

# DIARY AND SERMONS

OF THE

REV. ALEXANDER MACLEOD, ROGART

(Formerly of Uig, Lewis)

WITH

## BRIEF MEMOIR

BY THE

REV. D. BEATON, WICK.

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Diary and Sermons of the Rev. Alexander Macleod, Rogart and Uig, 1925

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Alexander Macleod is credited with having been the first of the evangelical preachers on the Isle of Lewis. In "Island Spirituality" from the Islands Book Trust I explore how he was brought to the Island by the landlady, Lady Hood Mackenzie - the last of the Mackenzies. Whether or not we consider ourselves to be "evangelicals", this rare document gives a fascinating insight into the kind of religion that entered Lewis in the 1920s.

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## BRIEF MEMOIR.

### PREFATORY NOTE.

It is now over a hundred years since the Rev. Alexander Macleod was settled at Uig, which was the favoured spot that was to be so abundantly blessed with showers from heaven. We send forth this little booklet with the prayer that the Holy Spirit may bless as He did in the days of old the word spoken by His servant. The "Diary" appeared in the "Free Presbyterian Magazine," Vol. III.; Sermon I. in Vol. XI., and Sermons II., III., and IV., in Vol. XXIX. The last three sermons were taken from the MSS. of Mr David Ross, Evelix, one of the Sutherland noted "Men."

D. BEATON.

Wick, 23rd January 1925.

ALEXANDER MACLEOD, the subject of this sketch, was born at Balachladich, Stoer, in 1786. It would appear that in his boyhood, when he was only fifteen years old, the Holy Spirit dealt with him savingly. And the work begun at this early age was deepened and strengthened by the preaching of the Word and the fellowship of God's people at Communion seasons in Ferintosh.

In reviewing God's goodness to him in the past, Mr Macleod makes reference in his diary to his early years. "Give a retrospective view, O my immortal soul," he writes, "to Jehovah's wonderful care of thee since you came to the world. When, eight, nine, and ten years of age, think of the instances you remember in which the law of nature was checking you then, when you committed any actual sin—Sabbath or week day—though you were then a stranger to grace. Think of how early you were put to school in a remote district of the country, but under the religious instruction of pious parents and teacher. Think how circumspectly they watched over your education and morals during your years of minority, and consider how strictly for your benefit—as well as for their own comfort and salvation—they regarded the laws of God and man, and trained you to pay a reverential regard to the former, and due respect to the latter, as thy Lord commands. Consider, O my soul, the first religious impressions you had under the means of grace, the places in which you felt these impressions so powerful that you could not well command yourself, when between the years of 15 and 18. Remember the time of private prayer in the field at Duirinish\* (Lord Reay's country), also at Ullapool and Reef, in Lochbroom, when you were made as a fountain of unceasing tears and love that could not be stopped in the presence of thy God. Remember the feast you had in Dingwall, on a sacramental occasion, when you could not deny that you got Benjamin's portion of 300 pieces of silver and five changes of raiment, when the rest of the brethren were more scantily supplied."

\* Gaelic form of Durness.

On reaching manhood, he entered on the usual course of study in preparation for the ministry. It would appear that about this time he came under the influence of Norman Macleod,\* who afterwards went out to Cape Breton, and became minister of a congregation there. Notwithstanding the fact that Mr Macleod was strongly recommended by the Rev. John Kennedy, afterwards of Killearnan, the Presbytery of Tongue, when he appeared before them for license, took notice of Mr Macleod's sympathies with Norman Macleod's views, as the following minute shows:— "They had been informed that he did at one time join a certain party or religious sect in the parish of Assint, who had openly and avowedly seceded from the Established Church of Scotland. They seriously interrogated him regarding his having renounced the peculiar tenets of said party. To which he answered, that with a conscience void of offence he was able to declare his firm attachment to the Church of Scotland, and also his having wholly renounced the party which he once joined" ("Tongue Presbytery Register." 19th October 1818). On making this acknowledgment, he was licensed by the Presbytery. In the following year (1819) he was ordained minister of the Gaelic Chapel, Dundee, and in 1821 he was translated to Cromarty.

What success his ministry had in these places we are not in a position to say. In his next charge, Uig, Lewis, however, there was an extraordinary blessing on his labours. His induction as parish minister of

\* The Rev. Norman Macleod was a very remarkable man in many ways. In 1851 he sailed in a vessel built by himself and many of his Cape Breton congregation, to Australia, where he remained for two years. He then went to New Zealand, and finally settled in the district of Waipu, about seventy miles north of Auckland, where he died in 1866, at the age of eighty-six. It is said that the life and doctrine of a certain class of ministers in the Church of Scotland were the cause of his separation from the Church of his fathers. There is a short account of his Cape Breton ministry (with portrait) in the "Presbyterian Witness" (Diamond Jubilee Number, December 1908), and of his New Zealand ministry in the "History of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand" (pp. 78-80). Mr Macleod's own ecclesiastical views are set forth in a volume of tracts, "The Present Church of Scotland and a Tint of Normanism, contending in a Dialogue." A full description of the Waipu settlement is given in a pamphlet entitled "The Idyll of the Ship-builders," published in New Zealand. Dr R. G. Macdonald, Dunedin, wrote two articles on the Rev. Norman Macleod and the Waipu settlement, in the "John O'Groat Journal" (9th and 16th June 1922).

Uig took place in 1824. This was the first appointment of an evangelical minister in the Island. Prior to this the people of Lewis were in great spiritual darkness, and from the account given by Mr Campbell in his biographical sketch of Mr Macleod in the "Disruption Worthies of the Highlands" (page 223), the spiritual state of the people was dark indeed. As an illustration, he writes as follows:—"It may be stated that the natives of Uig, being located for the most part on the western shores of Lewis, and thus facing the Atlantic, had, in days when lighthouses and Lloyds' agents were unknown, frequent experience of the material benefit accruing to them on the occurrence of a wreck on their dangerous coasts. The writer has never heard them accused of using any positive measures to further such a catastrophe, unless it can be considered that petitions addressed to the Supreme Being might prove to be such. For, however strange it may appear, at the first prayer meeting which Mr Macleod attempted to hold at Uig, one of the former elders actually offered a request that a wreck should be cast ashore in the neighbourhood; while another elder, referring to the death of our Lord as a misfortune, used strong expression of deprecation of its having at all occurred." This is not quoted with the purpose of exposing the nakedness of the land, but to show the state of things before the Gospel appeared marching triumphantly through the Island. Though the Lewis parishes had been supplied with ministers for many generations, yet they were of the "moderate" type, and vital godliness was unknown. Family worship was not observed, and superstition abounded. All and sundry, when they reached a certain age, became communicants. When Mr Macleod became minister of Uig, there were eight or nine hundred communicants in the congregation.

Mr Macleod's own words, as given in his diary, describing the condition of things bring home to a reader better than anything the low moral state of his parishioners. "The first month I laboured among this people," he says, "I observed that they were extremely attentive to the preaching of the Word. But the truth made no visible impression on them. They seemed to be much afraid, and astonished at the truths delivered. You would, at the same time, read in their appearance that they were at a loss to understand what they were hearing. Having commenced to examine several of the parents previous to my dispensing the ordinance of baptism to them, I found that they (with very few exceptions) were grossly ignorant of the truths of Christi-

anity as revealed in God's Word. In questioning them respecting the covenants of work and grace, they acknowledged that they were perfectly ignorant of the origin, nature, and systems of both. There were but few among them that could tell me the names of our first parents, of Noah, or of any of the patriarchs and prophets, and but few could tell of the nature of our Lord's mission, and the names of His disciples and their history. In asking how many sacraments Christ appointed, the answer in general was that He instituted seven. When I enquired their hope of salvation as to its grounds and foundation, good conduct and doing the best we could was the answer, and with regard to their expectation of heaven, they said it would be a wonderful favour to be somewhere else upon the borders of that happy place, though not admitted to the society of the holy. By such interviews, I have at once discerned their consummate ignorance of true religion, and that polluted remains of Popery, since it was the religion in this place, was the only notion they had of Christianity. Swearing, lies, and stealing were very common vices in the land, notwithstanding they were in general kind and obliging, and but few instances of drunkenness and uncleanness among them. After discovering the gross ignorance that universally prevailed in the parish, I found that I would require to begin the very first principles of Christianity with them, and to make it my great care and study how to come to a level with their untutored capacities, so as to render the truths delivered intelligible to them."

His preaching was very different from that to which they had been accustomed. His activity as a pastor was shewn in instituting prayer meetings, and planting schools throughout the parish. The teachers who taught in these schools were men of piety, and some of them became noted ministers in after years. Among these may be mentioned Rev. John Macrae ("MacRath Mor"), Rev. John Finlayson, Rev. Peter Maclean, and Rev. Alexander MacColl.

In view of the spiritual ignorance of the people, Mr Macleod decided not to administer the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper during the first year of his ministry. And when the ordinance was at length observed, the communicants had dwindled down to six.

This is Mr Macleod's account of the first Communion held after his settlement at Uig:—"Uig, 25th June 1827.—Yesterday the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was administered in this place, and much of the presence of the Lord appeared in the congregation. There were from 800 to 1,000 communicants formerly

in the parish, there being a habit of indiscriminate Communion. This is the first occasion we had the Communion here in my time, and only six individuals have come forward to the Lord's Table. There were no more than twenty communicants in all. The whole of the unworthy communicants kept back, and a great many of our young converts did not take upon them to come forward. The congregation was much impressed through the whole day. When the elements were presented, there appeared as a shower of revival from the presence of the Lord through the whole congregation, and in serving the first and second tables (there being two tables only), the heavenly dew of gracious influences was evidently falling down on the people in so conspicuous a manner that, not only the friends of Christ, but also the enemies of the Lord, cannot forget an occasion and a scene so singularly remarkable, in which all acknowledge that God was of a truth among us. But all this might be called the commencement of what happened afterwards, for when our young converts saw the uncommon liberty that was granted to the pastors in addressing those who sat at the table, they were still more impressed and filled, as it were, with new wine and holy solemnity. Much disappointment now appeared among several of them that they had not taken out tokens, and so were not prepared to come forward. Pungent conviction, towards the evening, took hold of some of them for not obeying Christ's command. It was a night ever to be remembered in this place, in which the whole of it was spent in religious exercises, whether in private or together with others, in cases mingled with unusual instances of joy and sorrow. While these things were carried on, the ungodly themselves were in tears, and iniquity for a time dwindled into nothing, covered her brazen face, and was greatly ashamed. On Monday, many felt sadly disappointed when they saw that the ungodly had kept back from the table, and when they perceived that the Lord's people were so greatly refreshed in commemorating His death, that they did not timeously prepare for the duty, and that, after the Lord in every way cleared the way for them, they were not ready. This circumstance caused much sorrow, and more so as there is no doubt but some supposed that some of the most promising of the Lord's people would not communicate at this time. But when they saw that those went forward, and that they themselves were not ready, and when they were convinced then in their consciences that they were led to follow the example of men that sincere regard to Christ's command and the commemora-

tion of His dying love, the whole circumstances of the case came home with peculiar force to their consciences, and they were humbled low in the dust. But this prepared their souls for receiving the excellent sermon preached by the Rev. Mr Macdonald [Ferintosh] on the following day, from John xvi. 22—'And ye now therefore have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your hearts shall rejoice.' The Lord's people were greatly impressed and refreshed by this sermon; and they descended from the mount with songs and praises."

Uig had become a well-watered garden, and the fewness of the communicants was an indication of how completely the people's minds had been changed as to their duty in sitting at the Lord's Table. People gathered from all parts of the Island, and extraordinary interest was awakened in divine things. Four years after Mr Macleod's induction, it is said, that 9,000 people were present at Uig Communion. The spirit of prayer and supplication was given to the people, and in dispersing from the public means of grace, they met in private, and poured out their hearts to God. This change affected not only the devotional habits of the people, but shaped and fashioned their whole conduct. "They are an extraordinary people," is the testimony of a naval officer; "one cannot but be struck with their honesty, kindness, and sobriety. I think I have never seen a drunk person out of the town. One 'hears' of religion elsewhere, but one 'sees' it here in everything." The Rev. John Macrae ("MacRath Mor") testified that the finest moral spectacle he had ever witnessed during his whole career was that of the congregation of Uig under the pastorate of the Rev. Alexander Macleod.

The work thus begun by God in so many hearts was not like man's work, for it continued, and through the preaching of Mr Macleod, Mr Finlayson, and Mr Finlay Cook, many souls were awakened to real concern. God opened the windows of heaven, and poured down a rich and abundant blessing on the dried and parched wilderness, and made it blossom as a garden of the Lord.

