationed on Mount Sion, and it was comparatively few of the people of the world that received out of its treasure. But when Christ broke down the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles, He opened branches among the poor Gentiles. He established sub-offices in the kingdoms of Europe: and at the present day there are branches of this Bank in almost all parts of the world. But that we may not forget our own great privilege, let us remember that He opened branches in Scotland and in the Highlands of Scotland. He opened a branch in Dingwall long before we were born; and the wonder is that after all our provocations, it is still kept open! Let us appreciate our unspeakable privilege; let us be humble and thankful, and beware lest we provoke the Lord to shut it. But He is merciful and long-suffering, and He will not shut it as long as there are customers. We have a few of these in our midst yet. May the Lord add to their number from among the rising generation!

There are agents in all the branches connected with the chief office, to transact business with customers. Christ has His agents too. Who are these? They are the ministers of the Gospel, whom He Himself trained for the business and appointed to their office. No wise Banking Company will employ agents that never learned the business. Christ, who is all-wise and the fountain of all wisdom, will not do so. He takes care that all His agents are taught of Himself, and that they know their business before He puts them into such a responsible situation. They are customers – needy customers – as well as agents. But, alas! there are thousands, and tens of thousands, of professing agents who crept into the office without Christ's authority. These revolutionised the sacred institution. They cast out the treasures of the covenant as obsolete, and substituted instead bank notes and coins of their own manufacture; and the reason assigned is that in this twentieth century they get more customers by the change. There is no great demand for the treasures of the covenant of grace.

That is a bad sign of our times. But the customers shall find out at death that they were cheated. The Lord's people will have no dealing with these agents; they will adhere to the covenant of grace, receive out of its fulness, and speak of it as David did – "This is all my salvation and all my desire." They shall praise the Lord in time and throughout eternity for making such a gracious provision for their salvation, and for making them partakers of its blessings in some measure in this world, and for the hope He has given them of participating in its inexhaustible blessings more abundantly in the world to come. "Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men." Amen.
[November 1910]

A Sermon.

By the REV. D. BEATON, Wick.

"Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints" – Jude 3.

In these words Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, announces to his readers his design in writing this epistle. He informs them that it had been his intention to write to them about the common salvation, but owing to the presence of certain men who had crept in unawares, who were turning the grace of God into lasciviousness and denying the only Lord God and the

Lord Jesus Christ, he found it necessary to exhort them specially to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. And in addressing the believers, who are described as sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called, he recalls certain well-known facts that bring out the great necessity of not only beginning well but also of ending well. Israel were delivered out of Egypt, but they were afterwards destroyed because they believed not. The fallen angels began well, but they kept not their first estate, and as a consequence they are now reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day. Proceeding on these lines, Jude, in language of special solemnity, warns his readers to be on their guard against the devices of the enemies of God's truth. Their attitude, however, is not to be merely defensive; they are called upon to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints.

In considering these words let us notice: –

- I. – The exhortation.
- II. – The manner in which they are to contend.
- III. – The matter for which they are to contend.

I. – *The exhortation.*

They are called upon, in the interests of the common salvation, to *contend* earnestly for its preservation. God's people are not to be indifferent to the priceless treasure that has been committed to them. For while, in one sense, it may be said that the maintenance of God's truth in the world is quite independent of men, yet it reveals a spirit of exceptional callousness in any professed follower of Jesus Christ, to stand idly by and see the precious treasure, graciously bestowed upon him and others, stolen away, and never an effort on his part made to retain it or defend it from such thieves. Not so was the spirit of the Psalmist, who felt the force of God's commandment, and whose desire was that children yet unborn should be partakers of like blessings which he had received. Not so was the spirit of the Apostle Paul, who, in giving advice to Timothy, says, "O, Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust." An effort – an *earnest* effort – is to be made by every follower of Jesus Christ to maintain and defend the faith that was once delivered to the saints. All natural aversion to controversy is to be laid aside, and while mere pugnacity – having its origin in a corrupt nature – is to be carefully guarded against, there is set before every believer the soldier's task and the soldier's reward. Some natures may, from their natural bent, shrink from the ordeal, and endeavour to ease their conscience by reminding it that Christ Himself has said that those who use the sword shall perish by the sword. It is to be remembered, however, that apart altogether from the misapplication of Christ's words in such a connection, it should not be forgotten that He said on another occasion that those who had not a sword were to sell all and buy one. The sword, in its own time and in its own place, is absolutely necessary in this conflict. And it is unkind and cruel to attribute to true soldiers of Jesus Christ, who are standing in the front line of battle, a spirit of mere natural pugnacity, when their zeal and earnestness may be traceable to the fact that their ears are more sensitive to the commands of the Captain of their salvation and their vision keener than that of their fellow-believers. At the same time too much stress cannot be laid on the fact that our weapons in this conflict are not carnal. No amount of carnal zeal and carnal activity will make up for the essential qualification of success in this conflict. The whole training must begin with God, and the whole equipment must be His, if there is to be any victory.

(1) *The whole training must begin with God.* – This battle is not ours but God's, and He has not called anyone to contend for His truth without giving the necessary preparation. The Psalmist fully recognised that it was God who taught his hands to war and his fingers to fight (Psalm 144:1). And it was because of this and the further fact that He had given him the shield of salvation and held him up by His right hand, that He had made him great. Much

may be done, and is done, in connection with Christ's cause in the world, with a zeal and earnestness that seem to point to genuine interest in that cause, that does not bear the test even of time itself. The enthusiasm having an earthly origin has an earthly end, and the burning flame, kindled by an ardent zeal, leaves no trace of its existence, except it may be some ashes, to remind one of how vehemently the fire burned. Such cases are by no means uncommon, and one has only to take a survey of the field covered by one's own limited experience to take home with a new meaning – "Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall." But for the army of the living God every one is a chosen man, as in Gideon's army, and he enters into the conflict with some sense of the true inwardness of the struggle; and, trained by God Himself, he shall come through it all more than a conqueror.

(2) *The whole equipment comes from God.* – The conflict that confronts the Christian is not one over which he can afford to affect indifference. There are abundant evidences to remind him that the enemy is powerful, persistent, and vigilant. That his modes of attack are subtle, is again and again brought home to the believer. The Church of Christ is a strong citadel, against which the gates of hell can never prevail. "It is an anvil," said Beza, "which has broken many a hammer." But the attacks of the enemy have been determined and varied. His policy to begin with was to crush the infant Church by the pagan power of Rome, but failing in this – though he so wrought in the hearts of men to invent forms of death for the early Christians that the mere reading of their sufferings makes the blood run cold – he resorted to his great master-policy of using the professing Church of Christ in the world for the accomplishment of his wicked designs. His success in this direction is seen to perfection in the Church of Rome, and in a more or less degree in the flood of worldliness with which he is filling so many of the Protestant churches in modern times. Confronted with such a subtle enemy and the consciousness of the great army that is arrayed against them, the believer may well say with Jehosaphat: "O, our God, wilt not thou judge them? For we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee." And God's answer is given plainly in His Word: – "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." We are not at liberty to refuse the armour or to make choice of any particular part of it. Each piece is necessary, being specially mentioned by the Holy Spirit, and for the conflict we are to take the whole armour of God.

(a) *The loins are to be girt about with truth.* – The girding of the loins is a common figure of speech in Scripture, indicative of preparation for action. The long, loose garment, so likely to prove an impediment, is gathered together by the girdle. In the believer's case the girdle is truth. The soldier of Christ must have this part of the armour. However able and zealous he may be – however powerful his attack on the enemy's position may appear – it is strength spent in vain if he be not equipped with truth. With this, standing alone, he is stronger than the man who is without it, though receiving the applause of thousands. Luther, at the Diet of Worms, apparently so utterly alone and helpless when he uttered his heroic words, "I can do nothing more, so help me, God," is a striking illustration of one whose loins were girt with truth. No amount of zeal or activity can atone for the lack of the truth. If we have it not, all our contending is but vexation of spirit. It is more than the world can know for a believer to be able to say with Ralph Erskine, "I had a good God, a good cause, and a good conscience." It is something to be able to say *that* in reviewing a life spent in contending for the faith once delivered to the saints.

(b) *Breastplate of righteousness.* – The breastplate was armour protecting the heart, and in order that the heart may not be influenced in the wrong direction, the believer is to be equipped with the breastplate of *righteousness*. Righteousness may be here used in the general sense of integrity, honesty, uprightness, or in the sense of Christ's imputed righteousness. In both senses it is necessary that the soldier should have such a breastplate. A

double-hearted man is a poor soldier at best, and in Christ's army it is treachery to the great Captain of salvation to be serving under His banner and holding converse with the enemy. Loyalty to Christ demands that in this conflict we should be single-minded, honest, and upright. The world's cunning and diplomacy is not allowable here. But if the believer needs such armour, he is no less in need of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. The Scriptures present us with one striking illustration of Satan's policy in weakening the hands of one who was doing a work for God. Joshua, the high priest, clothed in filthy garments, had very little outward evidence of being suitably equipped for such holy work as God had called him to, and Satan is not slow to make use of his opportunity to discourage him. Joshua's vindication is found not in his own spotless character, but in the choice of Him who said, "Is not this a brand plucked from the burning?" In modern warfare heavy guns are used not only for destructive purposes but for demoralising the opposing army. The shattered nerves of an army into whose ranks these guns have been pouring their shells, render the soldiers ill-prepared to meet the attack when it is made. Such tactics were well-known to Satan of old, and his method is to keep the soldiers engaged in this holy war looking to themselves, and asking them, "Do you think God would have ever employed such an unholy man as you in His warfare?" It was with such a question he came to John Knox when he was engaged in the great and noble work of the Reformation in Scotland; but when the Reformer lay dying Satan changed his tactics by saying, "If ever a man got into heaven for his good works, you're the man: look at the great work you have done in Scotland." In such times as these happy is the man that can turn away from himself, with all the evidences of his sinfulness, and by faith realise that God seeth no iniquity in His Jacob nor perverseness in His Israel. Christ's righteousness, imputed and received by faith – how strengthening it is in the day of battle!

(c) *Feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace.* – The figure is that of a soldier preparing himself for the battle by binding under his feet the military sandals. The feet are to be shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace. Without this peace of God in the heart the conflict is a heartless effort, if effort there be. One destitute of this peace has been compared to an unshod soldier, the painfulness and difficulty of whose movements occupying his attention and taking his mind off the conflict, which should have his undivided attention. This Gospel of peace is a preparation for the believer as he goes into the battle. In this Gospel there is revealed the peace of God which passeth all understanding, and the Apostle Paul, realising its supreme value, told the Philippians that it would keep their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

(d) *The shield of faith:* – *Above all*, taking the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. The parts of the armour already mentioned covered only parts of the body, but the shield is meant to cover it all. Its express function, as particularised by the Apostle, is the quenching of the fiery darts of the wicked. The figure employed is full of meaning; in the days of old it was customary to dip the arrows in some inflammable material, and, setting them on fire, shoot them into the ranks of the opposing force. One can imagine what confusion such a mode of warfare would introduce into the ranks. After all, it is a very apt illustration of the effect produced by the fiery darts of Satan and his numberless emissaries. To throw the ranks into confusion, especially at a critical moment, is his great design, and how often has he been successful! To obviate such a state of things, faith has been given as a shield, and the work of faith is to direct the thoughts and affections of the believer to the things which are unseen and eternal. In the time of confusion, and in the midst of every evil work, it can take, and has taken, the believer above the circumstances that surround him. *Above all*, take this shield, says the Apostle, for without faith the conflict for the cause of truth cannot be carried on.

(e) *The helmet of salvation.* – The helmet protects that part of the body upon which a blow would be likely to prove mortal, so, it has been well said, does the possession of

salvation – the recognition of the fulness of Christ’s redemption – afford a sure protection against the blows aimed with deadly intent by our spiritual foe. And may there not be here a clear indication that our main protection in this part lies not in any special wisdom of our own, but in the wisdom of God revealed in His salvation?

(f) *The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.* – This is the only weapon mentioned in the equipment. It is to be used for attacking and defending. We are not at liberty to use any sword we please in this conflict for truth. The sword of the Spirit – the Word of God – is alone to be used. And since we are limited to this weapon, the thought naturally arises – what are its characteristics? It is sharper than any two-edged sword; it is living and powerful; it is a discerner of the thoughts and the intents of the heart. Before it the proudest enemies have yielded. It has read the thoughts of millions of hearts, and taught them to look to that God against whom they were fighting. The believer has also the assurance that it is a perfect weapon. Christ pointed to no flaw in it; nay, on the contrary, He used it in His own great conflict with Satan. Should our faith be shaken in the trustworthiness of this weapon, we go into this conflict without confidence. And if the professing churches in this country are to carry on the conflict to a successful issue against the world, the flesh, and the devil, and the superstitions of Rome, there must be a wholehearted return to the Bible as the sword of the Spirit. Equipped thus with the whole armour of God, praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints, the believer is to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints. Notwithstanding his full equipment, he is never to lose sight of his entire dependence on God, hence the need of praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit. So prepared and so equipped, he is called upon to fight the good fight of faith, to contend earnestly for the cause of Jesus Christ in the world. Such, in the merest outline, is the nature of the equipment God has prepared for His people. No attempt is made to enter with anything like fulness into a description of the armour, but the main thing for the Lord’s professing people is to lay to heart that, when they are called to contend earnestly for the faith, they are called to put on the whole armour of God, so that they may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand.

II. – *The manner in which they are to contend.*

Contend *earnestly* is the exhortation. Now, it is evident that all who will carry out this injunction must be *living*. However necessary the graveyard may be, it is not the place to which any sane man will go who is in search of men to work for him. However pressing and necessary the work may be, no one ever thinks of going to the thousands lying in their graves in the hope of having it accomplished. And in the things of heaven, the living alone will contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints. We are left in no manner of doubt that it is such who are addressed in this epistle – those who are sanctified by God the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ. They are a people in whom the good work has been begun by God Himself. The sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, so indispensable to progress in the Christian life, is being carried on in their hearts, and He who hath begun it hath given the assurance that it will be carried on until the day of Jesus Christ. There is the possibility that the word “sanctify” here is used in its less familiar sense of setting apart to the service of God. The people to whom Jude writes are set apart to serve God in the world, and they are further described as preserved in Christ Jesus. Such, and such alone, will contend earnestly for the faith. The manner in which believers are called to contend excludes two classes at least – (1) those who are asleep; (2) those who are dead.

(1) *Those who are asleep.* – The state of those who are asleep may not be so hopeless, from a human standpoint, as those who are dead, but for all practical purposes, as far as the conflict is concerned, there is very little difference. An army, however powerful it may be – however well equipped – if attacked when all are asleep, is in an extremely critical position.

Looking abroad over the religious world of to-day, one cannot but feel the deepest concern at the tremendous apathy revealing itself on all hands, as far as the things of Christ are concerned. The lack of interest and enthusiasm among the professed followers of Jesus Christ, in contending for the faith, is one of the most fateful signs of the times. This is seen also in the half-hearted Protestantism of this so-called Protestant nation. Our leading statesmen may inform us that the Protestantism of this nation is too strong to fear the inroads of Rome, but they speak as men under delusion. The professing Church and the nation must be awakened out of this sleep if they are actually to see the enemy confronting them. There is no use speaking in low tones to men who are asleep, telling them of their danger. It is necessary to arouse them out of that sleep, and with their eyes open they will then see the danger for themselves. Our present condition in Church and State requires something mightier than man's power to work a remedy, and unless the Lord sends His Spirit from on high, our case will be lamentable indeed.

(2) *Those who are dead* in the very nature of things cannot contend earnestly for the faith. They have no living interest in this conflict; of old, men were employed for payment to fight for other nations. They were not fighting for home and hearth, and had only a mercenary interest in the struggle. But in Christ's army there are no mercenaries – they are living men and women in whose hearts the Eternal Spirit is working. They have, as it were, a personal interest in the issues of the conflict. And realising that it is carried on in God's name and for God's glory, it has a significance of transcendent interest for them.

III. – *The matter for which they are to contend.*

It is to be carefully observed that the great matter for which they are to contend is the *faith once delivered unto the saints*. Its importance is emphasised by the fact that it was delivered to the saints. This faith, which, broadly speaking, may be understood as the common salvation to which Jude refers in the same verse, was not the outcome of man's devising; it came from heaven. And coming as a gift, it is to be highly prized. It is for no man's honour that the conflict is to be carried on. There can be little doubt that in religious controversy there is always the lurking danger that the honour of some individual or individuals should bulk much more largely than the vital interests of Christ's truth. Such a state of matters is deeply to be deplored, and it is indicative of a very unhealthy state of religion. The mere ambition to make a name is another hateful form manifesting itself in religious controversy. It is not to make a name for themselves that the true followers of Jesus Christ carry on the warfare in His name. The faith once delivered to the saints is the vital matter to them. It is something worth losing their reputation for; it is something worth losing their life for. And in our own land we are not wanting in instances of men, women, and even children, who held not their lives dear to them for the testimony of Jesus Christ. Then, again, it is not for the doctrines or opinions of men we are called upon to contend. These men may be highly esteemed and occupy high positions among their fellows, and their words may carry great weight, but in this great conflict it is the faith once delivered to the saints that must have first place. Recently in this country we had a striking illustration of so-called Protestants pleading earnestly for the servants of the Pope. If one may say so, they seemed to read the exhortation as if it ran: – “Contend earnestly for the Church of Rome.” If there was half the enthusiasm manifested by our Members of Parliament on the side of Protestantism as there was on the side of Roman Catholicism, its votaries would not dare to trouble the House of Commons with Roman Catholic Disabilities Bills. It ought to fill us with the deepest concern and grief that the legislators of our country were so far left to themselves as to blot out from the statute book of this realm the Royal Declaration, repudiating the doctrines of transubstantiation, the sacrifice of the Mass, and the invocation of the Virgin, and declaring them to be superstitious and idolatrous. These doctrines are blasphemous and dishonouring to God and His Christ, and it was something that the most exalted person in this nation, at a

supremely solemn hour of his life, should make this national confession that he regarded these doctrines as superstitious and idolatrous. That testimony shall no more be heard uttered by our Kings, unless God, in His providence, ordain a way whereby the repudiation of these doctrines be restored to the Royal Declaration. The teaching of the Church of Rome runs directly in the very teeth of the faith once delivered to the saints.

That faith is clearly set forth in the Scriptures. It tells of man's ruin, utter and hopeless as far as the help of his fellow-men is concerned. In it there is made known the glad tidings that Christ Jesus came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost. It asks no impossible thing from man. He is not to ascend to heaven nor to descend to the deep, for the Word is nigh, even the truth declared in the gospel. And the Lord has made known in His word that His spirit shall instruct the sinner. All things have been provided. For the salvation of Jesus Christ is not a mighty, but after all, only a partial remedy. It is a remedy that never fails when applied. It was the realisation that this was God's remedy, fully capable of meeting the most desperate cases, that filled the hearts of the preachers of the cross with courage to declare it to Jew and Gentile. For He who made the provision knew the depths to which human beings were capable of sinking, He knew the varied needs of perishing sinners and made provision adequate to meet all their necessities. To darken this glorious gospel by human additions is a disastrous undertaking, fraught with danger to the souls of multitudes of men and women. The more one realises the wonders of the gospel of the grace of God the more will one desire at all costs that this glorious message be handed on to coming generations. It is the one hope for the salvation of sinners. Hence the imperative need of contending earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints.

[December 1910]

A Sermon.

By the REV. ALEXANDER MACRAE, Portree,
Retiring Moderator of Synod.

Preached in St. Jude's Hall, Glasgow, on 15th November, 1910.

“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place except thou repent” – Revelation 2:4,5.

The Apostle John was well stricken in years when the mysteries recorded in the Apocalypse were revealed to him. He was banished to the Isle of Patmos for the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. It is supposed that he was subjected to these sufferings during the persecution that raged against the Christians under the reign of Domitian, some years after the destruction of Jerusalem. Although much persecuted, he was much comforted. He testifies that he was “in the Spirit” on the Lord's day. The Lord Jesus, in whose bosom he lay in the days of His flesh, revealed Himself to him in the glory of His exalted humanity, and the sight was so overwhelming that he fell down at His feet as dead. Strengthened, however, by the right hand of Him whose glory, as exalted, he beheld, he was fitted to receive the revelation made concerning “the things which are and the things which shall be hereafter.”

He is first commissioned to write about the seven Asiatic churches. These churches were not all on the same footing in respect of faithfulness and consistency. Of the Church in Smyrna and in Philadelphia the Lord speaks in a manner that is wholly commendable; of the Church of the Laodiceans, in a manner that is wholly censurable; and of the remaining four He speaks in a manner that is partly commendable and partly censurable.

It is under this last category the Church of Ephesus comes. Christ lays both His commendations and reproofs on the basis of His omniscience. "I know thy works." He thus shows that, as the alone Head and King of the Church, He is God from everlasting to everlasting. He commends her for her labour in word and doctrine. She was painstaking in performing many of the duties of the ministerial office. He commends her for her patience. Patience presupposes suffering. Thus, the Apostle James adduces the prophets, "who have spoken in the name of the Lord," for an example of suffering affliction and of patience. Sanctified suffering calls forth the exercise of patience, for "tribulation worketh patience." He further commends her for her faithfulness in exercising discipline. There were among her those who presumed to claim a right to the apostleship. These she tried by the touchstone of truth, with the result that she proved them to be liars, and she could not suffer them to be associated with her. All this she did with a view to the glory of the Lord, as it is said, "for my name's sake." He, however, finds grounds of censure in her. Although He speaks commendably of her for her labour, patience, and zeal, He does not overlook what was censurable in her. He first reproves her for having left her first love. In the second place, He exhorts her to remember from whence she fell. And, lastly, He pronounces a solemn threatening to the effect that He would remove the candlestick out of his place except she repented. The angel or minister of the church is addressed as representing the church.

I. – The reproof: "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." – It is not judicially that He lays this fault to her charge. It is not in the sense in which He lays the guilt of Adam's first sin, all actual transgressions of the law of God, and the sin of unbelief to the charge of those who are still under the guilt of a broken law. He is concerned with a people who experienced the constraining influences of the love of the Triune God, and in whose case the sentence of condemnation was withdrawn and cancelled. "It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?" He rebukes and chastises His children for their folly. His chastisements are fatherly chastisements, and they will never cease to be His children. Notwithstanding their many failings, He will never leave nor forsake them. He finds in them grounds of censure and rebuke; He finds in them much that He can justly complain of; but out of regard to His faithfulness, He will not utterly cast them off. Similarly, in the case of the Church of Ephesus, He found just grounds of complaint and censure. She left her first love. The Lord Jesus Christ is the object of the love of the Church; but in giving this reproof, He does not mean that the church of Ephesus left or forsook Him. He does not charge her with having apostatized from Him, but with having left her first love. Love is a grace implanted in the heart by the Holy Ghost. It is not antecedent to faith, but faith never works without it. "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three." The Lord does not mean that this church fell away from love as a principle implanted in the heart. Wherever it is implanted as a vital principle it must inevitably abide – it cannot possibly be eradicated; but it is not always the same in respect of the degree or measure of its exercise. The fruits and acts of it are not always the same, although there will not be a total falling away in respect of its fruits and acts. Love, however, as a grace implanted in the heart, decays in respect of its exercises, fruits, and acts. It is in this sense that the Lord reproves the church of Ephesus for having left her first love.

The reproof is applicable to the people of God individually. The night of conviction may, in their experience, be long or short, as the Lord in His wisdom sees fit. A sense of God's wrath for sin may, for a longer or shorter period bruise and crush them with its terrors. But

when they are enabled to view Christ, by faith, wounded for their transgressions and bruised for their iniquities, they experience the efficacy of His blood to purge the conscience from the guilt of sin. They then have a sense of the pardoning mercy of God in Christ. It is accompanied with a sense of love to God. This love is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost. The fruit of it is seen in the case of the woman whose many sins Christ forgave. She washed His feet with her tears; she wiped them with the hairs of her head; she kissed them, and anointed them with ointment. It is constraining and persuasive love. It is spoken of as the love of one's espousals, and it is said to be strong as death. Although in principle it remains, there is a decay or falling away in respect of the measure of its exercise. This is evident from the case of the wise virgins, who also are said to have slumbered and slept. It is evident from the state of the Church, as described in the Song of Solomon. She lay on the bed of carnal security. She relapsed into a condition of deadness and formality. The fervency of her first love manifestly cooled. She exposed herself to the charge of having left her first love. It is a reproof justly administered to the people of God at one time or other during their sojourn in the wilderness of this world.

But the reproof here is particularly administered to the Church in its collective capacity, as publicly witnessing for Christ in the world. The Church of Ephesus was planted by the Apostle Paul. He laboured in this city for three years at least, and ceased not to warn every one, day and night, with tears. In writing his Epistle to the Ephesians, he declares that, after he heard of their faith in the Lord Jesus and love unto all the saints, he ceased not to give thanks for them, making mention of them in his prayers. He alludes to the time of the Church's first love. It is a time when the Holy Spirit, as a Spirit of love, of power, and of sound mind, is richly poured forth. The Church under the Old Testament dispensation experienced the glow of this love after the deliverance from Egypt and the miraculous parting of the waters of the Red Sea. It was then that Moses and the children of Israel celebrated the praises of redeeming love: "I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." There was an outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon the Church on entering the land of Canaan. It was by faith in God the walls of Jericho fell, after they were compassed about seven days. It is obvious that the Church at that time had experience of being under the influence of her first love. This love was again experienced on the return from Babylon. It found expression in the shout of joy that went forth from the people when the foundation of the temple of the Lord was laid. "And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid." But it was reserved for the Church, under the New Testament dispensation, to experience more richly than ever before the fervency of this love. The richest experience of it was in Apostolical times, for then there was a more copious outpouring of the Holy Ghost than had ever before been experienced by the Church. There was a remarkable experience of it at the Reformation in this and other lands. It was, in some measure, experienced at the Disruption; and it cannot be denied that there was an experience of it by our own Church seventeen years ago. It thrives in the fire of suffering for Christ. The flames of persecution have the effect of causing it to burn more and more fervently; for unto the Church it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake. As it happened in the case of the children of Israel in Egypt, that the more they were persecuted, the more they multiplied; so the more the Church suffers for Christ, the more her love to Him is inflamed. The Apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. When the Church is under the influence of her first love, the glory of God and the defence of the crown rights of the Redeemer, as Prophet, Priest, and King, stand out pre-eminently in her view. In comparison with them, the grandeur, wealth, honour, and esteem of the world vanish out of sight.