At the Disruption Mr Macleod joined the Free Church, and in 1844 was translated to Lochalsh, where he laboured for three years. In 1846 he was translated to Rogart, where he finished his course, after labouring there for twenty-three years. He died 13th November 1869, greatly beloved and honoured by a people who respected him as a true minister of Christ. Even to this day, notwithstanding the chilling indifference that is spreading over the land, the memory of Mr Mac-

leod is revered in the parish, where he spent so many years. And if the same success did not attend his preaching in Rogart as in Uig, yet, there can be no doubt of the impression his ministry made on his hearers.

In concluding this brief sketch of this noted preacher of the Gospel, one cannot help expressing regret that we are not in possession of much material to illustrate Mr Macleod's teaching. Some of the sermons in this booklet, however, will give an idea to those who appreciate deep experimental Scriptural teaching what Mr Macleod's preaching was like, we especially call attention to two of these—an ordination sermon on I. Tim. iv. 6, and the sermon on the words—"Cast thou thy burden on the Lord." In the former the text is—"Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (I. Tim. iv. 16), and the divisions are:—I. The exhortations of the text; II. The promises by which they are enforced.

In expounding the first exhortation—"Take heed unto thyself"—he notices six particulars. (1) Take heed that you be a sound believer, that you have been convinced and converted, and that you are making progress in the divine life. (2) Take heed that you be a called and sent minister to witness the things you have seen and felt. If the Lord does not send ministers, they shall not profit the people. The profitable minister is he who can say, "Lord, thou hast sent me; therefore go with me; bless me and make me successful." (3) Take heed you be an exercised minister—not satisfied with systematic and orthodox views merely, but coming forth in the fulness of the blessings of the Gospel of Christ, speaking from the heart to the heart, and bringing out of the treasure "things new and old." (4) See that there be conscientious diligence in all the means for attaining fitness for this great work. "Till I come give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all." (5) See that you will have the glory of God, and the salvation of souls in view. (6) See that you watch in all things; be on your guard against every temptation, every external and internal enemy, that your conversation be such as becometh the Gospel, and that you walk with circumspection, worthy of the vocation by which you are called.

In regard to the second exhortation, he says:—"Under the teaching of the Spirit, he will 'give heed to the doctrine'; he will be enabled to declare 'the whole

counsel of God' and to 'contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.' He will not be carried about by every wind of doctrine, nor teach every kind of doctrine to his people. The ballast of grace and spiritual understanding will enable him to weather out the wintry storms to which he will be exposed from the world, the devil, and the flesh, from external and internal enemies, in the dangerous voyage of human life. Dangers and difficulties, opposition and contempt, he must calculate upon and expect. The very nature of his ministerial functions implies the former, and all the grandeur and dignity of it will not exempt him from the latter. 'The truth itself' will offend. He will be regarded as an enemy by some for no other reason but because he tells the truth. The truth condemns the lax conduct of the unconverted, and their unscriptural creed founded on that conduct. To live in the consciences of such men as a witness against them is all that is desirable as long as they are at enmity with God. By consistency, however, you will command their esteem, for many often deny what they cannot disbelieve, and ridicule what they cannot but silently revere."

On the third exhortation—"Continue in them," he says:—"Continue (1) in thy views; (2) in thy calling; (3) be laborious and diligent. Continue in thy principles and work; you must not abandon either while on earth. 'Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel!' Continue to seek after greater fitness for thy work, in prayer, reading, and meditations."

These are a few quotations from as solemn and searching an ordination sermon as any young minister ever listened to. The zeal it manifests for God's glory, the sober and judicious handling of God's truth, and the searching application of it to the conscience must leave on the mind of every serious reader the impression that he is listening to a judicious counsellor, "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

In concluding this sketch, we feel it rather a difficult matter to convey to our readers an idea of the extraordinary place Mr Macleod had in the hearts of God's people. He was esteemed very highly for his work's sake. It was no blind hero worship, but the love of a living people who recognised in him a true servant of Jesus Christ, and gave him the place and respect due to his office. As a preacher he dwelt on such truths as the glory of Christ's person, the virtue and efficacy of His sufferings, the perfection of His finished righteousness, and God's great love to sinners.

## DIARY.

UIG, June 2nd, 1824.—Having been inducted as minister of this parish on the 28th day of April last, I now, in humble dependence on the grace of God, commence to give some account of the moral and religious state of my people at the time of my induction, and of the particulars that occurred among them since that period. The first month that I laboured amongst this people I observed that they were extremely attentive to the preaching of the Word. But the truth made no visible impression on them. They seemed to be much afraid and astonished at the truths delivered. You would at the same time read in their appearance that they were at a loss to understand the meaning of what they were hearing. Having commenced to examine several of the parents previous to my dispensing the ordinance of baptism to them, I found that they (with very few exceptions) were grossly ignorant of the truths of Christianity as revealed in God's Word. In questioning them respecting the covenants of work and grace, they acknowledged that they were perfectly ignorant of the origin, nature, and systems of both. They were but few among them that could tell me the names of our first parents, of Noah, or of any of the patriarchs and prophets, and but few could tell of the nature of our Lord's mission and the names of His disciples and their history. In asking how many sacraments Christ appointed, the answer in general was that He instituted seven. When I enquired their hope of salvation as to its grounds and foundation, good conduct and doing the best we could was the answer, and with regard to their expectation of heaven, they said it would be a wonderful favour to be somewhere else upon the borders of that happy place, though not admitted to the society of the holy. By such interviews I have at once discerned their consummate ignorance of true religion, and that the polluted remains of Popery, since it was the religion in this place, was the only notion they had of Christianity. Swearing, lies, and stealing were very common vices in the land, notwithstanding they were in general kind and obliging, and but few instances of drunkenness and uncleanness among them. After discovering the gross ignorance that universally prevailed in the parish, I found that I

would require to begin the very first principles of Christianity with them, and to make it my great care and study how to come to a level with their untutored capacities, so as to render the truths delivered intelligible to them.

July 5th.—From 2nd June to this period, many people from the neighbouring parishes attend divine service regularly, and many, young and old, seem to be under serious impressions. They now give close attention to what is spoken. Many young and old are in tears every Lord's Day, and several are so affected as not to be able to contain themselves or to retire.

August 10th.—The same appearances are still increasing in our congregation every Sabbath Day. A considerable number are so affected that it is with difficulty that I can go on sometimes with the sermon. Others are much afraid that such impressions may come their way, and there were instances of several for two Sabbaths that retired from the congregation when some were thus affected, from the apprehension that they would be the next that would become subjects of similar impressions. After having reprimanded them for so doing, they never behaved disorderly afterwards. May the Lord grant that these impressions be of a saving kind, that God may be glorified and sinners saved!

December 24th, 1825.—O how much have I to praise the Lord for His goodness to my people, since I came among them, especially of late! They now come to me from every corner, crying, "What shall we do to be saved?" It is manifest that many of them are the subjects of deep conviction, and others enjoy more of the consolations of the Gospel by faith. In April 1824, I could get none in the parish that I could call upon to pray at our prayer meeting, but now I have more than twelve I can call upon with liberty and pleasure to that duty in public. Glory to God for this wonderful change! May I never forget His benefits! Blessed be God for His unspeakable gift!

25th.—Preached this day from Matt. xxviii. 5—"Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified." 1st, I explained what was implied in seeking Christ crucified. 2nd, Considered the occasion of those doubts and fears to which the children of God are liable. The people were in general much affected during the whole service. But when I came to the practical application of the discourse, and showed that the words "Fear not" were turned vice versa to all unbel-

lievers, and that their fears and terrors, terrors unspeakable, would never terminate through the rounds of eternal ages, if the offers of salvation were rejected, you would think every heart was pierced, and general distress spread through the whole congregation. May it bring forth fruit!

January 1st, 1826.—Remember, O my soul, how the last year, which is now terminated, has been crowned to thee with very many signal deliverances and numerous mercies in the adorable providence of God, and encouraging pledges of His special goodness and favour to us in the Gospel of His dear Son. Forget not the 10th of June 1825, when on that tempestuous day you were in a small barque tossed on the mighty and roaring ocean, and when all thought you were destined for a watery grave, that the mighty God of Jacob rebuked the storm and brought us into safe harbour. I might well say, as one of Thy dear servants expressed himself on another occasion when in deep affliction, "Joseph was rough, but he was kind." Call to mind, O my soul, many other deliverances, care, support, direction and protection with which the Lord has continually surrounded and guarded thee, as with a shield, wherever duty called thee since that time, and let so many instances of God's providential care tend to increase thy faith, and to exercise it on the help of Israel in every duty and trial, casting all thy care upon Him, believing that He careth for thee. Sweetly ruminat upon the success of the everlasting Gospel among the people entrusted to thy care from the commencement to the end of the year that is now past. Meditate upon the gradual steps by which the Lord is approaching and manifesting Himself to not a few of this people, and muse with delight upon the progressive growth which so conspicuously appears among the subjects of grace in this parish. May we not say that the Tree of Life has been planted in the midst of us, and by conviction and conversion, union, faith, repentance, life, love, etc., has been prolific of fruit every week and every month, of which fruit sinners were invited to participate, and not a few were enabled to stretch forth the hand of faith to partake of the celestial fruit of the Tree of Life. And when in the last two months of the year, Thou, O Lord, hast been pleased to be more liberal of Thy special grace to sinners amongst us, may we not be greatly encouraged that Thou mayest be pleased to continue Thy special favour to this people, and to him who is appointed to declare Thy counsel among them. In this sanguine expectation, commence this year, O my



soul, with renewed vigour and increased ardour in the service of the Lord, having thy waiting eyes continually upon Him for adding daily to the Church as many as He has appointed to eternal life, and for times of refreshing from His presence.

April 30th, 1826.—Preached from the 32nd of Jeremiah, 40th verse, on the Everlasting Covenant.

1st, Considered the awful state of those who are under the broken covenant—under the curse in every duty, and their seeming blessings given to and enjoyed by them under the curse.

2nd, The properties of the new covenant (1) eternal, (2) of peace, (3) of promise, (4) new, (5) well-ordered, (6) made sure in all things, etc.

3rd, The Administrator of the blessings of the covenant who gives the legacy to the legatees, even to the elect of God. (1) He does this in the capacity of a prophet, witness, and interpreter. He explains His own testament, and executes and administers the same. (2) He acts as an advocate or prevailing intercessor in whose hands no case has ever failed. (3) He acts as a powerful king. He administers conviction, justification, conversion, life, light, power, sanctifying grace in every duty and trial, sanctification and eternal life.

I have this day preached on the Everlasting Covenant, and have cause to be thankful that, notwithstanding the trouble and uneasiness of mind I had through the week, the Lord delivered me on His blessed day from distracting cares and unnecessary and unavailing anxiety. Holy One, support Thy children in the midst of all the trials they may meet with, in whatever direction they may come their way, and prepare me for new trials and new duties. If I suffer, let me do so in Thy name and for Thy namesake, and do thou acquit Thy people in Thine own good time from the aspirations and groundless allegations of their enemies. Who shall condemn them? It is Christ that died for their sins, and rose again for their justification.

June 4th.—Our meetings are continued, and our young converts are making progress in knowledge and experience. One of them under sharp conviction, in stating his case to me, said that he thought every single letter in the Decalogue was as the continual noise or sound of a tremendous trumpet against him, and that he felt himself often so near the vengeance of the holy law to be executed against him, that he imagined there was not the thickness of a leaf of paper between him

and the immediate execution of all the threatenings of Sinai against himself. In remarking a rebuke that one of the brethren gave him and others, he said, making use of a military term of chastisement, "O what a blessed flogging we got to-day; it levelled me with the ground as a sword would do." "O how much we need such close and faithful dealings, and not building us up on our own self-righteousness," he added. Another of these, who began to pray publicly, when praying for those missionaries who left their native land and their all for the spread of the Gospel, said, "Lord, be with those who went to distant lands to promote the interests of Thy kingdom with their portion of the world (meaning the Bible) in their pockets." "The Bible," he said, "is their bank, their castle, their lands and possessions, their all. Lord be with them, be their all."

6th.—Although we have carried on our public meetings here for a considerable time past, we have had no private meeting. We have regretted exceedingly that we have not had it conveniently in our power to establish such a meeting hitherto. But to-day a private meeting was opened in the parish, which I trust will be countenanced by the Lord of the vineyard, and to which He will vouchsafe His special and effectual blessing. The regulations of this meeting are not yet fully drawn up, nor are they intended to be drawn up but as time, circumstances, and experience may call for additions to them. The first resolution is that none will be admitted as members of the meeting but such as are in the opinion of the Church partakers of real grace. They are to be examined upon their faith, change, and experience, and though in the opinion of Christian charity we might receive scores into this meeting, yet, this being the first private meeting ever opened in the parish in the memory of man, we intend to form a precedent for our successors, namely, to receive none into this meeting but such as give evidences that they are decidedly pious, and thus we exclude all others from this meeting, however promising in their first appearance. But if they are found to grow in grace, knowledge, and conversation becoming the Gospel of Christ, the meeting is always open, and its members are ready to receive such with the open arms of joy and consolation. But whilst we exclude the generality of professors from this meeting, the public meetings are still continued, and a general invitation is given to all to attend them. May the Lord make their members living members, and greatly bless them.