When, however, the Church is in this manner justly censured, she gives unmistakable signs of having fallen away from former attainments. Although her love cannot be wholly fallen from, it becomes cold in comparison with the warmth of its former exercises. There is a great difference between the flowing and the receding tide. When the Church has left her first love she resembles the tide in its backward course. Her course is one of retrogression and not of progression. When in this condition she may be eloquently spoken of by worldly men as advancing towards the right goal. The less spiritual the Church becomes, the more esteemed she is by those who are destitute of spiritual discernment. The more she conforms herself to the practices of the world, the more she ceases to be felt as a spiritual force in the world. The slightest inclination on her part to touch the hem of the world's garment, is a sure evidence of her having left her first love. History records that a general once arrayed his army against the advancing foe on a plateau, from which he could engage with advantage in the impending conflict. He, however, left the vantage ground that he occupied and descended to a neighbouring plain, with very disastrous results. In like manner, when the Church leaves the vantage ground of her first love, she not only incurs the displeasure of the Lord, but she so exposes herself to the attacks of her enemies that her wounds will likely bleed for many a day. One step of declension frequently leads to another. When once there is a moving away from the eminence reached, as expressed by the first love, it is hard to say how far the Church may go in a course of backsliding. The downward movement may not at first be very apparent. All the essential external features of a prosperous and thriving Church may be in evidence. The outward framework of the Church's activities may have undergone no visible change. The Word of God, in respect of its threatenings, invitations, and promises, may be preached with seeming faithfulness. Divine worship may be conducted with incorruptness. The ordinances of the Gospel may be administered in all their purity; and yet, because the Spirit of life has departed, the odour of the Lord's presence is wanting, and no quickening or enlivening divine influences are felt. The form exists, but the power is absent. The public ordinances, in which the Spirit of life was at one time experienced, degenerate into cold, lifeless formality. Deadness takes the place of liveliness. Warmth is succeeded by coldness. This coldness is felt by the Lord's people in their secret devotions, at the family altar, and at the public means of grace. It may be experienced not only in the courts of divine worship, but also in the courts of ecclesiastical government, as well as in the fellowship of saints. Signs of this love having been forsaken by the Philippians were seen from the fact that, while some of them preached Christ of goodwill and love, others preached Him of envy and strife. The unanimity that characterised the deliberations of the first Council of the Christian Church at Jerusalem generally ceases when the Church forsakes her first love. Communion is the fruit of union; true union is the fruit of genuine love; and love closely cements together. If the cold blast of a spirit of uncharitableness be entertained towards members of the household of faith, it is fitted to untie effectually the knot of Christian brotherhood, and to bring the Church under the sweep of the censure that is here administered to the Church of Ephesus. The Church's love then manifestly cools, the exercises of it fade, and the fruits of it decay. Her zeal ceases to burn with the vehement flame with which it formerly burned. There is a tendency to desire ease, like Issachar, who "saw that rest was good, and the land, that it was pleasant." There is a tendency to wish freedom from reproach for the name of Christ. There is a disposition to act on lines of expediency, like Peter, when he feared "them which were of the circumcision," with the result that, to some extent, he conformed to a system that was abolished. Hence Paul declares, "If I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor." The Church's sense of her duty to her divine Head, and to the present and coming generations, is not so lively as formerly. The Apostle Paul warned the Ephesian Church against the possibility of her thus declining. He charges her ministers to take heed unto themselves and unto the flock over which the Holy Spirit made them overseers. "For I

know this," he says, "that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore, watch and remember." All these things are sure evidences of a Church forsaking her first love.

II. – The exhortation. It is three-fold.

(1) "Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen." – This exhortation shows the seriousness with which the Lord regards the ground of His reproof; it shows the heinousness of the sin committed by the Church in having left her first love. He does not mean that those who receive grace fall from a state of grace, but they are liable to fall and stumble in respect of backsliding. That is the sorrowful fact here expressed by the words, "Thou art fallen." The Church is often represented as relapsing into this condition. In the days of Jeremiah, the Lord charges her with committing the degrading sins of spiritual fornication and adultery. Notwithstanding, He does not utterly cast her off, but He pleads with her to give up her vile practices and return to Him: "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." In like manner Hosea pleads with backsliding Israel to return unto the Lord, and he assigns the reason why there was a necessity for being thus entreated: "For thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." While the Lord points out to the Church of Ephesus the fact of her having fallen from her first love, He does not directly plead with her to return as in the case of Israel, but He exhorts her to "remember," and thus to compare her present with her former condition. She did not seem to be sensible of her present case. A spirit of slumber creeping over the Church is a sure sign of declension. Slumber leads to insensibility, and insensibility implies spiritual stupidity and deadness. The existence of these elements betokens listlessness and forgetfulness of former attainments.

The exhortation, in its general application, has all these elements in it. Thus, men by nature do not remember what they fell from, when by the fall they brought themselves into a state of sin and misery. They are forgetful of what they were, and they are insensible to what they are. They betray a spirit of stupid listlessness to the trumpet of the gospel that conveys the joyful tidings of salvation, and they are, therefore, solemnly warned, "Consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver."

The exhortation to "remember from whence thou art fallen" appeals to the believer in a state of backsliding. Blindness, hardness and stupidity are characteristics of a declining condition. There is no adequate conception of the sinfulness of the duties omitted or deeds committed. He becomes hardened in a course that grieves the Holy One of Israel. He shows such spiritual stupidity that he is forgetful of former loving kindnesses and insensible to his present condition. Whatever be the form of the declension, there is certainly forgetfulness on his part; and he does not come to himself until he remembers from whence he has fallen. The scriptures furnish us with an example of this condition in the case of David, who remained blinded, hardened, and stupefied, until the Lord convinced him of his sin, and caused him to remember from whence he had fallen. Thus, conviction and remembrance of his sin led to his repentance. It is the same with the believer in every age.

As a nation, we are sadly drifting away from former attainments. The keynote of a sound and healthy Protestantism that formerly rang throughout the length and breadth of the land is now turned into a cry extolling the virtues of "the man of sin," and claiming for Anti-christ equal rights and privileges with true religion. Modification of the laws that guard our national Protestantism is the practical result. We are forgetful of past mercies and insensible to present dangers. A cloud of judicial blindness has settled down upon us. We decline to call for a halt that we may consider, and, in obedience to this exhortation, remember from whence we are fallen.

But it is the Church particularly that is here exhorted to remember from whence she is fallen. On the part of the Church in our day there is a persistent falling away, both in respect of doctrine, worship, and practice. In regard to the branch of the visible Church with which we are connected, it is the purest, in every respect, known to us; but when we look at the condition of the churches generally, they are woefully fallen from the doctrines enunciated by Christ and His Apostles, as well as from apostolical worship and practice. The doctrines of a universal fatherhood, a universal atonement, and universal salvation are those that are generally held and delivered. The result is that the people generally will not endure to hear that they are lost, and that they will inevitably perish for ever if they are not born again. Many of their churches resemble places of amusement more than places of divine worship, to whom the character, “synagogues of Satan,” is more applicable than that they should be regarded as the Lord’s sanctuary. In practice, they are equally fallen, with the inevitable consequence that the churches are largely responsible for the spirit of infidelity that is abroad. There is a divine call to them to consider and to think upon their ways. They are entreated to remember from whence they are fallen. It is from an exercise of reflection on their ways that they will first think of pausing. Without serious reflection, there will be no retracing of their steps to the Lord’s testimony. They must remember, and conscience must pronounce them guilty, before they repent.

(2) The second exhortation is, “Repent.” It is an exhortation addressed to all sinners: “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” It is emphatically declared that, except they repent, they shall perish. It is a duty to which believers and churches alike in a backsliding state are called. Repentance is the effect or fruit of remembering from whence fallen. It does not precede the exercise of self-examination or self-searching, but it naturally follows upon sin being brought to remembrance. For example, it is said of Peter that, when he remembered the words of Jesus, “Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice,” he went out and wept bitterly. The sinfulness of one’s practice must first be remembered, the conscience must be convinced, and the fruit produced is repentance. Thus, the Lord spoke to the Church through Ezekiel concerning the manner in which her backslidings could be healed, and the effect, in consequence, produced in her. “Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed That thou mayest remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God.” There is more than a sense of sin in repentance; there is more than a remembrance of it, as it is said, “Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance?” There is an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ; otherwise conviction or remembrance of sin drives to despair, and the repentance that follows is legal repentance, as in the case of Judas Iscariot and others. In the latter case, there is no regard to the dishonour done to God; there is regard only to the misery entailed on oneself. In the former case, there is keen sorrow for the reproach cast upon the name of God. Regard for the honour of God’s name produces humble confession of sin. “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned.” The sorrow that accompanies it is after a godly manner, working repentance to salvation not to be repented of. The soul is humbled; the spirit is contrite; the heart is broken. There is a sense of shame for sin before God, as in the case of Ephraim: “I was ashamed; yea, even confounded, because I did hear the reproach of my youth.” There is a holy indignation against sin and against oneself for sin. Thus Paul recognises the fruits of repentance in the Corinthians when he writes: “What carefulness is wrought in you; yea, what clearing of yourselves; yea, what indignation; yea, what fear; yea, what vehement desire; yea, what zeal; yea, what revenge!” It is in these exercises of the soul that the marrow of godliness consists. Repentance produces a change, not only in the mind inwardly, but also in the actions outwardly. There is both a confessing and a forsaking of sin; there is a turning from it unto God. As in faith, the understanding assents, the will consents, and the actions conform; so in repentance, there is

pungent grief for sin as committed against God, there is profound hatred to it, and there is an honest effort after new obedience. This is the only way that leads to the doing of the first works. We need not look for a reformation of religion in our land that is worth speaking of without repentance. As individuals, as families, as churches, and as a nation, we need to be saturated with the tears of repentance that we may do the first works.

(3) Hence the third exhortation is, "Do the first works." The first works were those wrought by the church of Ephesus when she experienced the fervour of her first love. First love and first works go together. The one is inseparably connected with the other. They stand together and they fall together. The one does not exist without the other. If the first works cease to be performed, it is an evidence that the first love is forsaken. Night is not a surer evidence that the sun has set, than ceasing to do the first works is an evidence that the first love has been left. If once they cease to be done, they cannot be got at again without a process being gone through involving much sorrow and pain. They cannot be got at again except by means of repentance. Repentance is essential to doing the first works. The one is the stepping-stone to the other. And if the first works are done, there can be no doubt about the sincerity of the repentance. Thus the first works indicate a return to God by repentance. They indicate a revival of the exercises of faith and love. They indicate a revival of the fruits of the Spirit, which spring forth after the soul has been moistened with the tears of repentance. They evidence, on the part of the penitent, a holy jealousy for the honour of the name of God. They evidence godly zeal for the observance of all His commandments. The fact of experiencing anew the pardoning mercy of God through Christ in the healing of backslidings – though it be accompanied with a sense of self-loathing – stirs up to more and more earnestness in the work of the Lord. There is a feeling of being under greater obligations than ever to the Lord to serve Him faithfully and to do what He commands. This is the effect that the healing of backslidings invariably has. While there is a profounder sense than ever of the dependence upon the Lord for upholding and sustaining grace, there is a holy resolution to act in conformity with His will. It was thus Peter acted. He was never more earnest in advancing the cause of Christ than after his recovery by repentance and his tasting anew the Lord's forgiving mercy. He so set himself to the duty of doing the first works, that he loved not his life to the death; and at the appointed time he sealed his testimony for Christ and His truth by his blood. In like manner there was a remarkable coming back to the Lord by repentance in the days of Josiah. The reformation that was effected under him was a striking illustration of the call to do the first works being given effect to. The altars and the groves were broken down, the graven images were beaten into powder, and all the idols throughout all the land of Israel were demolished. Besides, a covenant was entered into before the Lord by the king and by "all that were present in Jerusalem and in Benjamin," to the effect that they would walk after the Lord, and keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes, with all their heart and with all their soul. Thus a return to purity of doctrine, of worship, and of practice usually takes place when the first works are done. There is no indication yet that the churches and people of this land entertain any thought about the necessity of doing the first works. But whenever they be done, the divine authority and absolute inerrancy of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments will be acknowledged; the churches will be purged of their idolatrous worship; the example of Christ and His Apostles will be followed; and there will be a ready response to the call, "Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten."

Further, performance of the first works is accompanied with fervent love to those who are believed to be members of the household of faith. Love to the brethren was a distinct feature in the character of those to whom Peter addressed his epistle, and, notwithstanding, he pleads with them to continue in the fervent exercise of it: "See that you love one another with a pure heart fervently." Evidence of the abounding of this love in the members of the Church of the

Thessalonians was a reason for which the Apostle Paul always felt bound to thank God for them. "Because that the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." Love of pity, entertained for those who, by their fruits, show that they are still hopeless and Christless, is also an accompaniment of the fulfilment of this duty, as well as a spirit of watchfulness, prayerfulness, and faithfulness. The Lord thus requires self-examination, repentance, and obedience. The exhortations are given in such order as that, if effect be given to what is required in the one, it naturally leads to what is required in the other.

III. – The threatening: "Or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." – The threatening is couched in terms that are fitted to excite fear and terror. It shows the tremendous issues that depend upon a course of impenitence and disobedience. Parents naturally feel more pungent grief, if anything of a scandalous nature be done by any of their children, than if the same deed were committed by one, to whom they are not related by natural ties. So it is with the Lord. He feels the dishonour cast upon His glorious name by the sins of the world; but He feels with peculiar keenness the dishonour done to Him by the sins of the Church. This fact is brought out in the terrible character of the threatening, to which He declares that He will give effect, in the absence of repentance. The threatening is two-fold.