July 11th.—This day I again preached from Jeremiah xxxii. 40, on the Everlasting Covenant, when I only enlarged upon the circumstances in which the Surety of this covenant for the Church was placed with regard to His relation to angels, saints, the world, and hell. They had nothing for this Surety to pay the debt. The Father also was to hide His face, and the Holy Spirit was not to have full scope, until this glorious Surety paid all the debt by magnifying the law through His life and ignominious death.

January 1st, 1827.—The years of time pass away unexpectedly, but the years of eternity shall never end. Blessed be Thy holy name that there are better years and a better country reserved for all Thy faithful followers. Enable me to be active in the line of duty, that with my loins girt and my lamp burning I may be ready at the coming of the Son of Man. Be praised for Thy wonderful kindness to me and mine during the past year, and renew my age in Thy service at the commencement of this year, and during my days on earth. Thy merciful interpositions and Thy defence from my inveterate enemies, and those that hate Thee, O Lord, will be recorded by me in praises of Thee during my pilgrimage on earth.

March 27th.—Since the 3rd of February last I have not been able to preach. It has been Thy holy will to visit me with sickness that threatened to terminate my life on earth. But when despaired of by all human witnesses that saw my low condition, Thou hast been pleased to rebuke my complaint and to withhold the rod. Nothing is impossible for Thee, O Lord. I thank Thee for the special care Thou hast taken of me during this part of Thy striking visitation. Thou hast been pleased to remove my bodily pains in the time of need, and Thou hast kept my mind serene and composed, looking for the coming of the Bridegroom, and expecting that it was the fixed time of my departure. When that hour may arrive, O grant that I may be prepared, and may the remaining part of my life be more improved than ever in making my calling and election sure. I thank Thee for the interest Thy people have taken in me during my sickness, and their prayers on my behalf. I thank Thee for the natural conviction that ungodly people have, that I have not preached or laboured in vain, and that my conversation has (through grace) been in any measure agreeable to my profession to the conviction of all. To Thy name be praise! Grant that the dispensation may be emin-

ently blessed to me, that I may be refined out of the furnace and made more spiritually minded and more zealous in Thy service and useful in my generation. And O grant that it may also be blessed to my people and to all concerned in this island, that the visitation may not be unto death, but for Thy glory and for the good of immortal souls.

June 25th, 1827.—Yesterday the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was administered in this place, and much of the presence of the Lord appeared in the congregation. There were from 800 to 1000 communicants formerly in the parish, there being a habit of indiscriminate communion. This is the first occasion we had the communion here in my time, and only six individuals have come forward to the Lord's Table. There were no more than 20 communicants in all. The whole of the unworthy communicants kept back, and a great many of our young converts did not take upon them to come forward. The congregation was much impressed through the whole day. When the elements were presented, there appeared as a shower of revival from the presence of the Lord through the whole congregation, and in serving the first and second tables (there being two tables only) the heavenly dew of gracious influences was evidently falling down on the people in so conspicuous a manner that not only the friends of Christ but also the enemies of the Lord cannot forget an occasion and a scene so singularly remarkable, in which all acknowledge that God was of a truth among us. But all this might be called the commencement of what happened afterwards. For when our young converts saw the uncommon liberty that was granted to the pastors in addressing those who sat at the table they were still more impressed and filled, as it were, with new wine and holy solemnity. Much disappointment now appeared among several of them that they had not taken out tokens, and so were not prepared to come forward. Pungent conviction, towards the evening, took hold of some of them for not obeying Christ's command. It was a night ever to be remembered in this place in which the whole of it was spent in religious exercises, whether in private or together with others, in cases mingled with unusual instances of joy and sorrow. While these things were carried on, the ungodly themselves were in tears, and iniquity for a time dwindled into nothing, covered her brazen face, and was greatly ashamed. On Monday, many felt sadly disappointed when they saw that the ungodly had kept back from the table, and when they perceived that the Lord's people

were so greatly refreshed in commemorating His death, that they did not timeously prepare for the duty, and that, after the Lord in every way cleared the way for them, they were not ready. This circumstance caused much sorrow, and more so as there is no doubt but some supposed that some of the most promising of the Lord's people would not communicate at this time. But when they saw that those went forward, and that themselves were not ready, and when they were convinced then in their consciences that they were led to follow the example of men rather than sincere regard to Christ's command and the commemoration of His dying love, the whole circumstances of the case came home with peculiar force to their consciences, and they were humbled low in the dust. But this prepared their souls for receiving the excellent sermon preached by the Rev. Mr Macdonald on the following day, from John xvi. 22—"And ye now therefore shall sorrow, but I will see you again, and your hearts shall rejoice." The Lord's people were greatly impressed and refreshed by this sermon, and they descended from the mount with songs and praises.

August 22nd, 1828.—What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits to me? Thou hast been my sun and shield, and my deliverer in the day of battle. On the 16th day of this month—being the preparation day before the communion at Stornoway—I was obliged to come away, as I saw it was my duty not to address any of the tables, finding that, owing to the description of people Mr C.— admitted, the Lord's people in general declined going forward. In these circumstances there were no tables but for a certain class of people, and, as I declined serving any, Mr C.— would not give me permission to preach, on which account I immediately retired. Though this was trying, I hope the testimony was faithful and will be of service, in this and future generations, to the Church of Christ in these western islands of Scotland, and, that what I have done in this affair will prove by the divine blessing to be of service for promoting the interest of the Messiah's kingdom in these remote corners of the vineyard, and stand as a good precedent for any of the faithful ministers of Christ in case of any one of them being placed in such trying circumstances as I on that occasion, in or after my lifetime. I hope the happiness I already enjoy from a consciousness of walking in the line of duty at that time will unspeakably more than compensate to me all these frowns of men and devils for holding and supporting the truth as it is in Jesus, and may also prove of unspeakable support and consolation and encourage-

ment to any of my fellow-Christian ministers meeting at any time with a similar trial in the exercise and duties of their official capacity.

January 1st, 1829.—At the commencement of this new year, it well becomes me to renew my vows, and to express my sense of His innumerable mercies by putting up my tent at the renowned and celebrated Ebenezer of my help. Give a retrospective view, O my immortal soul, to Jehovah's wonderful care of thee since you came to the world. When eight, nine, and ten years of age, think of the instances you remember in which the law of nature was checking you then, when you committed any actual sin—Sabbath or week-day—though you were then a stranger to grace. Think of how early you were put to school in a remote district of the country, but under the religious instruction of pious parents and teacher. Think of how circum-spectly they watched over your education and morals during your years of minority, and consider how strictly for your benefit—as well as for their own comfort and salvation—they regarded the laws of God and man, and trained you to pay a reverential regard to the former and due respect to the latter, as thy Lord commands. Consider, O my soul, the first religious impressions you had under the means of grace, the places in which you felt these impressions so powerful that you could not well command yourself, when between the years of 15 and 18. Remember the time of private prayer in the field at Duirinish (Lord Reay's country), also at Ullapool and Reef, in Lochbroom, when you were made as a fountain of unceasing tears and love that could not be stopped in the presence of thy God. Remember the feast you had in Dingwall, on a sacramental occasion, when you could not deny that you got Benjamin's portion of 300 pieces of silver and five changes of raiment, when the rest of the brethren were more scantily supplied. You little knew at this time, O my soul, that you yourself must be appointed in due time to be a teacher of others. Recollect how you went to Edinburgh to prosecute your studies, without money in your purse or (to your knowledge) any friend before you, but how soon the Lord raised friends for you then and money as you needed to prosecute your education until it was finished! Call to mind all the particulars of thy marriage, which took place in November 1814, the singular circumstance with which it was attended in all its bearings, and the remarkable interpositions of thy mighty Lord for thy protection and for accomplish-

ing the desire of thine heart at his critical event. Let these things be for ever wondrous in thine eyes. Add to all these wonders that the Lord has spared us yet together for mutual help and consolation. Let it be to Thy glory and praise! Think of thy licence to preach the Gospel, thy appointment to the Dundee and Cromarty charges, and the number of friends raised for thee in these places both for thy temporal and spiritual welfare. Think of your remarkable appointment to this county and parish, and the success which the Lord thy God gave thee in preaching the everlasting Gospel. How many under your ministry received it, indeed, as the living words of the everlasting God! Lo, children are here and there born to God, and churches are planted in the desert and desolate places. Think of thy remarkable deliverance from a watery grave on the 10th June in the year 1825, and thy remarkable deliverance and restoration from that severe illness from which none expected thy recovery in February 1826. Hitherto the Lord helped. O think of His deliverances from the snares and enmity of wicked men who were on the watch to entrap thy feet. Look always to Jesus, the Captain of Salvation, for all that has been done, all that is still doing, and all that is to be done. Speed your pace, and post on more swiftly with renewed ardour and diligence in every commanded duty. Urge thy heart with more vigorous and lively step towards Immanuel's country, and let hours, and days, and years roll till thou enter the joy of thy Lord.



## SERMONS.

### SERMON I.

“Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”—1 Tim. iv. 16.

**T**HE subject of this and the subsequent Epistle was born at Lystra which was a city of Lycaonia. Of his father we are merely informed that he was a Gentile, who had married a Jewish female whose name was Eunice. Timothy was instructed in the oracles of God from his earliest years and brought to a saving acquaintance with the truth by the preaching of Paul on his first visit to Derbe and Lystra, at which time Timothy was only a very young man. When the apostle returned to visit the brethren in these cities at the distance of a very few years, they gave him such a favourable report of the piety of Timothy that Paul determined to take him for his companion in preaching the gospel among the Gentiles, and to cut off all occasion of complaint on the part of the Jews who did not see that the ceremonial law was virtually abolished by the death of Christ. Timothy was circumcised. From this time he accompanied the apostle for several years, assisting him in his apostolic office, until, as is generally understood, he took the pastoral care of the Church at Ephesus. Timothy evidently enjoyed a large share of Paul's affection, who always speaks of him in language denoting the very high estimation in which he held him, and the tenderest solicitude for his welfare. This Epistle is thought to have been written by Paul in the year 58 A.D. Its original design was to give instructions to Timothy concerning the management of the Church of Ephesus, and it was probably intended that this Epistle should be read publicly to the Ephesians, that they might know upon what authority Timothy acted. The Epistle goes on, fraught with every necessary and salutary admonition, which is applicable to every Christian minister in every period of the Church, and which is calculated to cherish and promote that circumspection, faithfulness, and usefulness, which are implied in the exhortations of the text.

"Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt save thyself and them that hear thee." In enlarging from these words, I shall consider,

I. The exhortations of the text; and

II. The promises by which they are enforced.

I. The exhortations.

1. "Take heed unto thyself." Notice six particulars:—

(1) Take heed that you be a sound believer, that you have been convinced and converted, and that you are making progress in the divine life.

(2) Take heed that you be a called and sent minister to witness the things you have seen and felt. If the Lord does not send ministers they shall not profit the people. The profitable minister is he who can say, "Lord, thou hast sent me; therefore go with me; bless me and make me successful."

(3) Take heed you be an exercised minister—not satisfied with systematic and orthodox views merely, but coming forth in the fulness of the blessings of the gospel of Christ, speaking from the heart to the heart, and bringing out of the treasure "things new and old."

(4) See that there be conscientious diligence in all the means for attaining fitness for this great work. "Till I come give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all."

(5) See that you will have the glory of God and the salvation of souls in view.

(6) See that you watch in all things; be on your guard against every temptation, every external and internal enemy, that your conversation be such as becometh the gospel, and that you walk with circumspection worthy of the vocation by which you are called. Being surrounded with more temptations than other men in general, the minister should learn to bear injuries with patience and be ready to do good to every one; to be affable without levity and humble without pusillanimity, conciliating the affections without violating the truth, connecting a suavity of manners with a dignity of character, obliging without flattery, and throwing off all reserve without running into the opposite extreme of volubility and trifling. "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient."

Be watchful in the improvement of time, losing no time in indolence or unnecessary sleep, formal visits, or perusing useless books. Every day should have its work in Christ's vineyard.