1. "I will come unto thee quickly." The words express the idea of His coming unexpectedly. The idea is similar to that frequently expressed in connection with the second coming of Christ. When He at last comes to judgment, He will come suddenly – at a time when an expectation of His coming will be confined to very few, because of the spiritual torpor that will almost universally characterise the inhabitants of the earth. It is in like manner that He threatens to come unto the Church of Ephesus, and in a manner that she did not look for, if she persisted in disregarding the voice of the Lord entreating her to consider her ways, to repent, and to do the first works.

The threatening is not without significance in its application to our own day. The Lord is daily coming suddenly, in a providential way, when He summons both young and old, rich and poor, learned and unlearned to appear, as disembodied spirits, before His divine tribunal. This manner of His coming is intended as a solemn warning to all, but particularly to those who live in forgetfulness of their ways, and in impenitence for the evil of their doings. Among those whom He calls away are "the light of the world," and "the salt of the earth." They are instrumental in keeping the light of the gospel burning in the world, and, as the salt of the earth, in preserving it from putrefaction. When the Lord thus comes to the Church – and as He is not, apparently, healing the breaches that are made – the Church may well enquire, "What significance has these visitations for her?" Do they not loudly call to her to remember, and to repent, and to do the first works? But He comes in a special manner when He summons home those who faithfully laboured in word and doctrine. Gifted and powerful preachers of a pure gospel flourished in our land within the last fifty years. The Lord has come quickly, and called them away, one after another, from us. They are succeeded generally by those who, apparently, take more delight in treating their people to matters of a fabulous nature than to the great things of the law of God. The fruit is plain. The people generally have itching ears. They turn away their ears from the truth unto fables, and they heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts. The spirit of discernment is largely gone. Truth is rejected; error is accepted. The precious is not distinguished from the vile, nor the vile from the precious. Teachers and taught alike are become vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart is hardened. They do not receive the love of the truth that they may be saved. They are, therefore, given up to strong delusions, so that they readily grasp at lies. All these things are forerunners of the certainty that the more terrible threatening that follows will be carried out.

2. – “I will remove thy candlestick out of his place.” The candlestick is a figure expressive of the Church. It is thus explained in the closing words of the previous chapter. “The seven candlesticks which thou sawest, are the seven churches.” There was a candlestick in the Mosaic sanctuary. It consisted of a talent of hammered gold, beaten out into seven branches. Whatever else it might have meant, it was undoubtedly a representation of the Church. There is a certain fitness between a candlestick and the candle that is meant to be fixed in it. A burning candle is for the purpose of giving light; a candlestick is intended to diffuse, as from a centre, the light of the candle. “Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.” Not only does the Lord threaten, in the absence of repentance, to remove the candle of the word of truth and the ordinances of the gospel, but also the Church itself that was planted in Ephesus for the purpose of administering them. If the candlestick be removed, all else will be removed along with it. He does not threaten to *destroy* the candlestick, but only to *remove* it; for though it be not where it once was, it will surely be somewhere else. The Church of Ephesus long since ceased to be, like the Jewish Church before it; but the Church of Christ will not cease to be in the world as long as the world lasts. If the candlestick, with all the privileges connected with it, be removed from one place, it will be sent to another place. Because the Church of Ephesus left her first love, and did not consider the sinfulness of her practice, nor repented, the Lord ultimately gave effect to the grave threatening pronounced. She ceased to exist as a church. A once highly favoured people were deprived of the highest and most precious privileges. They readily came under the influence of the teaching of the false prophet. For many centuries they are sunk in Islamitic darkness, from which they will not emerge until the light that they despised will again shine upon them.

The case of the Church of Ephesus is fitted to serve as a warning to other churches to the end of time. It ought to serve as a beacon to watch against deviating in any degree from the standard of divine truth. It shows that a church may have much that is worthy of commendation, and yet her defections in some respects may be so serious, in the view of the Lord, as that she may be threatened with the severest visitations. It further shows that impenitence in a course of defection is sure to be followed by a heavy blow of the Lord’s hand. He who walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks holds in His hand, as King of kings and Lord of lords, the reins of universal government. As King anointed over Zion, He has absolute control over the affairs of the Church. In the exercise of His unlimited sovereignty, He can dispose of nations and churches as He pleases. He was often provoked to remove the candlestick from a people who persisted in despising the privileges of the gospel. He seems to be setting it up at present in parts of the world where hitherto the gospel was never heard of. We deeply grieve Him in this land; and have we not reason to dread that He is threatening to remove the candlestick from us? Let us earnestly seek that we may never cease to do the first works; let us honestly aim at ever holding fast the form of sound words in faith and love which is Christ Jesus. Amen.

[January 1911]

A Sermon.

By the late REV. L. MACPHERSON, Ontario.

“And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her” – Luke 10:41,42.

Martha, it would appear, was the mistress of the house, and most likely the elder sister. It was she who gave the invitation to Christ to come into the house. It is a good thing to invite Christ – in His people, in His cause, or in His spiritual presence – into our houses. None who do so in a right spirit will ever have cause to repent it. Christ is the best guest we can have; for besides that His presence more than pays for His trouble, He will remember it long, and return the favour when our time of need comes. When death shall put us out of house and home, then will Christ receive us into everlasting habitations. “Come, ye blessed of my Father, . . . for I was a stranger and ye took me in.” Many of you will, no doubt, praise Martha for what she did, and most likely you will think you would do the same very gladly, if you had only the same opportunity. But is not Christ now saying to each one of you, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with me”? Why, then, will ye not receive Him? You would esteem it great unkindness, and you could not be sufficiently revenged upon those who would allow Christ to remain all night in the open street for want of lodgings; but may not Christ say to the most of you – in reference to the way you deal with Him – “My locks are wet with the dews of the night”? O, will you not think of that day when you will hear Him say to those on the left hand, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, . . . for I was a stranger and ye took me not in”?

But to proceed to our purpose, let us, first, observe the account which the evangelist gives us of Martha and Mary; and, secondly, the character which Christ gives of them; or, the circumstances related of each, and Christ’s verdict on the matter.

I. – The account given us of the two: –

1. Mary. – “And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard his word.” This is just what one might expect of her. Both were gracious women, but there was a great difference between the two. Mary had the more grace, and her grace shone with greater lustre than that of Martha. This is evident from the various notices that we have of them elsewhere, as well as from the account given in the text. Let us here observe

(1) the effect of Christ’s presence upon her. Her grace had so much real life in it that the very sight of Christ kindled it up into a flame, and made her lose sight of every other object, and forget every other concern. At the death of Lazarus, when she heard that the Master was come and called for her, she instantly forgot the houseful of visitors that came from Jerusalem to comfort her concerning her brother, and left them abruptly, without apology or ceremony, to go to Him whom she loved better than them all. “It is the voice of my beloved” (Song 5:2). That puts everything else out of her thoughts; so now she forgets everything about the house – etiquette and all – forgets serving, and does not think even of going to prepare for Christ, whom she so much loved, although He had just come from His journey, and might be both weary and hungry. Ah! Mary, is this the way you use Christ when He comes to see you? Was He not welcome? Ah, yes! He would have, with right goodwill, the best in the house; but better still, He would first have her heart (See John 12:3).

(2) Her position and occupation – “sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word.” Christ’s feet is the right place for a believer. All who are by grace brought to their “right mind” are found there (Luke 8:35). Mary would not exchange that place for a throne. And what was she doing there? Hearing His word. She had a true relish for it which soon discovered itself. This was spouse-like. “I sat down under his shadow with great delight; and his fruit was sweet to my taste” (Song 2:3). Now, all these are signs of grace by which you may try yourselves. Put the question – Is there something in the presence and the voice that overcomes you and makes you forget everything else? Where are you – at Christ’s feet or at the world’s feet? If you are a Christian, you can never feel satisfied in any place but at Christ’s feet. At Christ’s feet as a sinner, seeking mercy, seeking refuge; at Christ’s feet as a scholar, learning; at His feet in the means – the Bible, preaching, the throne of grace.

2. Martha. – “But Martha was cumbered about much serving,” etc. A very unfavourable frame for profiting much by Christ’s discourse. She was a bustling woman, and made her hospitality become a burden to her.

(1) Her state at the time.

(1.) “Cumbered.” Her mind is perplexed, burdened, anxious, confused, concerned, distracted, overloaded. She was going about her business, which was a duty. But there was something wrong when her duty became a cross, a snare, and a sin to her. It was never intended that our duties should be cumbersome to us. If they become so it is our own fault. We have burdens enough to carry without this unnecessary one. She in this instance allowed her business to become her master. When this happens in any case, it at once destroys the comfort and pleasure that a Christian should have in his work, and the mind is, besides, thrown into a discontented and fretful state – discomposed – and thereby rendered both unfit and indisposed for spiritual exercises. This is our misery since the Fall – that our minds are so enfeebled, shattered, and ill-conditioned, that we know not how to go about our necessary work without getting some hurt or bruise from it. The work itself is a harmless thing, but much harm do we, for the most part, come by through it, and this by our unwatchfulness and foolishness. O, what need we have of that heavenly equanimity that would keep us, while pursuing our work here, from running upon either of these extremes on which we usually dash ourselves – the extreme of being cumbered, and the other extreme of negligence and slothfulness.

Is there not here also – without over-straining the point – a lesson for ministers, elders, and others, in reference to their public duties? How often do even the holiest things cumber and confuse the mind? A minister may, through negligence and unwatchfulness, get himself into such a hurry and bustle with his Sabbath duties that he entirely loses the comfort of both the Sabbath and these duties for himself. It should be our rule that when Christ is present, our minds should be perfectly free and prepared to enjoy His presence. It is no honour to Him that we should be cumbered before Him with His own work when He is with us. O, for Mary's sobered mind, that thought of nothing but sitting down at Jesus' feet and hearing His word!

(2.) What was she cumbered with? "Much serving." It was not about what was necessary that she was cumbered, but about much serving. This was the more reprehensible. She was not content to concern and cumber herself merely with what could not be avoided, but must take a right load of it while she is at it. We are not at liberty to suppose that this proceeded from a desire of display on her part, as is the case too often with others; but we would attribute it rather to want of judgment than to anything worse. She was anxious to honour Christ and His company in the best way possible, because she had a high esteem of Him, and this was commendable; but she deprived herself of more than half the pleasure of His company through her weakness of judgment as to the measure of her preparations and the manner of her entertainment. It was entirely about a carnal matter that she put herself to so much trouble, and gave trouble to others besides. Bodily wants must be attended to, but they are too mean and low for the soul to be wholly taken up with them. What a wretched life do those live "whose god is their belly" – who are all their lifetime cumbered and absorbed in this much serving for their bodies, which ere long the worms shall consume in the grave!

A lesson here to such as make a great ado about much serving at Sacrament times, when they have a houseful of strangers, also at ministers' visits, etc.

(2) Her complaint. Her burden was heavy, and at last it put her out of all patience. She puts the fault on Mary and, one would think, a little of it, perhaps unintentionally, on Christ Himself. Her complaint was carnal throughout.

(1.) Her own trial. "Dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone?" – She sympathised with herself, and thought Christ should sympathise with her likewise. Many such complaints are heard of poor, toil-worn, and harassed people, who have to be late and early at it, and altogether have a hard life of it. They count upon God's sympathy with them, and think the hardship of their lot sufficiently warrants such an expectation and speaks for itself. Thus the first thing with such persons is to sympathise with themselves in their difficulties and burdens, instead of first inquiring how they came by them. It is a sad but common mistake for people thus to be confidently counting on sympathy from God in hardships which are more their sin than their misfortune, being voluntarily and sinfully brought upon them by themselves. Ah! Martha, who told thee to take such a burden upon thee? Was it I, or thyself, that put that heavy load upon thy back, which so much distresses thee? We are kindly invited to cast our cares upon the Lord, and here is one coming to Him with a great load of them; and what then? He does not take them off her hand, but sends her away rather with a rebuke. And why? Because they are not proper cares to offer him. We must see to this before we go to Him; nay, we ought to see to it before we take them at all upon us, that they be such as we may cast upon Him, and such as He will be like to take off our hands. Was there not some show of reason in Martha's cares? Was it not entirely on His own account she had taken all this care, and was not that commendable? Yet we see that she was in the wrong, and got reprov'd for it.

(2.) Her complaint against Mary. "Dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her, therefore, that she help me." – Her cross was one of her own making, and, like all the crosses that we make ourselves, so ill made that it galled her severely. She

had undertaken more than she could master, and at length got herself so much out of humour, and exasperated, that she could not contain herself any longer, but breaks forth in the presence of all in the house. She was much agitated, no doubt, before she could thus so publicly reveal her weakness – a thing which would most likely cause deep regret and shame to her as soon as the storm subsided. This is what we usually get for our pains when we heedlessly and unwarrantably meddle with things that are not fit for us. We are such weak creatures that temptations – as soon as we come within their reach – make us to reel to and fro like a drunken man, deprive us of our wisdom and self-possession, and make their own sport of us, until we are rescued from them. Our greatest wisdom is to avoid such encounters and keep as far away from temptations as possible, for we are no match for the feeblest of them.

“Dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone?” Is it not strange that when our sins begin to cause us pain and trouble, we would not then bethink ourselves and notice our error? But instead of this, when we begin to reap the fruits of our own folly, we are then farthest from seeing our sin or supposing the fault is ours. We begin to regard ourselves as martyrs rather than transgressors, and seek for someone on whom to lay the blame of our miseries.

“Dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone?” Martha thought that Mary carried her religion too far. It made her neglect other necessary things. This is an ordinary complaint among worldly people. They think that if people are very religious it must be at the expense of prudence, which certainly is a higher virtue in the eyes of the world than piety. Nay, indeed, the world would carry its prudence the length of driving piety out of the world.

There are two cases in which pious people are apt to forget, very much, the things of this world, and in which they bring themselves under this charge.

(1) When a poor soul is first awakened. The only concern then is how he may be saved. He loses his appetite for worldly matters, and spends much of his time about religion. Perhaps he travels far and near in quest of his object, and it may be, is as often away as at home. Then very likely his worldly relations – it may be his wife, if he is so circumstanced, and she a worldly woman – will fall foul upon the poor sin-sick and sin-burdened soul, and accuse him of neglect of his lawful calling – his special duty – and make sad complaint (like Martha) of the hardships they are subjected to by his improvidence and imprudence. They are left to serve alone! The whole burden of caring for the farm falls upon their shoulders, and they are sadly wronged and abused, and have a right to appeal to the judgment of all about them and expect their sympathy; and among worldly people like themselves their case gets a ready hearing, and there will be no want of sympathisers. Nay, indeed, they verily think that God feels for them too and sees the wrong they are suffering, and it may be they even pray that God would bring the poor man to see his fault and attend better to his duty – that He would bid him help them, since he will mind no other.

(2) The other case is the case of Christians in a peculiarly lively and elevated frame – souls sick with love to Christ and having their minds very much away from this world. Such was particularly Mary’s case. These are always censured for carrying their love to Christ too far.

“Dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone?” Poor complaint this to make to Christ – that she cared so little about the world and thought so much about Himself. She is so much taken up with Thee, that she cannot think of me or any person else! Was it not a foolish idea that Christ would find fault with Mary for this? O, that poor worldlings would have cause to complain of this oftener – that they were left alone to mind the world and could get no one to bear them company; that people were now so much taken up with Christ that the poor world could get no one to care for it.

II. – Let us now hear Christ’s verdict on the matter; first, the reproof, and secondly, the commendation.

1. Martha expected that Christ would listen to her complaint, and do her justice. So He did, but not in the way she thought. She thought Mary deserved a reproof, and would no doubt receive it; but instead of this she gets it herself.

Martha was a gracious woman, but had great and manifest infirmities, which did her much evil, and greatly hindered her grace from shining as it would otherwise do. Such get frequent reproofs from Christ, sometimes sad blows, to humble them and bring them to their right mind. It is their mercy that He will not “let them alone.” “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten” (Revelation 3:19; Hebrews 12:6). One would think that in Christ’s house such a thing as the rod of correction would never be seen. It is a thing that has little attraction in itself, yet it serves a good purpose, and is useful in its own way. “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him” (Proverbs 22:15). God’s end in correcting His children is a gracious end: “that they may be partakers of his holiness” (Hebrews 12:10).

“Martha, Martha.” This is like the address of one who feels an affection towards the person addressed; something like the way in which an affectionate parent would speak to a headstrong and erring child. It showed also the earnestness of the speaker, and that what He said was peculiarly emphatic. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem” – “Simon, Simon” – and now “Martha, Martha,” thou art altogether in the wrong; the fault is wholly with thee, and it is a great one! “Thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful.”

“Careful.” In its own place, measure, and manner, this is right enough, but in every other case it is sinful and hurtful to the soul. There is nothing that eats out the vitals of the spiritual life in the soul more than the “cares of this world.” O, what havoc do they make in the soul! What are they? They are the “thorns” mentioned in the parable (Matthew 13; Luke 8). What do these thorns to the soul? Why, they choke the seed of the Word, and hinder it from bearing fruit. And what more? Why, thorns tear and wound whatever touches them. This, then, is the name that Christ gives to the “cares,” “riches,” and “pleasures of this life” (Luke 8:14). And O, how true! How unhappy they make the mind. How they torment, tear, and wound it, as in the case in hand – “Thou art careful and troubled.” And is it not a thousand pities that we should trouble and wound ourselves with things with which we have nothing to do? “Be careful for nothing.” Surely if ever there was a command given which one might feel disposed to obey, we might suppose this was that command. It is so entirely framed for our own interest, that it might be supposed every person would most willingly and constantly endeavour to obey it. “Be careful for nothing; but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.” And what then follows? O, that we would only believe it! “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6,7). Is not this kind? The Lord knows our frame, how feeble it is, and how ill-fitted to carry so great a burden as the cares of this life. He knows they are too heavy for us, and therefore graciously proposes to take them upon Himself, and discharge us entirely from having any concern about them, and invites us to cast them all upon Him. “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee” (Psalm 55:22; Psalm 37; 1 Peter 5:7). But our misery is – we will not trust them to Him, and will on no account part with them, although they make us stoop and groan under their weight, and, it may be, at last break our back, and our heart to the bargain. O, how many have found it so. How many have the cares of this life brought down with sorrow to the grave!

“Careful and troubled about many things.” Here we have a full view of the evil of the cares of this life, which consist not only of their quality but also in their multiplicity. Our minds are so constituted that we can only manage one thing at a time, and not even that very well at all times. When we attempt more than this, we become cruel to ourselves in driving

ourselves faster than we can go, and forcing ourselves to carry a heavier burden than we are able to bear. This is the cruelty that sinners use to themselves. They use themselves worse than the taskmasters of Egypt did the Israelites. There is a mistake in reference to this matter which is common to us all. We think that we can meddle with the cares of this life, as far as we think it is right and necessary to do so, and at that point restrain ourselves with ease. We usually promise this to ourselves, and with this confidence set out fearlessly on this dangerous track. But there could be no greater folly than to imagine that the heart thus once set loose is to be restrained within such bounds. Indulge the mind, only in a limited license, in this way, and you may then as well attempt to command the wind, as to regulate or moderate it in its cares and troubles about the things of this world.

“Careful and troubled about many things.” This is that which perplexes, bewilders, distresses, and kills the mind – to have a host of unmanageable things thrown upon it. It has more of them than it can handle. A man would need a hundred hands to manage his “many things.” Nay, he would need as many hands as he has cares, and as many backs also to carry them, before he could manage them; yet he is so foolish that, instead of being content with what he has of them, he is grasping at every new care that comes his way – never sick of the cares themselves, although sick enough of the trouble they occasion. Men in this matter are like foolish children who attempt to take up a great many things in their arms at once – more than they can manage. While they pick up one thing another drops out, and so on, until they are wearied out with disappointment, and, it may be in a passion, fling away the whole, and retire from the hopeless task, weeping over their failure. This is what we shall have for our pains in the end if we grow not wise in time – we “shall lie down in sorrow.”

And why “many things”? What are they for? And have we need of them after all? Little might serve our purpose in this life as well as much, and we might have that little with much less trouble and pain; but our greedy, intemperate hearts, once they get on the scent of the cares of this life, know not where to stop. We think that our wants are a hundred times more than they really are. We make an intricate, multifarious business of this life for ourselves, foolishly imagining that unless we care and trouble ourselves about “many things,” we must have but a poor life of it. Like Martha, when we get the length to which we may lawfully and safely go, we think we are not half way. Our hearts throw dust into the eyes of our judgment, and we perceive not the line at which we should stop. We step over it, and thus get ourselves into a labyrinth. Might we not learn a lesson of those who get through the world without caring much about it? Might we not get through it so as well as they? Or, which is better still, might we not learn our lesson concerning this matter from the Scripture of truth? “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). This is the length, breadth, depth, and height of the care we are allowed to have about this life. Here we are to pray for “bread” – that is all. There are not “many things” there. And we are to seek this only for one day – “this day.” And further, we are not told to care even for that, but only to pray for it. O, how easy and simple God makes this matter besides what we make of it. He brings down our “many things” unto one, and frees that one thing from the evil that attaches to every one of our “many things” – the evil of having to care for it ourselves. There are two things we should ask ourselves concerning these “many things” about which we are careful and troubled: (1) What are they for? and (2) Are they needful? Ah! we might well blush, if we had any right feeling in us, when we consider that all these “many things” are exclusively for this “vile body.” What a troublesome and costly concern it is to many. And then, what is it worth? Ah! but we make too much of this vain life. How much of our precious time is spent about it. And how many of our thoughts are given to it. Ask yourselves the second question – Are they needful? Most people say they are, and they cannot do without them. But we will undertake to prove that they are not needful. Ah! say you, how can you do that? Are not riches needful? And are not pleasures needful? A rich table, a good house, an easy bed, good furniture, fine dress, a good

fortune to maintain them? No; these are not needful. Many had them not, and yet did well enough without them; nay, better than most of those that had them. Lazarus had none of them, and yet he did better without them than the rich man did who possessed them to his heart's desire. But, say you, if not these, yet are not such things needful as a good farm, a good stock, good crops, good credit, and such things as men in ordinary circumstances have? No, we say, they are not needful. But is not a man's daily bread needful? All the world knows we cannot do without that; and, are we not even commanded to pray for it, and also to labour for it? Are they not then needful? We say no; they are not needful. But you will say, how will you prove that? You have reason, and the judgment of all the world against you in it. Yes, we can prove it in the best way in which anything can be proved – the word of Christ – which we need not go far to seek, for we have it in our text. He says, "One thing is needful," and it is quite certain that this one thing is none of the "many things," which make up the cares of this life. What say you to this? Will you believe the word of Christ? I know the most of you will not. You think it must have some other meaning, for, in this sense, it is against reason and the world's daily experience. But can you look no higher than that? Just look at it for a moment in the light of eternity and of eternal things. A man can die without these cares, can he not? Will they help him to die better or more comfortably? A man can stand before the tribunal of God without them; can he not? Will there be any need of them there? Or, will his not having them in this world prevent him from getting there? And, if he goes to heaven, will his eternal felicity be diminished, or in the least affected for the worse, because he had not these things in this world? Will not eternity be to him as happy and as full as if he had been a king when on earth? And view them now in the case of the man who at this time has no interest in Christ. Can you say that as long as he is without Christ any of the "many things" he has, or seeks to have, can do him any good, or deserve the name of needful? Ah! no. "One thing is needful." All the others are not. You will all ere long be in the other world! Let me ask you what will be the value of these "many things" to you then? O will you not therefore say each and all of you – "I will henceforth cease from this vain and hurtful business of caring and being troubled about 'many things.' Let the world from this time forth walk on its own legs or get some stronger back than mine to carry it, for I will have nothing to do with anything but this 'one thing needful.'"

2. The commendation. – We shall only notice a few points.

(1) Mary's portion. It is described thus – "One thing is needful," and "that good part." They both mean the same thing, which certainly is Christ Himself – the salvation of the soul – the kingdom of God – eternal life. "One thing needful." – The other things for which the world cares, we have seen are not needful; but this does not arise from any fulness in men; as if they were above need, and had in themselves a sufficiency of everything which was necessary for their happiness. Far from it, "they are wretched, and miserable, and blind, and poor, and naked" – Revelation 3:17, – and in reality have nothing else but need, and it is from this circumstance that the "one thing" here derives its peculiar attribute or quality of "needful." And hence arises also its peculiar preciousness to us – that it is the very thing, and the only thing that suits our need, and suits it so well, as entirely to remove it. It bespeaks both our misery and our happiness at the same time. It shows that we are truly in a lamentable state – a state of utter want, and nothing within the bounds of the whole universe – away from this "one thing," that can do us the slightest good, for it "one thing" only that is needful. All the others, although bestowed upon us, would not make us any better than before. They could not apply to us when this need existed – still there would be this one thing needful wanting. Also it shows our happiness, in that while such a need existed there is one thing that suits it exactly – otherwise it could not have this name of the "one thing needful." If it were not the thing entirely to fit our need, like the other things, we would have no need of it. And although

there is but one of this description, it is as good as if there were a thousand; for the one fills up the void, and it can hold no more.

The misery of most among us is that they do not believe that they need it. This is the reason why so few embrace it. O for a sense of this need! If this were once attained, there would be no more slighting of this “one thing.” Every sinner, having this sense, would at once go and serve himself heir to this infinitely precious portion, by making it his choice, as Mary did. The language of most of your hearts is, “Give me the ‘many things’ of this life, and I will let the next provide for itself;” and it is not unlikely, but that God is letting many of you have your choice! Look at your tables, groaning, as they say, under the weight of the bounties of providence with which they are covered – not an inch of room empty – no place for anything more! Have you not a goodly portion? Such abundance, and such variety, that if one thing suits not the taste, there are so many others, that you can be at no loss. What better than this could any one desire! But, sinner, believe me, there is one great want in your feast. I see nothing on that table, that will suit the taste, or satisfy the desire of an awakened and guilty conscience. When that comes – and come it shall – there is but one thing that will suit your need, and this one you have not. If you ask, what much better could you be than you are, even had you that one thing with the rest? I would simply ask – What is the life of a beast to the life of a rational, spiritual, and immortal being? What is the body to the soul – time, to eternity? An earthly portion to everlasting blessedness? A state of guilt and condemnation, to a state of peace with God. In short – without it you can have no true enjoyment even in this life. It is the thing that sweetens every earthly enjoyment; and is itself a feast when other things are wanting. Without this you cannot bear up in troubles. It fortifies the soul against the evils that assail it in the world. You may think you can live without it, but you cannot die without it. You cannot go to judgment without it. You cannot go to heaven without it. A thousand worlds then for the “one thing needful.”