As the Christian religion pre-eminently regards the welfare of our immortal souls, as its object is to promote the honour of God and the salvation of men, how incumbent it is upon the ministers of this holy religion to feel its grandeur and importance, to imbibe its true spirit and genius, to "magnify" their ministerial office, and to display the beauty and glory of it before a dark and fallen world! To them are committed the word of life, the mysteries of godliness, the riches of divine grace, for it is through this consecrated medium that these great and inestimable blessings are chiefly communicated. Hence they are called in the language of inspiration, the light of the world, the salt of the earth. If the light then be eclipsed, darkness covers the land; if the salt lose its savour, the earth becomes putrid and corrupt. Being, therefore, the appointed and instrumental causes of diffusing this knowledge of Christianity, and its character and reception in the world being closely connected with their fidelity and zeal how ardently they ought to seek a conformity of spirit, a perfect congeniality of soul to this sacred and momentous office with which they are invested! To produce a capacity of enjoyment, there must be a congruity between the mind and the object, so that religion, when rendered congenial to the mind inspires also confidence and delight, and renders the service of God a service of perfect freedom and happiness. The heart, attuned to a just and elevated sense of divine objects, assists the operations of the understanding. Its feelings imperceptibly mingle with the light of the mind, and by their reciprocal influence, the fire kindles within, the thoughts begin to sparkle, and the expressions to flow. This is to become "burning" as well as "shining" lights.

There is also a force and an authority with the truth, when it is delivered with gospel sincerity and simplicity and accompanied with genuine holiness. Such characters are living sermons, read and understood of all men. Discourses about virtue are pictures only. A virtuous example is a virtue embodied, animated, and exhibited to public view. Well may saints be represented with a glory around their heads, seeing the work of sanctification assimilates them more and more to the divine image, and enables them to have a life and conversation becoming the gospel of Christ.

This holy fervour of spirit and hallowed flame of devotion, which all the ministers of Christ most anxiously desire to cherish in every duty and trial, arises from a spiritual knowledge of the glory of God shining in the person of Jesus Christ, and is a very different thing from that species of knowledge which defends only the outworks of Christianity, illustrates its nature and importance, and admires it only as a beautiful and perfect system. Knowledge is one thing; grace is another. Hence some men are able advocates for "the faith once delivered unto the saints," zealous champions for the truth as it is in Jesus, standing forth in the trenches, repelling by cogent arguments the bold attacks of infidelity, and yet, at the same time, strangers to the interior and vital parts of the Christian religion, to that inward sanctification of mind, to that spirit of genuine piety and devotion with which the ministerial success of a pastor, and the salvation of his own soul are inseparably connected. Though the intellect of fallen man still retains many vestiges of its primitive grandeur and capacity, though it be still competent to the investigation of the most abstruse sciences, and even to the acquisition of sound and orthodox notions in the great science of theology, yet it has no such perception of divine truths as admits them into the mind under a just view of their spiritual nature, moral beauty, and transcendent importance. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." His conceptions on these subjects are so feeble, so indistinct, and so inadequate that he himself comes not under their influence. To all practical purposes the light he has is little better than darkness, and if the light that is in him be darkness, how great is that darkness! It is, moreover, to be observed, that not only considerable theological learning may be acquired, and much sacred criticism displayed, but also the most splendid gifts may be bestowed for the general edification of the Church, independently of divine grace. But when genuine piety is not the basis of these qualifications and gifts, they swell and inflate the mind, and usually exhibit a light which dazzles more than it illuminates, leading to self-exaltation more than to the glory of God. Whereas it is the character of grace to humble the sinner, to exalt the Saviour, and promote holiness, all which are characteristics of true ministers of Christ; and the influences and operations of the Spirit upon their souls for these glorious ends are of a much higher order than those extraordinary gifts or even that

miraculous information of the understanding, which were conferred in the days of the apostles. The latter were designed for particular purposes, and ceased with the reasons which occasioned them, whilst the former are essential to the salvation of men, and to that holiness, without which, we must be eternally lost.

Let, then, holiness to the Lord be inscribed in deep and legible characters on the heart of the Christian minister. Let an ardent love to God and man inspire him with the most active benevolence. Let the love of Christ constrain him to consecrate all his gifts and talents to the glory of God and the benefit of his fellow-creatures. It is under the daily tuition of the Holy Spirit of grace and supplication that he can be thus animated and supported, in order to abound in every good word and work, to make full proof of his ministry, and to act the character of a faithful steward of the manifold grace of God—of a careful and tender shepherd, of a vigilant watchman, and an indefatigable labourer in Christ's vineyard. It is the Spirit that will enable him to ask aright, and to perform aright, that can stimulate him to care, to vigilance, and exertion—to foil temptations to discipline the inward man, to regulate the heart, to mark the secret recesses and operations of sin, to pursue it in all its manifold forms and branches, to guard against its insidious or more daring encroachments, and to attain, not only deliverance from its dominion, but also the lively and habitual exercise of these Christian graces that constitute the beauty of holiness, and to which the Lord has annexed His promises and blessings. It is the Spirit that will enable him to wrestle at a throne of grace for a blessing to himself and to his people, that will keep him often in prayer, secret meditation and communion with his own heart, that will teach him savingly in all truths, and bring them seasonably to his recollection, that will render him well versed in all the sacred writings, and that will capacitate him to use the sword of the Spirit successfully as a skilful master in Israel, with Gideon's motto, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon," and to repel all the fiery darts of the wicked one, with a holy dependence on that final victory and triumph which the Lord has promised to all His faithful witnesses.

Under the teaching of this Spirit, he will "give heed to the doctrine"; he will be enabled to declare "the whole counsel of God" and to "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints." He will not be carried about by every wind of doctrine, nor teach every kind of doctrine to his people. The ballast of

grace and spiritual understanding will enable him to weather out the wintry storms to which he will be exposed from the world, the devil, and the flesh, from external and internal enemies in the dangerous voyage of human life. Dangers and difficulties, opposition and contempt, he must calculate upon and expect. The very nature of his ministerial functions implies the former, and all the grandeur and dignity of it will not exempt him from the latter. "The truth itself" will offend. He will be regarded as an enemy by some for no other reason but because he tells the truth. The truth condemns the lax conduct of the unconverted, and their unscriptural creed founded on that conduct. To live in the consciences of such men as a witness against them is all that is desirable as long as they are at enmity with God. By consistency, however, you will command their esteem, for many often deny what they cannot disbelieve, and ridicule what they cannot but silently revere.

Whatever opposition, therefore, he may meet with from the supine indifference of some, or the intemperate zeal of others; whatever misrepresentations may, with secret but malignant industry, be circulated with a view to cloud his character or depreciate his ministry and usefulness; and however such vague and idle reports may be received, with a kind of inward complacency, by those who affect even candour and Christian charity, and from whom better things might be expected—let none of these things, however, move the Christian minister. Let not the storms of various opinions move him. Let not the applause or flattery or contempt of any person or persons whatever move him off the gospel ground on which it is his privilege to stand, and which he is commanded never to abandon, as he would wish his own salvation and that of his hearers. Neither let fastidious delicacy, which is often more shocked at a breach of the artificial forms of politeness than of the sacred duties of Christian morality, deter you from making full proof of your ministry, of approving yourself to God, as a workman that needeth not to be ashamed; recalling ever to mind Paul's declaration to Timothy—a declaration of universal application—that all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. Let all his trials for righteousness' sake remind him of the dignity of his character, and of his resemblance to his Lord and Master that the disciple is not above his Master and the servant above his Lord. "It is enough for the disciple to be as his master, and the servant as his Lord."

If our own hearts be deeply affected with the important truths we deliver to others, we shall then walk with circumspection worthy of the vocation by which we are called. Let, therefore, a solemn sense of the terrors of the Lord, of the bitterness of sin, of the vanity and precariousness of all sublunary enjoyments, of the importance of eternity and the responsibility of our office, stimulate us to carry the momentous truths of the everlasting gospel with energy and life to the hearts of our hearers. For if our souls are not kept in the lively exercise of grace, our rounds of religious duties will unavoidably be cold, and our most sacred ministrations will be deplorably blasted. Let us always bear about us the dying of the Lord Jesus, and uniformly take heed that we are delegated ambassadors of Christ, to transact matters of everlasting importance between an infinite God and immortal souls. And if the honour of such a glorious embassy be so ineffably great, what inexpressible need have they of taking heed to themselves in all things, in the exercise of self-denial, ardent love to God, disinterested regard for His honour, and compassion for souls! What prudence, faithfulness, diligence, humility, holy zeal, spirituality of mind and conversation; what order and plainness and fervour; what just temperature of mildness and severity, are necessary as needs be! What heed for fear we may get careless and lukewarm in the Lord's vineyard about His glory and the salvation of souls, for fear that we may be deserted of God, and that pride and sinister motives may bear sway!

2. Take heed that "the doctrine" be not your own, nor that of others, but "Christ and Him crucified"—Christ in all His offices—justification by faith—the law of God as a rule of life—the covenant of grace, with all its benefits. No Arminian or Antinomian doctrines.

Let a man speak as the oracles of God. Let thy doctrine be accompanied with much humility and self-denial, so as to have God's glory and the salvation of sinners in view. Let it not be mixed with vain philosophy, so as to be delivered from seeking yourself and the applause of men in the excellency of speech. It is found that the holiest ministers preach most plainly, and that the plainest ministers are most successful. Let it be grave and weighty, sound speech that cannot be condemned, commending ourselves to every man's conscience. The power of the truth upon our own hearts will greatly advance this.

Paul preached with a demonstration that the Holy Spirit was in him, sanctifying him. He preached so as to give a demonstration that the Spirit was with him. He was out of weakness made strong. The grace of our Lord was made sufficient for him. The Lord renewed his strength; he received out of the fulness in Christ, and grace for grace. He preached by the Spirit to the heart of the hearers, with the demonstration of the Spirit and with power, from the heart to the heart, from faith to faith, and from experience to experience.

3. "Continue in them." Continue (1) in thy views; (2) in thy calling; (3) be laborious and diligent. Continue in thy principles and work; you must not abandon either while on earth. "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel!" Continue to seek after greater fitness for thy work, in prayer, reading, and meditations.

II.—The great promises and encouragements by which these exhortations are enforced.

1. "Thou shalt save thyself." Your continuing and persevering in the ways of the Lord will tend to promote the salvation of your soul daily. "This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our consciences."

"Thou shalt save thyself" from the guilt of other men's sins and ruin, if thou be faithful in the ministry. "Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked, and that he has not turned, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul" (Ezek. xxxiii. 9). "I am clean," said the apostle, "your blood be upon your own head." "I take you to record this day that I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God."

2. Thou shalt save "them that hear thee." It is in the proportion in which a minister of Christ is taught to promote his own salvation, that he promises usefulness in the Church as a means of saving others—of opening their eyes to turn them from darkness to light. He is to preach in season and out of season for this end, and they are to hear. God's glory and the salvation of sinners are the great ends of preaching, and the Lord promised His countenance to His ministers, even to the end of the world, for convincing and converting sinners, and for building them up in their most holy faith.

## SERMON II.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."—John iii. 16.

IN these blessed words of our Lord we have the sum of the whole volume of inspiration, a most wonderful display of divine love, a most glorious intelligence and glad tidings of joy to all people. Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews, struck with the indications of supernatural powers and authority which were manifested in our Saviour's miracles, acknowledged his conviction of His divine mission, and immediately came to Him to receive instruction, and there are two things on which our Lord chiefly insists in this discourse on this interesting occasion. He first teaches him the necessity of regeneration, next the medium through which salvation was to be accomplished, and the indispensable necessity of believing in Him in order to have eternal life, and as He was discoursing with a master in Israel, He illustrates this great subject by a fact recorded in their law, and which prefigured the Redeemer's death, viz., that as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so the Son of Man must be lifted up on the cross, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life, and that he might divest him of that self-righteousness so peculiar to the Jewish people and so congenial to the human mind, and on which he so much founded his salvation. Our Lord further shows him that in the economy of grace every thing of this kind is superseded for that as the mission of the Eternal Son of God into this world had for its object to bestow eternal life upon those who were ready to perish, so the only way of enjoying the blessing was by faith in the testimony that God has given of His Son, and as this faith is not of ourselves but the free gift of God, so the bestowment of it on men of every character and description corresponds with the grace which appeared in the Father's sending His only begotten Son into the world that whosoever believeth should not perish but have everlasting life.

In discoursing from these words, I propose, in the first place, to consider the properties of God's love to a guilty and lost world; secondly, the evidence He gave of His love, He gave His only begotten Son; thirdly, the end or design of this unspeakable gift of love, viz., that



whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life; and, lastly, conclude with a short application.

I. The love of God is the brightest beam of divinity that ever illuminated the creation. There is an unfathomable depth in it which even the penetration of angels cannot reach, an ineffable excellence which even celestial eloquence cannot fully express.

(1) It is pure, unmixed love in its nature, object, and operation. It comprehends the various forms of divine beneficence—goodness, that extends its bounties to innumerable ranks of creatures, and diffuses happiness through the various regions of the universe—grace, which so richly showers its blessings upon the undeserving without past merit or further compensation. Mercy, that commiserates and relieves the miserable; and peace, and long-suffering which so long tolerates insolent and provoking offenders. All this divine beneficence in its different forms towards indifferent objects shows the greatness of divine love under various names. It is gracious, merciful, patient, and long-suffering love—love variegated, overflowing, and unbounded. Is not divine love displayed in the creation of this world, so well accommodated and so richly furnished for the sustenance and comfort of its inhabitants, and in rendering them capable of receiving streams of happiness from the immense fountain of divine goodness? It is by the love of God that this universe is preserved in order and harmony from age to age, and its numerous inhabitants supplied with every good thing. But is it not most conspicuously displayed as an unspeakably great, rich, free, and unmerited love in the gift of His Son to a guilty world? Almighty love, which brought the Lord of Glory from the celestial throne to die upon a cross, an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world, in order to fit us for the incorruptible inheritance, and then to perpetuate our bliss through an eternal duration. Behold, then, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God, a subject so very grand and so elevating that our limited capacities are quite inadequate to comprehend it. Who can by searching find it out? who can trace it to perfection? It is as high as heaven. What can we do, deeper than hell what can we know? Surely the measure thereof is longer than the earth and broader than the sea. But while this eternal love of God is an unfathomable ocean, we adore the God of our salvation, who sheds it abroad in the hearts of His people by the Holy Spirit, that they with

all saints may be able to comprehend in some degree what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge. For though creation be replete with evident traces of the goodness and love of God, yet it is the work of redemption that gives the most exalted display of this most animating and delightful truth. Accordingly, when the Lord promised to make a New Covenant with the house of Israel, He intimated that He would therein carry the demonstration of it far beyond whatever could be conceived of it either in creation or providence. I will make an everlasting covenant with them (says He) that I will not turn away from them to do them good. Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and will bring upon them all the good that I have promised them, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, saith the Lord. And He gives us this as the amount of the whole—"They shall be my people, and I will be their God." The highest possible display of His love was manifested when He gave His Son to die to procure our redemption, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us unto God. For in this He at once commended His love to us as unspeakable, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly, in order to redeem them from sin, death, and hell. To teach them the revelations of His will and the declaration of His promises, in His determination to sanctify and to glorify them, in supporting them through life, blessing them in death, and bringing them to glory. When we, therefore, consider the unspeakable highness and holiness of our heavenly Father, and the lowness and wretchedness of those on whom He conferred His unspeakable gift, we are constrained to exclaim with the inspired writer—"God is Love."

(2) It is an everlasting love. "The Lord," says the prophet Jeremiah, "appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I loved thee with an everlasting love, and therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee." "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," exclaimed the illustrious apostle, "who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus according as He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." O the matchless love of our God to a whole world full of ignorance, carnality, and enmity, against His holy perfections, in a state of actual rebellion against Him, and without the least desire ever to know, serve, or enjoy Him. Yet,

hear, O! heavens, and be astonished O! earth, God loved this world of perishing sinners. But how much no tongue can tell, for eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man what things the Lord prepared for them that love Him. It is so unspeakable and so unlike anything in human affairs that our text makes no comparison in order to describe it. It has no parallel or similitude among men, and, therefore, it is only said—God so loved the world that He gave us His Son. In most cases human love is expressed by words more than by deeds, but the love of God is such that it cannot be fully expressed by words. It is a divine contrivance which we, while in this tabernacle, cannot fully comprehend.

(3) It is an immutable love, as in Mal. iii. 6—For I am the Lord, I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed, He will rest in His love towards His people, for His love is engaged for their everlasting security. Having made them the objects of His love, a primary fruit of His eternal favour, this love must abate, and His purposes must be rendered void before they are left to themselves. But if the Lord of hosts has purposed, who shall disannul it? If His hands be stretched out to execute His designs, who shall turn it back, before He has accomplished the end He has determined. As He thought, so shall it come to pass. As He purposed, so shall it stand. He has set His delight on the sons of men, and, therefore, He rests. He takes the highest complacency in the exercise of His love towards all His favourite objects. He rejoices over them with singing, and takes a divine pleasure in doing them good. So firmly did the illustrious Apostle believe this salutary truth that he exulted in the contemplation of God's immutable love, expressing himself in the following forcible and pathetic language:—"For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

(4) It is a free love, as nothing out of God Himself can be the cause of it, for then there would be a cause prior to Him. The misery of the creature is not the cause of it, for He is not wrought upon as creatures are, nor are the merits of the creature the cause. Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. It is, therefore, free, as it arises from His sovereign will

and pleasure through the merits of our Redeemer. Let us then consider the freeness of this love, and rejoice in the exercise of faith and lively hope that the most glorious day shall soon arrive when our happy anticipations of His immediate presence shall be unspeakably realised, and when we shall see Him as He is.

II. The evidence of God's love to sinners—He gave us His only begotten Son.

(1) Then, we have the clearest evidence of this love in the Incarnation of our Lord. Here the unspeakable gift of God, manifested in the flesh, is most conspicuously displayed to a fallen race. Now, the original promise made to our first parents is fully realised. The God and Saviour of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to the great astonishment of men and angels, condescended to appear in the likeness of sinful flesh, and now the divine predictions are amply fulfilled—"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulders, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." How clearly did He manifest His love to us in the humiliation and sufferings of our Lord, in the poverty of His birth, the reproach of His character, the pains of His body, the power of His enemies, the desertion of His friends, the weight of His people's sins, the slow, ignominious, and painful nature of His death, and the hiding of His Father's face, for He hath made Him sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. "And the Lord hath laid upon Him the iniquity of us all." Yet some have impiously asserted that the sufferings of Christ were only in appearance and not in reality. But if hunger and thirst, if revilings and contempt, if condemnation and crucifixion be sufferings, our Lord suffered; if the sinless infirmities of our nature, if the weight of our sins, if the malice of men, if the machinations of Satan, if the hand of God could make Him suffer, our Saviour suffered. If the annals of time, if the writings of His Apostles, if the death of His martyrs, if the confession of Gentiles, if the scoffs of the Jews be testimonies, our Lord suffered. He, therefore, that spared not His only begotten Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him, also, freely give us all things. This great doctrine, therefore, of the remission of sins through the expiatory sacrifice of our Lord is that in which we can behold the great and mysterious love of God, and is the doctrine which stands as it were in the very face of the divine oracles, and claims our pre-

eminent regard. It is this which impresses the Christian dispensation with so gracious and merciful a character, and justly gives it the designation of glad tidings. Though every part of our Lord's obedience was meritorious and tended to magnify the law, yet His death upon the cross was its perfection and consummation; then it was that He exclaimed, "It is finished." In that tremendous hour He satisfied the penal demands of Justice, He silenced the thunders of Mount Sinai, He conquered death, He triumphed over principalities and the powers of darkness, and opened the gates of everlasting life to sinners, dark and cloudy as that day appeared to the eye of sense, it was the brightest day that ever shone upon a guilty world, for on that day a light above the brightness of the firmament shone through the whole Jewish economy. Types met with their antitype, shadows were turned into substance, victims no longer bled upon the smoking altars. The veil of the temple was rent in twain, and a new order of things rose before us. Whilst infidelity triumphed and insulted our dying Lord, saying, He saved others, Himself He cannot save, it spoke indeed the truth. He was enchained and bound, but it was by a love to us and our salvation. Thus we read He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people was He stricken, for it pleased God the Father to bruise Him and put Him to grief, and in this He commended His love most conspicuously toward us that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.

III. The end or design of this gift of love was that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life. This was God's great object in giving His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. He has not sent Him into the world to condemn the world, as sinners might have expected, but that the world might be saved by Him. In this blessed design of man's redemption we behold the three divine persons moved by sovereign and free love, heartily joining in the most wonderful scheme of our everlasting salvation. The blessed Father to exert the grace, the Son to advance the merit, the Holy Ghost to apply the purchased benefits, the Father to adopt us for His children, the Son to redeem us for His mystical members, and the Holy Ghost to sanctify and renew our hearts. The design of this unspeakable gift is no less manifested in the resurrection of our Lord, when He secured the union of His people as His quickened and mystical members and their resurrection to everlasting life. It is no less conspicuous in His ascension when He took possession of

heaven in their name, prepares them for the heavenly mansions, pours down His Spirit upon them for that end, weans their affection from transitory objects, and attracts them to things above where He is, making continual intercession on their behalf, and securing their exaltation in due time. It was in the consideration of this grand truth that the Apostle Paul spoke of the great Mystery of Godliness—"God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, and received up into glory." All which was intended to adopt us into His family to sanctify our nature and receive us into glory, and when we consider the despicable objects on whom this unmerited favour was conferred, we are devoutly struck with unspeakable and holy veneration of the Divine Author, from whom all this has originated freely. When men adopt it is on account of some excellency in the persons adopted, as Pharaoh's daughter adopted Moses, because he was exceeding fair; and Mordecai adopted Esther because she was his uncle's daughter and exceeding fair. But man has nothing in him which merits this divine act, as in Ezekiel xvi. 5—"None eye pitied thee to do any of these things unto thee, to have compassion on thee, but thou wast cast out in the open field to the loathing of thy person in the day that thou wast born." It was in this state our Maker found us, when He said—"Live," and when He pours His Holy Spirit on His people they receive Christ by faith as freely offered in the Gospel to this end. His divine grace is imparted to them in order to excite their gratitude and direct their attention to the glory of Him who called them from darkness to His marvellous light to accomplish the great end of their salvation. They are divinely conducted to run the Christian race with faith, hope, and love; they proceed in their journey towards the heavenly Jerusalem, faith is the foundation and measure of hope. The latter is only the anticipation of those blessings which the former realises and presents to the mind. If faith be strong, hope is full of immortality and glory. Her heavenly prospects vary with the divine principle from which she proceeds. She is associated also with that humility which waits with patience for the full accomplishment of the promises. Hence, as an anchor within the veil, she keeps the soul sure and steadfast amidst all the fluctuating tides and tempests of this lower world. But these graces, however important, beneficial, and permanent in their effects, are only instrumental to that grace of love with which we shall ever be filled in everlasting praises of Him who loved

us. All other graces are but means to this blessed end. When we enter into a state of grace the full fruition of God, even eternal life, is ultimately intended. The end of God's unspeakable gift and all the graces of His Spirit through Him are to land us at last in the unfading and incorruptible inheritance. Love should adorn our Christian profession while here below—"The end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart and of a good conscience, and faith unfeigned." "Now abideth, faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." It is of a superior and transcendent nature, without it all other gifts are but as sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. While faith is that primary grace which apprehends and appropriates the salvation of Christ, and while hope ardently looks for the perfect and ultimate fruition of this salvation, divine love is that holy affection which constitutes the health and felicity of the soul. It is the greatest evidence that we can have of being called of God. It is the prize itself, for in proportion to our love we dwell in God and God in us. Of all the Christian graces it is the most general and comprehensive, concentrating every other into its own nature. It suffereth long and is kind, without usurping the place or disturbing the functions of the rest. Love allies itself to them all, regulates their exercise, preserves their simplicity, refers them to their proper end, and by purifying the secret chambers of the soul, keeps up a hallowed flame of devotion which diffuses life and splendour over every part of divine truth, and thus maintains their just empire in the heart with a single eye to the glory of God. It is also eternal in its duration, charity never faileth; faith ere long will be lost in vision, and hope in enjoyment. Their specific operations do not extend beyond the grave. When they have conducted the Christian to the confines of a better country they consign him over to perfect love, there to arrive at the very fountain of love, from which all the streams run for the healing of perishing sinners, and join the spirits of the just in songs of everlasting praises to the Lamb that was slain and redeemed them by His blood.