“That good part.” – The poor world is all the time crying out, “Who will show us any good?” which is sufficient proof that there is no good in it. Sinners are thus constrained unwittingly to bear testimony to the truth of Christ’s saying, that there is but one thing needful and this is the “good part.” There is in it, real, suitable, satisfying, and everlasting good. And, withal, it is the only good, and all the good that is to be found in the whole universe. This does not bespeak the scarcity of good, but rather the great abundance of it; for it is so great that there is no room in the universe for more than one such “good part.” We might here dwell on several of the excellencies and preciousness of it, but we will simply in the meantime notice the one here mentioned that it shall not be taken away from those that choose it. Death will strip you of all the others and leave you empty enough. – “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then, whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?” – Luke 12:20.

[February 1911]

Brief Notes of a Lecture.

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

“The words which Thou gavest me” – John 17:8.

No one ever honoured the Scriptures of the Old Testament as did Jesus Christ. His body was broken, in order that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. Yet it is an error to think, as some do, that Christ had no other means of knowing the mind and will of the Father, save the written word. He was in all things made like unto His brethren, sin only excepted, and He was made like unto His brethren in being made subject unto the written word. But although He became what His brethren were, that does not mean that He did not continue to be what they were not. And in regard to the means which He had of knowing the mind and will of the Father, the Apostle John, especially, is emphatic in intimating to his readers that Christ knew Himself as One who spake upon this earth things that He had heard before the eternal ages. Thus he quotes (John 3:31,32) John the Baptist as saying of Jesus Christ: “He that cometh from heaven is above all. And what He hath seen and heard that He testifieth.” And he quotes (John 15:15) Christ Himself as saying; “All that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.” Christ may, on this account, be said to be contrasted with Moses. Moses was marvellously equipped for his work as mediator of the typical covenant which God made with Israel when He had brought them up out of the land of Egypt. He was repeatedly forty days and forty nights with God in the mount. That meant marvellous fitness for his peculiar work. But Christ’s fitness is of a still higher order. The Mediator of the New Covenant was in ineffable fellowship with the Father before the eternal ages. Of Him are to be understood the words of Proverbs 8, “The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning or ever the earth was. . . . Before the hills was I brought forth. . . . When he prepared the heavens I was there. . . . I was by him as one brought up with him; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth, and my delights were with the sons of men.” What things Christ uttered in the days of His flesh were, it is true, thoughts which passed through the mind of a man, words which were spoken by the lips of a man. Yet He was conscious in giving expression to these thoughts that He, there and then, uttered what He had seen and heard in that ineffable fellowship which was His with the Father from all eternity. When then Christ, in John 17:8, speaks of “the words which the Father gave Him,” words which Christ gave His disciples, and which they received, we are to understand Him to refer, in the first instance, to the consciousness which He had of the divine and mysterious source of the teaching wherein He taught His people.

But, secondly, we are not to overlook the fact that one of the standards which God set up in His Church whereby a true prophet was distinguished from a false prophet was this: The true prophet spake in harmony with such oracles as God had, in earlier times, delivered to His people. Christ was always willing to have His claims tried by this test. In fact, the Old Testament promises do so tally with Christ's claims as that the promises and claims can be understood only through their correspondence the one with the other. They are like the lock and the key whose fitness the one to the other, especially when the mechanism is unusually complex, is the sufficient proof that the maker of the one had the other also in mind. Similarly the divine answerableness of Jesus Christ to the promises of the Old Testament Scriptures is the means of our identifying Jesus of Nazareth with the Messiah promised of old. Through the unction which is of the Holy Ghost, the claims are read in the light of those mysterious promises, and *vice versa*.

The second Psalm, so rich in its expressions of Christ's essential glory as the Eternal Son, and of the glory of His mediatorial kingdom, becomes in this way to the believing soul words which the Father gave to Christ, and which Christ by His Spirit gave to His people. The same is true, to mention only one other example, of the one hundred and tenth Psalm, with its revelation of Christ's eternal priesthood.

Has Christ in this way become precious to us in His Word? Has His Word become precious to us as the galleries in which our King is held? If we can truly answer in the affirmative, it cannot but be that Jesus of Nazareth has appeared to us as the incomparable prophet, as One who, when He trod this earth, continued revealing those divine, mysterious, and life-giving truths which had been His own possession in the beginning, yea, from the eternal ages.

[February 1911]

A Sermon.

BY THE LATE REV. CHARLES J. BROWN, D.D., EDINBURGH.

[This sermon is taken from a volume entitled "The Word of Life." Dr: Charles Brown was one of the most godly and gifted ministers of the Free Church of the Disruption. He was ordained in 1831, his first charge being Anderston Church, Glasgow, where he succeeded the eminent Dr. John Love. In 1837 he was translated to the New North Church, Edinburgh. He died on 3rd July, 1884, aged seventy-eight years: – ED.]

"This is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" Jeremiah 23:6.

In the opening verses of the chapter God had pronounced a woe on unfaithful pastors – referring probably to rulers, both civil and ecclesiastical – who had destroyed and scattered the sheep of His pasture. He had promised to gather His flock in due time together, and set up faithful shepherds over them. Then He passes, at the fifth verse, by a natural and beautiful transition, to that prediction of Messiah, the great Shepherd of the sheep – King and Priest of His Church both – of which the text forms a part: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch, and a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord (Jehovah) our righteousness."

You will easily perceive that, in this great title of Messiah, there is a party introduced as if speaking, and giving it to him – "our," – "The Lord *our* righteousness." Beyond doubt this party is the ransomed Church of God – the true Israel and Judah – the body of Christ – consisting of believers of all countries and ages, of the world. Of the members of this body it is in effect declared that they shall be found addressing Christ – humbly, believingly, joyfully – by the name, "The Lord our righteousness." And what I purpose, accordingly, is to inquire a little into the leading thoughts and feelings which the title, as thus given to Christ by His Church, implies and expresses.

I. – And, first, I remark that when the people of Christ address Him by this name, "The Lord our righteousness," it implies a contrite acknowledgment that they have no righteousness of their own – that they are destitute of all personal righteousness in which to appear before a holy God. "The Lord our righteousness," they say, confessing in the very utterance that "all their righteousnesses are as filthy rags" – that they have none in which they can for a moment venture to appear before the Holy One of Israel. The more narrowly they search the inspired Word, and view their own characters in the light of it, the more is this humbling conviction borne home on them. They find the Lord prescribing to man at the first a perfect rule of righteousness. They find Him pronouncing His curse on every one who continueth not in all things which it requires. They find Him declaring that in this fallen world "there is none righteous, no, not one"; that "the carnal mind is enmity against God"; that "as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse"; that "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin." Once,

indeed, the people of Christ did not – any more than the world around them – obtain the knowledge of sin by the law. “They were alive,” as Paul writes of his former self, “without the law once.” Blind to the extent and purity and spirituality of the law, they fancied themselves in their own righteousness sufficiently good and secure. But “when the commandment came” at length to them by the Holy Ghost, “sin revived, and they died; and the commandment which was ordained to life, they found to be unto death.” They found that, while a single sin was sufficient to bring the curse, their entire lives had been one continued course of sin – of rebellion. They saw that even since the time of their conversion to God, with some goodness – the fruit of His Spirit – there had mingled imperfections and defilements innumerable. And still, as they continue to search their own hearts – rise in their thoughts of the breadth and purity of the law, and see its requirements reaching to the most secret motives and principles of action – they find that their very best deeds have not only nothing in them meriting heaven, but much, very much, deserving wrath. Every way the conviction is borne home on them that they are without a righteousness of their own in which to stand before God; and they give expression to this in effect when they call Christ by the name, “the Lord our righteousness.”

II. – But, secondly, I observe that when the people of Christ give this name to Him, they declare their solemn persuasion that they require a righteousness, though they have none of their own, in which to appear before the Holy One of Israel. They not only confess their entire destitution, but acknowledge their indispensable need of a true and perfect righteousness: “This is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our righteousness.” O yes, they do not profess to regard as superfluous what they have found to be wanting. They do not so renounce the hope of life by the law as to despise and trample on the law. They believe it to be none the less “holy, and just, and good,” that they have fallen beneath its curse. While they own themselves to have broken and dishonoured it, they acknowledge that kept it must be “magnified and made honourable” – or they must perish. The same Spirit of grace that has “convinced them of sin,” “convinces them of righteousness” – teaches them to know that their standing in need of forgiveness does not lay God under any obligation to bestow it; to know that mercy can never require anything at His hand which justice forbids; to know that justice does forbid pardon without satisfaction – favour without righteousness; to know that even mercy itself – considered in relation to the whole scheme of things – requires that the threatenings of truth be executed, and the rights and claims of justice respected and maintained; to know that all the divine perfections conspire in forbidding that that law which required a perfect righteousness of unfallen man, shall be lowered and set aside to admit of the sinner’s acceptance without righteousness; to know, in a word, that if they are to be saved, it can only be in some way (if such can by possibility be found) of reconciling and harmonizing the desires of mercy with the demands of justice – the integrity of the law with the blessedness of its transgressor – his utter destitution of righteousness with his acceptance before God as righteous, and capable of being restored holily to the favour and fellowship and image and everlasting enjoyment of God.

III. – And thus, thirdly, I observe that when the people of Christ address Him by this name, “The Lord our righteousness,” they express and profess their faith that Messiah – being in one person God and man – has brought in a righteousness in their behalf, which is by God accepted for them and imputed unto them for their justification – “This is his name whereby he shall be called, Jehovah our righteousness.” They profess their faith that Messiah is in one person God and man. As for His humanity, it is implied in the very idea of His becoming the righteousness of His people, since a creature alone is capable of fulfilling the righteousness of the law. But the same blessed truth they find expressly in every prophetic announcement of Christ, from the first promise of the seed of the woman that should bruise the head of the

serpent, down to the prediction which introduces the text, "I will raise unto David a righteous branch" – a son – even as Isaiah had written, "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." Well, but of what avail could be the righteousness of a man, however sinless, for the salvation of his fellow-men? To yield such a righteousness had been but His duty for Himself – more than which He could not yield, nor less, without falling beneath the curse. Accordingly, see how the title which God puts here into the mouth of the ransomed Church, proclaims Christ God as well as man – "This is his name whereby he shall be called, Jehovah our righteousness." From the beginning the Church knew sufficiently this mystery, as witness the words of Jacob on his dying bed, "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk; the God which fed me all my life long unto this day; the Angel" – manifestly the same God – "which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads." But as the stream of prophecy widened, advanced, and fell at length into the tide of the Gospel revelation, the Church grew more and more familiar with such titles as "Emmanuel," "the mighty God," "the fellow of the Lord of hosts," "the first and the last and the living One," "God manifest in the flesh," "God over all, blessed for ever." Nor has she ever for a moment regarded this as some theological dogma or speculation, but has gloried in it ever as a truth wherewith her dearest hopes and interests are inseparably bound up – "Jehovah our righteousness." As man, she beholds Him able to suffer; as God, able to save: in His humanity fulfilling all righteousness; by His divinity rendering that righteousness available for the lost as man, made under the law, obeying its precept, enduring its curse; as God, imparting to the obedience and sacrifice a value, merit, sufficiency, strictly infinite.

In the counsels of eternity – in the everlasting covenant – she beholds Jehovah constituting our Lord Jesus the Head, Representative, Surety, of His people – as it is written, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one"; "I have laid help on one that is mighty"; "By the knowledge of him shall my righteous servant justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities." She sees the Son, in the fulness of time, coming into our world, taking our nature up into His divine Person, and discharging in it the entire debt of obedience and suffering due by His people – "finishing transgression, making an end of sins, bringing in everlasting righteousness." She sees the Father, "well pleased for his righteousness' sake," raising Him from the dead, in testimony of the acceptance of His sacrifice; acquitting and glorifying the Surety, and in Him the people whom He represented, when their debt was paid. In a word, she beholds the Father, on His intercession within the veil, sending the Holy Spirit into their hearts, uniting them to Christ by living faith, imputing His righteousness to them, setting them for ever free from the curse, accepting them in the Beloved, making them heirs of everlasting salvation – as it is written, "He hath made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him"; "David describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works"; "By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous"; "Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us righteousness"; "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth"; "This is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our righteousness."

IV. – But, once more, I observe that when the people of Christ call Him by the name, "The Lord our righteousness," they are seen in the act of embracing, appropriating, and rejoicing in Him as the Lord their righteousness. "Our," a word of possession – of appropriation – "the Lord our righteousness." Do you ask what the ground is on which this all-important embracing – appropriating – proceeds? I answer that assuredly it is not any kind of price paid by the sinner – any kind of equivalent sought or given – for a possession which in fact is beyond all price, even as the Church has no price to pay, being in herself "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." And what *is* the ground, therefore, save the free and unrestricted offer of Christ and His glorious fulness in the Gospel to sinners of mankind – to sinners simply as such – to them all, without exception or distinction? Thus,

“My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.” “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.” “Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness: I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry.” “Now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all, and upon all them that believe.” “Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.” “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” Listening to such blessed offers – taught by the Holy Ghost effectually to listen to them – the Church flees for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before her; no longer “going about to establish her own righteousness, submits herself to the righteousness of God”; embraces, closes with, Messiah as the Lord her righteousness – like some drowning man laying hold of the plank that can alone sustain and save him – exclaims, “This is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our righteousness.” Nor is this her exercise once only or a second time, but constantly – even as often as she discovers new defilements deserving wrath, new sins needing forgiveness, new glories of purity and spirituality in the law, making manifest her own vileness. Entering daily into the spirit of the title, “the Lord our righteousness,” she lives by the faith of the Son of God; comes up from the wilderness leaning on her Beloved; runs the race set before her, looking unto Jesus – “This is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our righteousness”

But there is a further ground on which the “our” of the text – this word of property and rightful possession – proceeds. I refer to scriptural evidence of being already in Christ; evidence of having already embraced the Saviour; evidence, in the fruits of faith, of the existence and reality of faith; evidence of union to Christ in communion with Him, and some measure of conformity and obedience to Him. More and more thus ascertaining that Christ is hers in possession, the Church comes to mingle, you will observe, a new element of thought and feeling with the *our*, “the Lord our righteousness.” It is the language of joy and triumph, as well as of reliance and faith. It is not the spirit only of the drowning man laying hold of the plank, but of the safe and happy, rich and joyful man, realising his safety, and rejoicing in his treasures. “My Beloved is mine and I am his.” “Surely shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength.” “In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified and shall glory.” “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.” “This is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our righteousness.”