I conclude with a short application. Is the love of God therefore from everlasting? Is it the great, the eternal, and absolutely free favour of God in Christ manifested in the vouchsafement of spiritual and eternal blessings to the unworthy entirely detached from all supposition of human worth and absolutely independent of any such thing as human goodness? O! then, all ye children of want and sons of wretchedness, whether

Jews or Gentiles, to this unexhaustible fountain of God's free and unmerited love ye may freely come. Here the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind, with longing hearts and uplifted hands, big with expectations of being healed, may come with the utmost readiness, for the invitation extends to all characters and descriptions of men, and the proclamation (whosoever) is expressive of the freest favour and richest grace, including offenders of the worst characters, publishing pardon for sins of the deepest dye, and all ratified by Veracity itself. It affords sufficient encouragement to the vilest of sinners who is willing to owe his all to divine bounty, to receive the heavenly blessing, and with faith and gratitude to rejoice in the royal donation. Yes, it is the sovereign love of God that raises the poor from the dunghill and the needy from the dust, and sets them on thrones of glory, and numbers them among the princes of heaven. Happy, then, are they who are taught the infinitely marvellous, pleasant, powerful, and profitable truths of God in a manner that enlightens, draws, renews, ravishes, and sanctifies their heart. Happy they who being chargeable with every guilt and pollution, have them all washed away through the efficacious and expiatory sacrifice of their Lord, their righteousness and strength. How freely may they come to His throne of grace to receive of His love and sing in the heights of Zion. Happy His subjects who in love itself, whose laws are holy, just, and good, a perfect law of liberty, and whose whole administration is wisdom, righteousness, condescension, kindness, and love. O! then may that blessed day hasten when time shall give place to eternity, when our transient glimmerings of His glory here issue in our being for ever with the Lord, when our beloved ordinances of His grace shall be exchanged for seeing the God of infinite love as He is, who will acknowledge us in the face of His dear Son, who is the light of the celestial mansions, our everlasting light—our God, and our eternal glory.



## SERMON III

“Cast thy burden upon the Lord and He shall sustain thee.”—Ps. lv. 22.

WE are all in a state of trial and probation, for a permanent and eternal existence in another world. The space in which we move is but short at best, and by several circumstances very much contracted; but short and contracted as it is, scenes of the most weighty and important nature are transacted upon it. Man in his present fallen condition is truly forlorn. He is appointed to endure many severe afflictions, which he can neither foresee nor prevent. In the distribution of afflictions there is no doubt but the unerring wisdom acts, nor can chance have any place in His vast dominions, where even a sparrow falleth not to the ground without Him. It is true that in our short-sighted apprehensions the distribution appears very unequal, but humility and entire resignation are our bounden duties; for here we know but in part. Men's natural dispositions are as different as the complexion of their faces; nor can we imagine that the same measure of afflictions will answer the end of their discipline. Hence it is that among those who are evidently the children of God we see some whose heads continually hang down as the bulrush, while others have no severe dispensations comparatively to endure. Even among the wicked this seeming partiality may be discerned. There is no question, however, but the end of these different dispensations is that they may be disciplined and prepared for a state of infinite perfection, when all tears shall be wiped away from their eyes. Those for whom these afflictions have not answered these ends, but, like Pharaoh, harden themselves in wickedness, shall be left inexcusable. It often happens that the dearest and nearest child of God feels most of the bitterness of the rod; “in this world ye shall have tribulation.” We may rest assured, however, that there cannot possibly be one needless drop in their cup, for it is measured out by the unerring wisdom of their beneficent Father. A believer without afflictions and crosses has reason to doubt his sonship, “for He chasteneth every son whom He receiveth.” Here the excellency of our holy religion appears, that it not only calls us to endure afflictions, but makes them productive of the most invaluable advantage to those who are exercised therein. The inspired penman of this Psalm had to endure not an ordinary measure of these afflic-

tions, both before and after he became king over Israel, but he was not left destitute or unaided; he had experienced that God's strength was made perfect in weakness. From the experience he thus had of the divine help in every time of trouble he gives it as his advice to all in similar circumstances to follow the same method. With God there is no respect of persons. He is equally ready to succour and help the weakest believer as He was to help David; and when they follow the same course, “out of weakness they are made strong.” I presume there are some now present who have experienced the truth of God's promises, that His strength is made perfect in their weakness. There is none without his own burden. Some may think that there is none more uncomfortable than themselves; some may go so far as to suspect the safety of their condition, and speak bitter things against themselves. In order by the divine blessing to give some direction and help to these heavy-laden and weary souls it is my design to show—

I.—Some of those many burdens which every believer may be presumed to have.

II.—How we are to cast these burdens upon the Lord, or what is implied in so doing.

III.—Clear up the import of the promise—“He shall sustain thee.”

IV.—Practical inferences.

I would earnestly solicit the patient and attentive hearing of all who are now present, that they may have an opportunity of knowing whether they have a title to be numbered among the true disciples of Jesus, and hear Him invite them, saying—“Come unto Me.”

I.—Some of the burdens which every believer may be presumed to have. (1) Sin is a most grievous, a heavy and a dangerous burden. This is a burden we have brought with us into the world, and while we remain here, with which we must struggle. There are many who now hear me that may have no feeling of this burden; and how can they, seeing they are all in a spiritual sense dead in trespasses and sins. They have such a weight of sin upon them as will be more than sufficient (unless they are relieved from it) to sink them down to the lowest hell, and keep them there throughout the endless ages of eternity. Like a man immersed under water, who feels no weight from a quantity the hundred-thousandth part of which he would be unable out of the water to bear. But when

the divine life is communicated by the Spirit of God, the feelings are restored to the once dead and insensible soul. While one is dead he is in the land of silence where no complaint is heard, but when life is restored the person feels and complains. The Apostle Paul informs us, that he was alive once without the law, that he thought himself a good man, and wanted a feeling sense of the burden of sin, but when the commandment came sin revived and he died. The burden he had felt brought him down to the ground, he found himself unable to bear up under it. There was a strong and, on the part of the Apostle, an unavailing struggle; the soul now quickened, felt the burden of sin, and unable either to bear it or extricate himself from it, he exclaimed: "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death." The body of sin had affected all the powers of his soul and not withstanding that it was deeply felt, he could do nothing towards rescuing himself, Rom. vii, 24. Nor was this peculiar to the Apostle only, he speaks the experience of all une people of God. Sin is their daily and most grievous burden. They would rise upon the wings of faith and make their escape from the world of troubles, but sin as a weight prevents them. They would hold spiritual converse with God, but sin intervenes. They would have their conversation in heaven, but sin prevents their mind from acquiring that spirituality of affection which is necessary for that employment. They would, with unwearied perseverance and daily advancement, go towards Zion as travellers to that happy country; but the burden of sin prevents them from making but a small progress. This burden is much more so to some than to others. And perhaps those sins which never come to light, yea, which they never committed bear heavier upon them and prove their greatest burden. The Psalmist felt this burden (Ps. xxxviii. 4.) Every believer does the same and longs exceedingly to be relieved from it, "he groans being burdened." We should, therefore, lay aside every weight and more especially that sin which doth so easily beset us that we may run with patience (though not sinless) the race that is set before us (Hebs. xii. 1.)

(2) The hiding of God's countenance from the soul is a burden, weighty and unsupportable, to the believer. Sin is not only the worst of evils in itself, but also the cause of all the other evils man is appointed to endure. It is matter of no small astonishment that we are in general so fond of our greatest tormentor. Among the other great evils which sin introduced into the world, that complete and universal alienation which

it has made between the Creator and His creatures is by no means the least. This of itself is misery enough. There is no happiness for a rational being but in God. Sin made God, in whom is no enmity, an enemy to us; and man, in the constitution of whose original nature there was no enmity, is now enmity itself. Nor is this all; the highly-favoured few, who, through the mercy and free love of God in Christ, have been readmitted into favour and intimate fellowship with Him, have reason with David to exclaim that God hides His countenance from them, and they are brought low. The soul-excruciating pain of desertion is felt by none except those who are admitted into nearness and fellowship with God, who upon some favoured seasons can say with the disciples it is good for us to be here; and we may observe that the degree of distress where-with the soul is affected upon the hiding of God's countenance, corresponds with the degree of intimacy enjoyed. Those who are only mere professors of religion desire no more of it than such a measure of knowledge as shall enable them to pass through the world with a reputation, but the sincere believer desires to have the life of religion, and the life of religion is fellowship and communion with God, who is not the God of the dead, but of the living. This man alone can say that it is sweeter to him than honey, than the honey-comb (Ps. xix. 10). He has not only seen, but also tasted that the Lord is good. The life of faith is the Christian's life, but the communion with God which His people enjoy with Him upon some seasons depends not upon faith. They may have a faith's view of God when they have not an experimental communion with Him; so that we have here two distinct considerations. Sometimes the hiding of God's countenance refers only to one of these: we may have faith in exercise, when we are very low in our experience. This was the case with David, as he expressed it in Psalm xlii. New converts in the day of their espousals live more by experience than by faith. Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn while the bridegroom is with them? But the day is coming when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they mourn in those days. Hence we are not to imagine that God's providential care shall ever be withdrawn from His people: "My presence shall go with you, and I shall give you rest." But it implies that in our experience we are not uniformly to enjoy the same sense of His gracious presence, which upon some occasions we are permitted to enjoy. What a cloud came over the mind of the disconsolate disciples when Jesus was

in the grave. Those who have been in similar circumstances can best tell. The reason why God thus withholds the influence of His Spirit in their experiences from His people is in some measure concealed from us. He giveth no account of any of His matters. We know that it proceeds from love. Some times it arises from unwatchful or unguarded action of His people. They may have forgotten it, but when they feel their souls bereaved of comfort, they then confess that it is an evil thing and a bitter, that they have forsaken the Lord. Perhaps they may not discover the reason, and yet from God's dealings towards them they know they have offended Him. Like an obedient wife whose happiness depends upon the smiles of her affectionate husband, or a dutiful son who anxiously wishes to please his father, the believer would anxiously know wherein he has offended, and would suffer any infliction rather than to want the smiles of his father and his God. But I presume that some of the desertions of believers may arise from the infinite wisdom of God towards them, in order to prepare them for some extraordinary discovery of Himself, or some change that is to happen in their situation. But from whatever cause it arises, it is an uncomfortable situation, and when a believer comes the length of losing sight of his resignation as a duty he owes to God, it becomes intolerable (Ps. lxx).

(3) The believer's doubts as to his interest in the benefits of the everlasting Covenant, well ordered in all things and sure, is another heavy burden. As another evil consequence of sin, we are under sentence of condemnation to the holy and good law of God, having lost our ability of giving that perfect obedience which it requires. We are, therefore, upon the terms of the first covenant outcasts, and have most justly forfeited every claim to any of the benefits we had secured to us in the covenant. The last breath we draw is only from the unmerited goodness of God. But the Lord was pleased to establish with His people in Christ a new and unalterable covenant. In this covenant the forfeited right and lost blessings are restored. They are sure to all the seed, and they have as unquestionable a title to them as Adam in innocence had to all that God promised him. That this covenant is made with Christ and ratified by His blood, is every believer's salvation and all his desire. But if the covenant is made with Christ as head and representative of His people, it is but just and reasonable that while He stands according to the stipulations of the covenant, those who are interested in it, for whose sake He entered into such an engagement, should be partakers of the benefits of

the covenant. Unless this had been the case, to speak with reverence, we could not say that justice would be done to the covenant Head. We find, therefore, that there is no believer but receives these covenant blessings. It is also the first concern of every Christian to know in whom he has believed, and to taste of covenant love in covenant mercies. This is as unquestionable an evidence and much more so than if an angel came from God with the same message with which he came to the blessed virgin. Yea, it is as certain as if God with an audible voice declared that one is a child of the covenant. Covenant benefits can only come to the children of the covenant. The children's bread cannot be given to dogs. Christ undertook and accomplished the work for those that the Father had given Him from eternity. Nor need any one examine into this secret mystery; let him rather know if his state bespeaks him to be among the redeemed of the Lord Jesus. There are some who have no doubt in their minds but they are God's children in the covenant of grace. It becomes them to take heed how they walk. There are others, and the greatest number, who, notwithstanding that they are as certainly interested in the covenant as the former, can scarcely believe it. They dare not say, but they may be; but they dread they are not. They are prevented from utter despair, but they are often on the brink of that pit. This is a most severe burden, and naturally resulting from the former. These doubts arise from within and from without. The experience of sin and sinful corruptions working from within; the promises so completely locked up that the believer dares not look to them. Unbelief and the evil suggestions of Satan will misrepresent the promises, and even doubt their veracity (Ps. cxvi. 11). When he considers the advanced state of other believers, he does rejoice, but instead of being encouraged, he rather concludes that, were he one of God's children, he would partake of their privileges. He can find no parallel to Himself among the people of God: he often repents and bitterly laments that ever he presumed to take the children's bread. This is a most unsupportable burden to an awakened soul, who knows and firmly believes that there is no other name given under heaven among men whereby he can be saved, but that of Jesus alone. These doubts and dismal apprehensions may be in part constitutional. They are, however, in some degree or other felt by true believers. They should be cast upon the Lord. He shall sustain us. The manner of casting them upon Him comes to be considered under another

head; but let none imagine that this case is peculiar to him alone. It is the lot of many of God's children. Be not content, however, in the condition, but believe that you may be a child of the covenant, although you may not have the appearance of it. Distinguish yourself from the formal hypocrite by not contenting yourself with a probability, but aspiring to a certainty.