Let me add an inference or two before I close.

1. First, see here how wondrous a provision the Gospel has made for at once humbling the sinner and exalting him – laying him low in his own eyes and yet gloriously ennobling him. Utter destitution of righteousness; possession of an everlasting righteousness – we have found both elements together in the title, “the Lord our righteousness.” And you will carefully observe that not only is the believer both humbled and exalted, but – such is the admirable contrivance of divine wisdom – it is the very same blessedness that elevates which also lays him low. The dignity of having Jehovah for his righteousness, whereby he is raised above angels, does, in the very act of his claiming and rejoicing in it, proclaim him “a child of wrath” by nature – “dead in trespasses and sins” – “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” Ah, the men of this world are proud of unreal, imaginary dignities. The Christian learns to be lowly amid royal, celestial honours. This is what the Apostle James means in his remarkable words, “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted; but the rich, in that he is made low.” Think not, brethren, that when God so much insists on laying the creature low, it is that He may debase and degrade him. O, no, no. He desires only to abase the pride which is his real degradation; to lower him in his own eyes, that He may

elevate him in reality; to strip him of a glory that is visionary, that He may invest him with a crown of glory that fadeth not away. He desires only to change the object and ground of his glorying – transferring it from himself to God, from earth to heaven, from vanity to wisdom, from the “filthy rags” of his own righteousness to the robe of a righteousness divine and everlasting. “Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord.” “In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever.” “Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption; that, according as it is written, he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

2. Again, see what a ground of security, of peace, and of everlasting blessedness, the believer in Christ enjoys. As to his security, he is clothed from head to foot with the “righteousness of God.” Unlike to Adam at his creation, who was sinless, indeed, but mutable and liable to fall, the believer stands, not in his own righteousness, but in that of the second Adam, the Lord from heaven – “Jehovah our righteousness.” “This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord; and their righteousness is of Me; saith the Lord.” Then, as to his peace. Well, surely may that be as a river – a peace which passeth all understanding – when, in the view of death and judgment and eternity, he can meet every challenge of conscience and the law by pleading the obedience unto death of the God-man, exclaiming, “This is his name whereby he shall be called, the Lord our righteousness.” “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.” “The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.” “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” As to the believer’s eternal blessedness, behold it the fruit and crown and reward, not of any merits of his, but of the righteousness of God’s own Son. And thus think it not incredible, but rather natural, certain, necessary, that it should be all that the Scriptures describe it – a blessedness not exaggerated when set forth as an “inheriting of all things,” “inheriting of God,” “sitting down with Christ in his throne,” an “exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” What purity, glory, happiness shall be deemed too great to reward Messiah’s obedience unto death – to be the fruit of the travail of His soul – to express the Father’s boundless, eternal complacency in it. “He that spared not his own Son, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”

3. Finally, let me beseech you to use the subject in the way of self-inquiry, and of direction, according to the result of it. Dear hearers, have you ever truly seen yourselves destitute of righteousness? Have you seen that you need a righteousness, though you have none of your own, in which to stand before God? Have you beheld the Lord Jesus, God manifest in the flesh – the surety of the lost – made under the law, obeying its precept, enduring its curse – “made of God,” to all who put their trust in Him, “righteousness”? Have you fled for refuge to lay hold on this offered Saviour? Have you laid the weight of your whole eternity on Him as the Lord your righteousness? If so, then blessed are ye. Then is He your righteousness in actual possession, as well as in the offers of the Gospel. “As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.” And not content with confiding in Him, rejoice and glory in Him, exclaiming, “This is his name whereby he shall be called, the Lord our righteousness.” But if you have never built on this foundation laid in Zion – if either you are quite conscious that you have not, or the absence of the fruits of righteousness prove that you have not – then I beseech and implore you, trifle no more with the concerns of eternity. Ponder well the relations you stand in to God, His justice, His law. Think what that load of unforgiven guilt is which even now presses on you, and presses all the more fatally that you do not feel it. Behold the sword of divine justice ready at any moment to descend on you! But

I beseech you to behold the same sword as it entered the bowels of Emmanuel, the substitute of the guilty. "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts; smite the Shepherd." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God; for he hath made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." "This is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our righteousness."

In place of my usual closing word to the young, I cannot resist reading a sentence or two from Bunyan's "Pilgrim" – from the deeply-precious dialogue held between Christian and Hopeful, lest they should go to sleep on the Enchanted Ground: –

CHRISTIAN. – And what did you do then?

HOPE. – Do! I could not tell what to do, until I brake my mind to Faithful, for he and I were well acquainted. And he told me that unless I could obtain the righteousness of a man that never had sinned, neither mine own nor all the righteousness of the world could save me.

CHRISTIAN. – And did you think he spake true?

HOPE. – Had he told me so when I was pleased and satisfied with mine own amendments, I had called him fool for his pains; but now, since I see mine own infirmity and the sin that cleaves to my best performances, I have been forced to be of his opinion.

CHRISTIAN. – But did you think, when at first he suggested it to you, that there was such a man to be found, of whom it might justly be said that he never committed sin?

HOPE. – I must confess the words at first sounded strangely, but after a little more talk and company with him, I had full conviction about it.

CHRISTIAN. – And did you ask him what man this was, and how you must be justified by him?

HOPE. – Yes, and he told me it was the Lord Jesus, that dwelleth on the right hand of the Most High. And thus, said he, you must be justified by Him, even by trusting to what He hath done by Himself in the days of His flesh, and suffered when He did hang on the tree. I asked him, further, how that man's righteousness could be of that efficacy to justify another before God? And he told me He was the mighty God, and did what He did, and died the death also, not for Himself but for me, to whom His doings, and the worthiness of them, should be imputed if I believed on Him.

CHRISTIAN. – And what did you do then?

HOPE. – I made my objections against my believing, for that I thought He was not willing to save me.

CHRISTIAN. – And what said Faithful to you then?

HOPE. – He bid me go to Him and see. Then I said it was presumption; but he said, No, for I was invited to come. Then he gave me a book of Jesus' inditing, to encourage me the more freely to come; and he said concerning that Book, that every jot and tittle thereof stood firmer than heaven and earth. Then I asked him what I must do when I came; and he told me I must entreat upon my knees, with all my heart and soul, the Father to reveal Him to me. Then I asked him, further, how I must make my supplication to Him. And he said, go and thou shalt find Him upon a mercy-seat, where He sits all the year long, to give pardon and forgiveness to them that come. I told him that I knew not what to say when I came. And he bid me say to this effect: 'God be merciful to me, a sinner, and make me to know and believe in Jesus Christ; for I see that if His righteousness had not been, or I have not faith in that righteousness, I am utterly cast away. Lord, I have heard that Thou art a merciful God, and hast ordained that thy Son, Jesus Christ, should be the Saviour of the world; and moreover, that Thou art willing to bestow Him upon such a poor sinner as I am (and I am a sinner indeed). Lord, take therefore this opportunity, and magnify thy grace in the salvation of my soul through thy Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.'"

[March 1911]

A Sermon.

By the REV. JAMES S. SINCLAIR, John Knox's, Glasgow.

“And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us”– Acts 16:14,15.

The Lord Jesus Christ, in the farewell words which He spoke to His Apostles before He was carried up into heaven, gave them commission to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” The time of the ingathering of the Gentiles had come, and it was the happy privilege of these servants of Christ to go forth, attended by the “all power” which was given to their Lord and Master, to “teach (or make disciples of) all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” The world at large was the field He then set before the apostles and all other truly sent messengers of the gospel to the end of time. It is equally manifest, however, that the Lord still reserved in His own hand the right to prescribe the exact order of time and place in which the gospel message would be proclaimed throughout the nations. This we learn in a very marked way from the section of the chapter which precedes our text. Paul, who was on his second missionary journey, and his fellow-labourer Silas, “had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia,” confirming the churches in the faith, but “were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia,” that is, in what was known as the Roman province of Asia, for they were already in Asia Minor. Then again: “After they were come to Mysia, they essayed to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit suffered them not.” Now, this did not imply that the Lord had no intention of ever sending the Gospel to these parts of the world, for we learn from other sources that there were many Christians in these places afterwards, but that He had designed in His all-wise providence to send the Gospel to another continent first. These restraints, though they may appear at first sight discouraging signs, were not so; they taught Paul and Silas in a very clear and distinct way that the Lord was watching all their steps and controlling all their movements in His service, and that they might rely upon Him to guide them in all that they attempted to accomplish in His name. He did not, however, leave them with something “forbidden” only; He gave them a positive call to move in a certain direction. While they tarried for a little at Troas, on the sea-coast, “a vision appeared to Paul in the night: There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us.” This vision led them to conclude assuredly that the Lord had called them to preach the Gospel unto the people of Macedonia, and immediately they loosed from Troas, and sailing across the Aegean Sea, which separates Asia from Europe at this point, they came by the island of Samothracia to the town of Neapolis on the Macedonian coast. Thence they proceeded ten miles inland to the city of Philippi. The vivid call that the Lord had given no doubt greatly encouraged Paul and his fellow-labourers (for Luke, the writer of the Acts, was now evidently with Paul and Silas – “we” in the tenth verse) to expect that the divine blessing would abundantly attend their labours in this quarter, and their expectation was not disappointed.

Philippi was the first place in which the Gospel of Christ was preached on the continent of Europe – that continent to which Great Britain and Ireland, as islands of the sea, belong. That circumstance should make the incidents of this chapter of special interest to us. It is to

be sincerely hoped that the good work begun among the Philippians will continue without break on this great continent and its adjoining islands to the end of time. "Wherefore, glorify ye the Lord in the fires, even the name of the Lord God of Israel in the isles of the sea" (Isaiah 24:15).

This chapter gives us the record of two outstanding conversions that took place under the ministry of Paul and Silas in Philippi on this memorable occasion – the conversion of Lydia and the conversion of the jailor. The Lord is sovereign undoubtedly in what He pleases to put on record, and in what He chooses to leave out. But there are many things in these distinct cases of conversion that seem to point to the reason for their record – things that are fitted to instruct and edify sinners in all subsequent ages. We can only notice a particular or two. Lydia was a religious woman, a worshipper of the God of Israel; the jailor was, to all appearance, an ungodly heathen. Both needed the new birth, and both got it. Lydia was dealt with in a comparatively gentle way; the jailor was awakened with terrible things in righteousness. Both came to the same spot – the feet of Christ – and both believed on His name. Both confessed Him before men, and both brought forth the same fruits of repentance, faith and love. Thus, while in some particulars they differed from one another, they experienced the same thorough, saving change in heart and life, and were monuments to the praise of God's glorious grace. Such points of difference and similarity are common in the history of God's people in all generations.

It is our present purpose, in dependence on the Spirit of truth, to consider the case of Lydia, and in doing so let us observe:

- I. – The account that is given of Lydia before her conversion;
- II. – The message she heard on this important occasion in her history – "things that were spoken of Paul";
- III. – The blessing which accompanied the message; and
- IV. – The proofs which Lydia gave of the genuineness of her conversion.

I. – Let us notice the account that is given of Lydia before her conversion.

1. She was a Gentile by *birth*. Her own name, common among the Greeks and Romans, and the name of the city, Thyatira, in Asia Minor, to which she originally belonged, prove this. She was born and brought up among the dark Gentiles, who were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenant of promise." But the day of deliverance for the Gentiles had begun to dawn; God had a chosen people among them. Lydia was evidently led by various steps to the place where she first received "the good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people." This teaches us that when the Lord has a purpose of saving mercy, He can bring the sinner to the Gospel, or send the Gospel to the sinner, no matter in what part of the earth he or she is found. But though Lydia was a dark Gentile to begin with, she became a bright epistle of Christ before the Lord was done with her. "There is nothing too hard" for Him. "Ye were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord."

2. She was "a seller of purple" by *occupation*. She seems to have been a business woman of some standing and means. Purple dye was much in use in connection with the clothing of the rich. You remember that it is said of the rich man in the parable that he "was clothed in purple and fine linen." The people of Thyatira were famous for their work and commerce in the business of dyeing. Lydia was in all probability a much-occupied and well-situated woman in respect of outward circumstances. Here we observe the grace and power of God in the Gospel. The Lord is able to make all ranks and classes of people willing in the day of His power, willing to count all things but loss and dung that they may win Christ and be found in Him. When the time came, Lydia allowed no consideration of worldly business or gain to stand between her and becoming a devoted follower of the despised Jesus of

Nazareth. “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:5).

3. She was a Jewish proselyte by *religion*. She “worshipped God.”

(1) Lydia is here found on the Sabbath in the company of some women, the greater number of whom were probably Jews, worshipping the God of Israel in a quiet spot by the side of a river outside the city. Here “prayer was wont to be made.” It is likely that these devout Jews were either too few to build a synagogue, or were not allowed to do so within the city owing to the opposition of the Gentile rulers. We are not informed how it came to pass that Lydia had renounced the idolatrous religion of her childhood, but renounced it she very definitely had, or she would never have been found in this humble company. It was not altogether an unknown thing for Gentiles of high intelligence and morality to turn away from the foolish practices and grossly immoral rites that were associated with their own religion. Their natural understanding and natural conscience rose in rebellion against the degrading superstitions that were so much believed and practised. Some of them also did not fail to discern that the Jewish religion and worship were of a purer and nobler cast than that with which they were accustomed. To this class Lydia manifestly belonged. But I think, friends, there is more to be observed in her case than mere intellectual discernment. She had been led not only to see the folly of Gentile worship and the excellency of the Jewish, but to identify herself with the Jews in very humble and uninviting circumstances – a few women meeting for prayer by the river-side, outside a city where the Jews were apparently far from well liked. She had been willing to run the risk of some reproach and loss already for her new-found attachment to the faith of Israel. This would seem to prove that a supernatural power was at work – that God had been blessing the testimony of the Jews among the Gentiles, and that He was leading this blind Gentile in a way she knew not, opening her eyes gradually to see the truth of the revelation He had given of Himself in the Scriptures.

(2) Lydia was a conscientious believer in Jehovah as the one living and true God, and in the Old Testament as a divine revelation, at this time in her history, but she was not a truly regenerate person or possessor of saving faith until she heard the Gospel from the lips of Paul, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Whatever faculty of her soul had been hitherto “opened,” her “heart” was not; for this, we are told, was now opened by the Lord Himself. In all likelihood Lydia was, consciously or unconsciously, resting upon her own righteousness as the chief foundation of her hope for eternity. This was the common, practical error of the Jews in her day, and this is the common, practical error of unconverted sinners in every age. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God”; he cannot rise higher than himself; and so, in one way or another, he is building chiefly upon his own character, ability, and attainments as the ground of his acceptance in the sight of God. A half look he has towards the divine mercy, but his main dependence is in his own righteousness. We may be worshippers of God from common conviction, but what will that avail us if our hearts are unrenewed by divine grace and we are not trusting in Christ alone for salvation? “If ye believe not that I am he (saith Jesus), ye shall die in your sins.” Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3).

II. – Our second head is the message which Lydia heard on this important occasion – “things which were spoken of Paul.” Now, we are not told expressly the things which Paul spake at the river side on this Sabbath day, but the silence of the inspired writer does not imply that they were uncommon things that he uttered, but quite the opposite. It suggests that they were just the things Paul was accustomed to speak, which are recorded elsewhere in the Acts and his Epistles. Let us notice very briefly some of these things under three general heads.

1. Things concerning *sin*. – As we see in the Epistle to the Romans, the Apostle was most earnest in pressing home upon the Jews the truth concerning the Fall and its consequences. This was a small Jewish gathering he was now addressing, and it may be justly concluded that he did not omit to bring home the solemn truth of *universal depravity* – that all, both Jews and Gentiles, had “sinned and come short of the glory of God,” that there was “none righteous, no, not one,” and that all had gone out of the way, and were aliens and “enemies in their minds by wicked works” (Romans 3; Colossians 1). Still further, the Apostle was wont to declare *the dread punishment* of sin in such terms as these: “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Romans 1:18); “the wages of sin is death” (6:23); and those that “know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 1:8,9). These truths were required then, and they are as much needed to-day as ever. It is perfectly plain that the modern pulpit has largely forgotten them. Sin and its punishment are hardly ever mentioned. People are allowed to grow up with the idea that they are, on the whole, very good, and are sure of heaven at last, without any special inquiry as to whether they have obtained the forgiveness of sins or the new birth. What ruin this delusion brings at death!

2. Things concerning *Christ* – The Lord Jesus was the great and central theme of the Apostle’s preaching. To the Corinthians he said, “I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified.” He preached Jesus Christ as *the true Messiah* promised unto the fathers; the root of Jesse who should rise to reign over the Gentiles, and in whom the spiritual seed of Abraham everywhere should trust. He proclaimed Him in language of exalted thought and holy fervour, as in His person *the eternal Son of God*, co-equal with the Father and the Holy Ghost in the undivided Godhead, one “who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God” (Philippians 2:6); the brightness of the Father’s glory and the express image of His person; God’s dear Son, by whom were “all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth”; the Creator and Upholder of the universe. He also dwelt on the co-related truth that He was “*God manifest in the flesh*,” God the Son, who assumed into union with Himself a real yet pure humanity – “the likeness of sinful flesh,” – yet “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” Still further, the Apostle preached Christ as *the only Redeemer of God’s elect*, who “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8), and who redeemed a multitude out of every kindred and tongue – “the Church” – by His own blood. “We preach Christ crucified,” says he again, “unto the Jews a stumbling-block and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

3. Things concerning *salvation* – the provision that is in Christ and the way to attain an interest in it. Christ, by His obedience and sufferings unto death, had provided a *righteousness*, on the ground of which sinners can be justified in the sight of a holy God. He is “the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth.” Similarly, as He was made unto His people righteousness, He was also made unto them *sanctification*. He came to save His people from their sins, and to wash them from all their defilement, so that at last they shall be without “spot or wrinkle or any such thing” (Ephesians 5:27). The Apostle was also wont to proclaim that these and other blessings of the new covenant were obtained, not by works, but “*by faith* in Jesus Christ.” Justification, sanctification, adoption – the complete salvation that is in Christ – was only obtainable by a faith in which the sinner acknowledged himself dead in sins, and a child of wrath, according to the testimony of the word, and yet willing to be saved by grace and grace alone. This saving faith, the Apostle declared, was the gift and the operation of God (Ephesians 2; Colossians 2), so that, while the word of salvation was freely “preached to every creature which is under heaven” (Colossians 1:23), those who

received it in truth were debtors to the grace and power of the Holy Ghost for their obedience of faith to the Gospel call. And lastly, the salvation of Christ was *eternal* in duration. "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6), the day of His second advent, and of the final glorification of His redeemed.

Such is a very imperfect survey of some of the great things which Paul was accustomed to preach to Jew and Gentile, and which in all likelihood Lydia heard not a little of on this all-important day in her spiritual history.

III. – The blessing which accompanied this message to the heart of Lydia: "whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken."

1. Let us notice that the "heart" is the main thing that must be affected with a view to receive the Gospel. The word "heart" is generally used in the Scriptures to describe the whole soul of man in all its faculties, understanding, conscience, will and affections, but with a special emphasis upon the will and affections. The Apostle speaks of sinners in their natural estate as having "the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." On the other hand, he teaches that with the heart man believeth unto righteousness," and that by "*the love of the truth*" men are saved. The faith that is saving in its nature is "with all the heart" (Acts 8:37). The Scriptures also bring before us a temporary faith which appears to be only an assent of the natural understanding or conscience, or superficial movement of the natural emotions. Many believed in the days of Christ's personal ministry who afterwards went back and walked no more with Him. Some such believers also associated with the Apostles for a time. But when the whole soul, including the will and affections, is gained to the truth as it is in Jesus, there is evidence of "the renewing of the Holy Ghost" – an heart truly opened by the Lord, that shall never close finally against Him.

2. Let it be observed that the words imply that Lydia's heart was *shut* until now. The figure seems to be that of a house, or room, with a door – a not uncommon one in the Bible. "Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me." Thus spake Christ to Laodicea. Well, we do not open a door that is already opened. It appears to me, therefore, as I have already hinted, that whatever enlightenment Lydia possessed before this as to Jehovah, God of Israel, her heart was unrenewed, and that she had never savingly received the whole counsel of God concerning sin and salvation, even as that is taught in the Old Testament, for the truth is essentially one under both dispensations, and if she had so received it, her "heart" would have been "opened" before this time. She was indeed, like many in our own day, who may receive the truth to a certain extent in their judgments, but are still under the dominion of sin in their affections. They believe, intellectually at any rate, in the existence of God and the truth of the Bible, but they are still dead in sins and uncircumcised in heart. It should be matter of serious enquiry with each one of us how we stand in this respect.

3. The third thing here to be noticed is that *the Lord* opened her heart. This clearly implies that none but He could open it. For if powerful eloquence, gracious argument, and burning zeal for the salvation of sinners, could have done so, they were all present in the person of the wonderful preacher Paul. But not a word does the inspired writer say of the graces and gifts of the speaker: he only mentions "the things which were spoken," and attributes the whole work of the opening of the heart to the Lord Himself. How different this is from the ordinary manner of men in writing (and to a certain extent lawfully) about their fellows! The instrument is there; but "Christ is all and in all." What an indirect but powerful testimony also to the truth which runs through the whole Bible that salvation is of the Lord alone! Let this be deeply considered by each one of us, but not with the fatalistic conclusion

that we are to fold our arms in ease and indifference. That is the devil's logic. Let us remember that if we cannot open our own hearts, there is One who can, and He says, "I will be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them"; "Ask and it shall be given you"; "My son, give me thine heart."

4. The last thing we shall here observe is that as the result of the Lord's work, Lydia gave a *heart attention* to the truth that was spoken of Paul. Every faculty of her soul was wide open for the reception of the truth. How great a work the Lord can accomplish in a short time! The things spoken, accompanied by divine power, found a ready entrance. Her trust in her own righteousness was consumed; she was laid low as a poor, guilty, helpless sinner before God; and she was speedily raised and enabled to believe upon the Son of God as all her salvation and all her desire. By the door of this heart attention it is not too much to say that Christ entered powerfully and savingly into her soul, and she embraced Him in the arms of faith and love. All that is recorded as taking place on her side is attention – an attention divinely wrought, no doubt, but still only an attention. She could add nothing to the Gospel; but it was her blessed privilege to attend and to receive into every chamber of her heart the whole counsel of God for salvation, and pre-eminently the Christ of that counsel. The language of the forty-fifth Psalm, and of the Song of songs, will well set forth her thoughts and feelings, if not her very words; "Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips. Thou art the chiefest among ten thousand, the altogether lovely."

IV. – The proofs which Lydia gave of the genuineness of her conversion – self-sacrificing faith towards the Lord Jesus, and love to the brethren.

1. "She was baptised." This may seem a comparatively simple matter to many of us in our time. But it was far from simple at that period in the history of the Church. It implies that Lydia had made a *public confession of her faith* in Christ, a step that then involved the greatest possible risk to her person, family, and possessions. Hers was no weak sentimental belief that might have said, "I will cherish this faith in my heart, but I will not make it known yet, as it may involve much trouble and loss; I must proceed cautiously." Oh, no; hers was a heavenly flame that consumed every carnal and worldly-wise objection before it. She was determined to count all things but loss and dung, that she might win Christ and be found in Him, and was prepared to sacrifice her life itself, if necessary, for the Lord Jesus. All this the early Christians had to lay in the balance. Lydia had much to lose, house and business and means, but she was ready, by the grace of God, to surrender all for the sake of Christ and the Gospel.

2. She besought Paul and his fellow-labourers to come into her house and abide. She showed *warm love to the brethren*. Hers was not that lofty and fanciful affection for Christ that has no living attachment to His children. If she now loved "him that begat," she loved them also that were "begotten of him" (1 John 5:1). If she loved "the great Shepherd of the sheep," she also loved the under-shepherds who had been instrumentally useful to her soul. She desired a token of spiritual confirmation from the Apostle and his friends: "If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord (or a true believer), come into my house and abide there." And it is added: "and she constrained us." It would look as if they hesitated to go with her. Perhaps their hesitation thus spake: "You don't realise, Lydia, the danger to which you are exposing yourself by asking us to your house: yours will become a marked house for persecution in Philippi. Are you prepared to take the consequences"? She persevered in her request; her faithfulness to the Lord triumphed, and received the desired confirmation. "And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13). Love constrained her to throw open her heart and her house to the followers of Christ. Freely she had received, freely she gave. Lydia was "an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."

Now, in conclusion, let each one of us examine himself and herself, whether our hearts have been opened by the Lord to receive the things spoken by the prophets, apostles, and Christ himself. These are the things which have been in our ears and before our eyes since childhood, and we shall have to give a very solemn account, at death and the judgment seat, of our responsibilities if we have never received them into our hearts. They shall rise up to condemn us to “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and of the glory of His power.” Our hearts are shut by a guilty unbelief: all our excuses and palliations will appear as subtle forms of sin and self in the light of eternity. May the Lord lead many of us now to His feet with our stubborn, rebellious, unbelieving hearts, that He may work in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure!

And you, whose hearts were opened in a day of mercy, have reason to praise the Lord that He did so of His free grace. You may often feel that iniquities prevail against you through the presence of an old corrupt heart that would shut out Christ, and the Bible, and the Gospel, altogether. But when the Lord has once opened, no power in earth or hell can finally shut. You must come continually to “the throne of grace,” that you may “obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Let us finally observe, from the experience of Lydia, the blessing that may be found, by divine grace, in small meetings gathered in accordance with the Word of God. Many people undervalue prayer-meetings and gatherings where the numbers are small, and they prefer to go with the multitude to places where neither doctrine nor worship is sound and wholesome, than with the few to places where both are pure and scriptural. This happy incident is a rebuke to such. Lydia was with a very small company at the river side when she heard the words of eternal life, to her soul’s eternal good. It is an encouragement to others who may be found in the society of a few who desire to worship the Most High according to His truth. The Lord Jesus gives such the greatest encouragement. He saith: “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

May the Lord bless to us His own word!

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