(4) Their duties are a burden to believers. This may on first hearing surprise some who are not acquainted with the experience of believers. But to make this in their view a greater paradox, their duties are their burden and their pleasure. They feel an ardent, growing desire for the duties of their holy faith as they advance in the spiritual life. But their minds are enlightened to see and believe the immaculate holiness and spotless purity of God. They know that He is a Spirit, and they that serve Him acceptably must do it in spirit and in truth. They, on the contrary, find themselves under the influence of carnal and dead affections: they mourn after that fervour and warmth in devotion, which, though it cannot recommend them to the favour of God, would indicate the indwelling habitation of His Holy Spirit. They would do good but evil is present with them. They would go unto God as their chiefest joy and glory in Him, but they find a deadness and indifference. Even their most solemn duties, where they expected comfort, are rendered uncomfortable to them by the intrusion of vain thoughts; and sometimes they retire from the house of God much more burdened in this respect than when they have entered it. They are often in a strait between two: they fear that their duties may provoke the Spirit of God to withdraw, and yet they cannot refrain from duties. Nor is this occasionally: some even complain that they have reason to fear that no duty of the Christian life had ever been rightly performed. They sometimes doubt their sincerity; and any commendation from men grieves and humbles them. They exclaim from a sense of deadness—"Awake, O north wind, and come thou south."

(5) The temptations of Satan are a burden to believers. In this wilderness of their pilgrimage the people of God are exposed to many hardships; they are in themselves a poor, defenceless people. Among other things which make their journey through life often uncomfortable, they must feel the stings of fiery flying serpents. The Apostle's complaint, in the experience of every child of God, holds still true, "and we are not ignorant of his devices." There are some of God's

people who have more discernment than others to know his temptations. There are some who from their natural temper and other circumstances are less exposed than others. Some, from a long experience of his attacks, are not much disconcerted, at least till he makes use of new methods. Some are tempted to such abandoned vices as they would not communicate to their nearest connections or their most confidential friends. They find their hearts contrary to their wishes open to his attacks. They find, even, in the most solemn part of their duties, that the heart, by the evil suggestions of the enemy, is carried away. Nay, sometimes they are compelled to abandon a commanded duty. They hear his secret whisperings carrying away their attention. They pray against it and yet their smart is not eased. Upon some occasions they have relief, but after that his temptations are renewed with redoubled fury. The more seeming relation and zeal they discover for Christ they are the more distressed by the cunning and craft of the old serpent. Cast this burden upon the Lord.

(6) The present melancholy and unpromising state of the Church of Christ and its members is another grievous burden to the believer. It is an undoubted evidence of a Christian temper, to have his mind expanded and enlarged by universal philanthropy for all men. Every true believer is of a public spirit, yea, the cause and glory of Christ concerns him much more than his own private interest and even his eternal salvation. Seeing that he has a union with Christ and the members of His mystical body, he has a particular and abiding concern for his mother, the church. Thus we find the believing soul expressing himself in Song viii, 2. We justly despise that son who denies and disregards the influence which natural affection has over him; nor can the most dutiful attention repay the care and painful distress of a mother. It is no less unnatural for children of the same family to be indifferent about one another's welfare. Between Christ and believers who are begotten by the Gospel, there is a much more intimate relation. They are members of one body. They are under the influence of one spirit, they are children of one family. They are joint heirs with Christ, of the same glorious hope. Every believer feels an interest in the Church of Christ. He rejoices over it, and mourns when the cause of Christ is not triumphing. When he perceives the marks of an angry God towards the Church; when he sees judgments drawing nigh, when he sees Satan



successful then is his time to encourage, warn, and admonish, earnestly and unceasingly imploring the return of God's favour and His exercising protection over His Church. There is much reason to mourn and lament over the cause of God in our days. Who that is in any measure animated by the same Spirit but will unite with the weeping prophet in Jer. ix. But although the union of believers with one another exceeds that of natural affection, it by no means eradicates it. On the contrary, it raises it to a degree of which a natural person is never susceptible: it begets a concern for the immortal part. It not unfrequently happens that godly persons have very ungodly and wicked relatives. Adam had a Cain in his family, Aaron had a Nadab and Abihu, David had an Absalom, and in the Saviour's own family there was a Judas. And in general many of the people of God have cause to complain that their house is not right with God. In the distribution of God's grace it happens in families and congregations that while one is taken, the other is left. This must be matter of grief to the believer, and the more intimate the connection the heavier the burden. Cast this burden also upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee.

(7) Poverty is a burden to believers, notwithstanding that the Lord has in a great measure alienated the affections of believers from earthly to heavenly objects; and that they expect to be made happy only when that which is in part shall be done away, yet they must feel like other men the ills of life. They are in general a poor, despised, and afflicted people. "Not many noble, not many mighty are called." From the present unrelenting state of men's mind they have in their view little lenity to expect. There is, in most cases, no mercy for a poor man. "The rich have many friends." It is likely the believer many times knows not to what hand to turn for relief. He may have others depending on him, and sees nothing wherewith to provide for them. This is a burden grievous to be borne. It may sometimes stagger the faith of a confirmed believer. The affliction wherewith his family is visited heightens the distress. In similar circumstances we find the Israelites upon their crossing the Red Sea. They had no prospect of support; they were always to move forward, and even should they settle, the wilderness would give them no maintenance. But the Lord had provided for them. If many of us had been present, it is most probable we should have joined them in their murmuring against God and Moses. Cast this burden upon

the Lord and He shall sustain thee. "They that truly seek the Lord shall not want any good."

Lastly, the want of a burden is a most grievous and weighty burden. However strange this may seem to some present, this is the most unsupportable of all the burdens we have mentioned. It is so in its own nature, and more especially as it unfits us for having it removed. Owing partly to the believer's constitutional habits, the delusion of sin, the temptations of Satan, and the corruptions of his own heart, he finds himself in a state which he cannot describe. There is such a deadness and indifference seizing him that he cannot with any degree of precision trace any work of grace in his soul; any corruption, any need of a Saviour, any danger, any desire for an alteration of state, and yet he feels a most uncomfortable uneasiness in that situation. In this state such indifference may take hold of him, that unless restrained by the unseen agency of God, he would commit any sin to which he is tempted. But in the goodness of God Satan is restrained in a great measure. The believer would mourn and lament his sins before God, but he cannot. He would pray but knows not how. He would meditate, but knows not on what. He would believe, but feels himself under an utter inability. Sin, like a delirious fever, has seized all his soul, and he can scarcely feel or describe anything in its true light. We should be cautious that we do not create such a state for ourselves. Cast thy burden upon the Lord.

II. How we are to cast these burdens upon the Lord. Man, in consequence of his apostasy from God, labours under the most deplorable inability in a moral sense. Any one of these burdens we have enumerated would be more than sufficient to prevent his ever arriving at that rest which remaineth for the people of God. But blessed be God we are not left to have an unavailing struggle with difficulties. We have a mighty One as our defence, and underneath are the everlasting arms. To encourage our approaches, He has assumed human form, and most graciously bore Himself all these burdens. This makes a faithful and fellow-feeling High Priest. This of itself must be matter of encouragement for feeble and helpless sinners. But they are not left to conjecture. He condescends in the most endearing unequivocal manner, to invite them to His pardoning, refreshing, and supporting mercy, much readier to communicate strength than they are to ask him. "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy

laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. xi. 28). In this state of trial and difficulties we groan, being burdened, but we labour not alone. The Angel of the Covenant that appeared unto Jacob in the way is ever present with us. But there is such humility and condescension in God towards sinners that they find a difficulty in believing it possible—"Dost thou wash my feet?" There is no question but God is more than sufficient to uphold the most disconsolate believer under the heaviest burden which any is doomed to labour under. But the difficulty rests on his own part. That impotency which incapacitated him for bearing under his burdens, disables him also from casting them upon the Lord. There are two hands wherewith the believing soul should cast his burdens upon the Lord: these are faith and prayer. If at any time, which often happens, one of these begins to fail, it must be cast by the other, and sometimes their joint efforts must be exercised, like as Moses and the inferior judges managed the concerns of the children of Israel. I speak not of counterfeits. Both these must be inseparable if they be of the genuine kind. Faith may sometimes be weak, but prayer may be had recourse to in all cases. Prayer must be offered in faith; but it may be the prayer of faith, when faith itself is not in exercise. Faith, likewise, partakes of the nature of prayer. In any and in every situation when we have recourse to these, they prove effectual. There is no burden which we may groan under but can be supported in this manner. How comfortable may be the soul who has freedom of access to God in prayer in any situation. And I may appeal to the experience of some who now hear me, that not infrequently they had approached a throne of grace bitterly complaining of their many hardships and trials; but, if in the goodness of their God, they have been admitted to any intimacy there, they find themselves eased of their burdens and possessed of unexpected strength for their Christian course. A burden can never bear too heavy upon the believer while he has freedom of access to God, to make known unto Him all his complaints.

III. What is implied in this promise—"He shall sustain thee?" This does not imply that a belief in the all-sufficient, all-free grace of God in Christ should make us more careless in our walk through the world. This would be to sin, because grace doth abound. If a man be rescued from sudden destruction by the benevolent exertions of another, should this induce him to expose himself to the same danger, even should his former benefactor stand by; and surely no man in his sober

senses would be so mad. This imputation upon the doctrines of free grace is the most unfair and unjust that can be conceived. The clearer and firmer a believer's assurance in the favour and protection of God is, the greater watchfulness and circumspection does this beget in him. Neither does this promise imply that when we cast our burdens upon the Lord we ourselves are henceforward to go free. This would not be to consult our good, which God uniformly does. Such is the corruption and deceitfulness of the human heart that did we but for any length of time want something to humble us, we should in a short time turn wanton against the Lord, and bring upon ourselves the sorest burdens. For there are no burdens so severe as those which we have brought upon ourselves by our unwatchfulness. The promise, therefore, does not run in this way. You shall be free, but He shall sustain thee, labouring under the burden and often ready to fear that you shall fail. But the promise implies—

1st. That no unnecessary burden shall be laid upon us, that even a dog cannot bark against us without permission. The Lord is infinitely wise; He does not proportion our burdens according to our resolutions, but according to our danger; and what He has designed for us, or what He is to do by us. There are many who may suppose that a less burden might serve, and that should he have easier burdens he might make a greater progress in the Christian life. But this proceeds from ignorance. A little acquaintance with your heart will convince you that even the measure of affliction you have is scarcely sufficient for keeping down the pride and haughtiness of your heart. They are all measured out by infinite wisdom. They are necessary for preserving us right in our journey through life, lest we might make a shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience; and though we may not know it now, we shall know it hereafter. For we are yet but children in knowledge; nor do we know what the wisdom of our Father intends for us. He shall sustain us; and surely if we must be indebted for strength, we should leave the manner to Himself.

2nd. This implies that we shall have every necessary direction and discipline under these burdens. When we have at first engaged in the Christian course, we are impatient of restraint: we think that nothing but comforts and uninterrupted communion and fellowship with God is to be enjoyed. But we have not gone far when we find that we are not yet made perfect. We must undergo a discipline here, that we may arrive

safely and qualified for the enjoyment of the higher house. When we begin the Christian life we may have many struggles. Ephraim most emphatically compares himself to a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke (Jer. xxxi. 18). The untoward disposition of his heart was much severer than the service to which he was called. The Lord shall teach His children this discipline until they are at length brought to rejoice and joy in tribulation. They bear the yoke not of constraint, but of a willing mind. They are under the tuition of infinite wisdom and unalterable love.

3rd. This promise implies that they are perfectly secure under every burden, and that at length they shall be delivered out of them all. He shall sustain thee. He, who is the Almighty, He who is Lord of Hosts; all thy burdens are under His immediate inspection; yea, they are ordered by Himself: "Fear not, for I am with thee, be not afraid, for I am thy God." While there is omnipotence in Jehovah to sustain a fellow-feeling and grace in Christ, and the fellowship of the Spirit the true and sincere believer cannot fail. It is true that even the most sincere believer is but weaker than frailty itself; but the appointing of the burden for believers belongs to God: troubles arise not out of the dust. Omnipotence itself cannot lay any burden which itself is not able to bear. Pray not then, O believer, that thy burden may be removed or even lightened, but in a consistency with infinite wisdom, well knowing that though of yourself you are insufficient, yet your sufficiency is of God: "His grace shall be sufficient for you, for His strength is made perfect in weakness." But think not that even God Himself is to support you under these afflictions always. He has a nobler service for you yet in the higher house. Even while we are supported under afflictions; and they are thus joyous, there is a desire of deliverance natural to man. This time of redemption draweth nigh. The end of the journey will ease us. Our salvation is nearer than when we have believed. Who would grudge a few trials and difficulties, if need be, in this world when there is the more unquestionable certainty of a sudden and certain deliverance. More especially when we reflect that these very distresses shall enhance the value of the enjoyments, and that they are, moreover, one chief means whereby we are prepared for heaven. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (II. Cor. iv. 17).

IV.—Practical inferences. (1) Hence we may remark what an inestimable privilege the Gospel of Jesus is. It has among many other advantages given us clear and comprehensive notions of that great Being whose we are, and whom we serve. It has made Him, who was formerly little more than an object of terror, an object of love and unshaken confidence. Believers can now contemplate His adorable perfections and see them in the face of Jesus all exercised on their behalf encouraging their hearts, and giving them good hope and consolation through grace. Nor can any one consider God out of Christ but as an object of terror; on the other hand, connected with this knowledge of God is our happiness. Let the advantages we enjoy be duly estimated.

(2) Hence, we may learn the true cause of our inquietudes and anxious fears. It is true that we must suffer many things in this our probation state. These are not, however, the cause of our fears. Our fears do not arise either from our sufferings or wants. Many of our fellow mortals had these to endure, and yet they were not cast down, but rejoiced in them. There is none who is in the least acquainted with the history of the saints but will know this. Have we not the same unchangeable God? Is not His goodness, His power, wisdom and love equally free to us as to them, and yet we do not find such unshaken confidence? The reason is plain, they had more real intimacy with God; were much more exercised by afflictions than we are, yet they fainted not because they believed that underneath were the everlasting arms. It is necessary in order to constitute God an object of dependence, that there be a special revelation of Him to us as individuals.

(3) Have we cast our burdens upon Jehovah? This is an important question. Sooner or later we shall all feel the need of Him. But unless it is done as an act of the will, with the consent of the mind we should not imagine ourselves safe. A reliance upon God is the believer's privilege.

(4) A word to those who have unshaken confidence and freedom of access to God. They should walk circumspectly, lest they may in their experience deprive themselves of this greatest of all blessings. They should, also, have compassion upon those that weary themselves for very vanity. They should bear with the weak. They should guard against self-sufficiency.

(5) Those who entertain doubts of an interest in God and can not say whether they have laid their burden upon Him, they should examine whether He has done anything for them in time past from which they may comfortably conclude that they are objects of His peculiar care. They should, also, endeavour to commit their ways unto God and having done so to leave the issue with Him. They should often contemplate the unchangeableness of God their Saviour.

Lastly, a word to hypocrites and self-secure sinners. It happens often that those who have least cause, are the most seemingly comfortable. But their joy is like the crackling of thorns under a pot it shall be turned into sorrow. They should examine upon what their confidence is founded. If they would but listen to the voice of conscience it would inform them that it is nothing more than presumption. Real trials and severe difficulties are before them. Let careless sinners also consider the awful situation wherein they stand. Consider what is said, and the Lord give you understanding.



### SERMON IV.\*

“ And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.”—Gen. xxii. 14.

**T**HE providences of God towards His people are most remarkable and fraught with the most weighty instructions: they are no doubt intended for the benefit of all generations, and preserved in the Scriptures for that purpose. The history of Abraham, the friend of God and father of the faithful, is most remarkable and interesting. That part of his life and that severe trial of his faith to which the text refers we have an account from the beginning of this chapter, and in the text a remembrance is kept of it. The Lord shall be seen by His people in their difficulties, straits, and trials. He shall be seen in the mount, as in the case before us, when matters are brought to an extremity; when all succour failed, and we have neither help nor hope. As, on the one hand, we ought not to despise the chastening of the Lord, so on the other we ought not to faint when we are rebuked of Him. Just as Abraham was about to lay the knife on his son the Lord was seen; this made the deliverance most beneficial and sweet. Let us notice—

I. That it is God's usual way to bring His people into extremities.

II. That then, and not before, the Lord will be seen.

III. That these straits and trials into which God in His sovereignty brings His children are not punishments but privileges.

IV. Let us make application.

I. That it is God's usual way to bring His people to extremities. That is a truth so fully established by the history of God's people, both living and dead, that we need not stay upon the point. We refer you to the great cloud of witnesses with which we are surrounded. Those that are now nearest the throne above came out of great tribulation. The tribulations do not arise out of the nature of religion necessarily, but it has been the manner in which the wise Sovereign of

\* This sermon is incomplete. It will be noticed that it is only the first head which is dealt with.

the world saw meet to lead His children forward towards the enjoyment of that rest which remaineth for the people of God. I would, on the present occasion, endeavour to direct your attention to a few reasons as far as we can know them and He has revealed them, of this part of the divine procedure towards His people. This may help us in apprehending and discharging duty.

(1) The Lord will bring us to extremities that they might be really felt by us as an affliction; we, too often, create innumerable evils for ourselves; and while we view them through the medium of our own fancy, we presume that there is none so heavily afflicted as we are. And it often happens that nothing will convince us of our sin and folly except the hand of God being laid heavy upon us. Then we forget what we are wont to consider as a heavy affliction. Until we are brought to an extremity it really is no affliction; and from what is not so we reap no benefit. For we come out of those furnaces we have ourselves heated more stubborn and self-willed than before. But when we are shut in on every side and have no hope left, then we shall look out of ourselves. God does not willingly grieve nor afflict any of the children of men, but He does it for their profit.

(2) That in our extremity we might seek unto God. We are all, since the introduction of sin, alienated from the life that is in God: we run after the creature, and pursue with eager, imaginary expectation the fleeting shadows, and as long as we believe that the creature can do us any good, we shall go no further. Hence it is that when we are exercised in the discipline of our Heavenly Father, and acquire spiritual discernment, we see that the severest dispensations which at the time were viewed as indications of the divine displeasure, are seen to be fruits of His love, and inseparable from it. Those that in their health live at the greatest distance from God, and never hear what He says, will often in their affliction adopt the language of, in Hos vi. 1—“Come, and let us return unto the Lord; for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up.” It is only when the aid of the creature ends that the assistance of the Creator comes in. On a death-bed almost all are serious. When the creature can afford them no comfort nor stay; when all are wholly vanity, “miserable comforters.” But it is one thing to be convinced of the vanity of, and renounce, all creature comfort from necessity, and another thing

to do it from a conviction of the excellency of divine things. It is one thing to say in the bitterness of one's spirit, “My judgment is greater than I can bear,” and another thing for the soul to say—“Thou art my portion in the land of the living.” Natural causes may produce the former, but nothing except a saving work of God upon the heart can effect the latter.

(3) That we may acknowledge and praise God as our helper and deliverer. We are so attached to self and so much under the influence of this universal idol, that when difficulties are only partial, we ascribe the deliverance, at least in part, to ourselves and other means. If we lean to the creature, we will either resolve them wholly to it, and forget God, or at best divide the praise. It is true that God has appointed means, and uniformly works by them, but until we are denied the efficacy of means and refer all to the supreme will and blessing of God, we cannot have a deliverance in God's way nor as a real benefit; see this beautifully illustrated in the case of Gideon (Judges vii. 2). The original number which Gideon had to oppose to that of the enemy was comparatively few, but then Gideon would have ascribed the victory to himself in some measure had he been suffered to go forth with them. But when the number was so very much reduced as to leave no hope of a victory, the praise must be entirely and wholly referred to God. The language from such a deliverance will naturally be—“Not unto us, O! Lord, not unto us, but to thy name, for thy glory and truth's sake be the praise.” God will not divide His glory, “He will not give His glory to another, nor His praise to graven images.” Had Abraham discovered the ram a moment sooner, God should not have so much glory of it, nor would Isaac be so sweet to him as receiving him from the dead. Those who are taught of God know that when they substitute any idol in place of God that He takes vengeance on that invention—all of them must say in a day of God's mighty power—“What have I to do any more with idols?”

(4) That from a happy necessity we might be made to seek the Lord, and know Him experimentally. In our ease and prosperity we are all prone to be satisfied with a speculative acquaintance with God. And until these fine speculations are called into actual exercise by severe trials, we may think that our hill standeth firm, and shall not be moved. But all these refuges of lies shall be swept away, and in the day of evil nothing but

a practical experimental acquaintance with God can support the soul. Nothing is well learned but by experience. This alone can inspire confidence in God. The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me (said David) out of the hands of this Philistine. It is when a person is in real extremity that he shall have experience of the Lord. Therefore, we read concerning Manasseh that when he was in affliction and prayed and humbled himself, he knew the Lord was God (II. Chron. xxxiii. 13). Such of you as attend to God's dealings with His people will find that it was always upon some emergency or change in their circumstances and situations that He manifested Himself to them. This was eminently the case with Jacob, both on his leaving his father's house and on his return. He had upon both these very critical occasions clear manifestations of the God of Bethel, and that knowledge of God which men acquire in such circumstances never leaves them. It has the best influence both upon their hearts and life. It even animates them to an unshaken trust in God in the prospect of death and judgment.

Lastly, that our faith in, and acquaintance with, and confidence in God might be tried and proved. This view we have of this dispensation towards Abraham, see verse 1 compared with Heb. xi. 17. The most spiritual faith and the most scriptural experience have some alloy and mixture. This was the case with Abraham, though on the whole his knowledge of God was special and his love to Him sincere, yet his heart was alienated in some degree by Isaac. He suffered him to go to the utmost without committing the deed, to see whether his faith would carry him forward to that very severe act of obedience. The language of all these trials is, Lovest thou Me more than these? How severely did Jesus try the trust of Peter, and in a similar manner the woman of Canaan. But blessed is the man who endureth temptation, for when he is tried he shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. The trial of their faith is more precious than gold that perisheth. The oftener the pure metal is melted, the more precious it is, for there is no time of melting but it is separated from some alloy. Such is the case with the vessels of mercy, until they are wholly purified, and fit to be presented without spot or wrinkle or blemish, or any such thing. With this difference, however, that all these trials and furnaces cannot purify the soul: it is only the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son; that cleanseth the soul from all sin.

By way of application: (1) Let none judge God's love by the external evidences of it, but wait the issues. When a physician cuts deep and administers harsh medicines we may feel distressed, but without these there could be neither life nor cure. Sin has penetrated so deep, that God, in order to restore the soul, to moral health, and fit it for His own enjoyment, administers such means as He sees most fit. But both His wisdom and love are sufficient guards to prevent any unnecessary severity either in the manner, the measure, or the time. I was dumb, opening not my mouth, because Thou didst it.

(2) Let us learn from hence never to be discouraged, nor suffer our hearts to be cast down within us, however seemingly desperate our case be. A believer in God through Christ may address the language of David to himself, Ps. xlii. 11. and xliii. 5. What case could be more desperate than the one before us, and attended with circumstances of greater distress? Yet the Lord, in the fittest and most proper moment, delivered him. There are many other similar instances left us on record in the Holy Scriptures. Consider the case of Job and the happy issue of it. Consider Nebuchadnezzar's case as in Daniel iv., the Israelites at the Red Sea, and the Jews in Mordecai's time. And I believe there is none who has marked God's ways towards himself, but must have remarked that man's necessities are God's opportunity. Still hope in God, therefore, for you shall have yet cause to praise Him, who is the light of your countenance and your God.

(3) Let this subject call forth the exercise of patience and self-examination under any particular distress or affliction. God's time is always seasonable: a deliverance from trials, without suitable dispositions to improve that deliverance would be most hurtful to ourselves. Let patience then have its perfect work that we may be entire and wanting nothing in all the will of God.

See the difference between real religion and the bare name, true religion always produces fruit; we may have the name and the knowledge without the truth of religion. Abraham's obedience is referred to by God Himself, as an evidence of his having feared Him (verse 12). Some think they can be honest enough men; good husbands and wives: faithful parents and affectionate dutiful children, and so on without religion which is impossible. For the tree must be good before the fruit can be good. While others think that if they can

talk about religion, and attain to some experience in it, that they may neglect personal and relative duties. Both these extremes are damnable errors. Without religion man is on a level with the beasts that perish, and without the fruits of genuine universal holiness every man's religion is vain. The apostle James tells us that Abraham justified the truth of his faith (religion) when he offered his son, Isaac. As God, therefore, in His Word, and by the work of His Spirit in the renewed soul, has joined faith and good works, let not man put them asunder. Let your light so shine before men that others seeing your good works may glorify your Father who is in heaven.

