

"AND HAVING DONE ALL, TO STAND."

Thou gav'st Thyself for me :
 Then may I stand
 Steadfastly, true to Thee,
 In the foe's land.

For surely Thou art worth
 The standing for ;
 Thou who this hostile earth
 Hast trod before ;

Finding no help or friend
 To be Thy stay ;
 Yet faithful to the end
 Of the dark way.

So may it be with me,
 In these dark days—
 Looking alone to Thee,
 Seeking Thy praise ;

Standing for Thee alone,
 Held by Thine hand ;
 And having all things done,
 Yet still, to stand.

THE ALTAR OF ABRAM.

GEN. XI. 27 ; XII. 1-7.

We are going to examine the various circumstances which furnished Abram occasion to offer his worship to God. We will also consider his walk and the character of his worship, and how he was led by faith to present this worship to God.

It is very precious to find in Genesis the elements and the broad principles of the relations of God with man in all their freshness from the creation, sin, and the announcement of the Second Adam. We also see how the government of God was exercised ; in what manner man fell ; the judgment of the deluge, which put an end to the old world ; the promises made to Abram ; the two covenants of Sarai and Hagar ; the relations of God with the Jews in the beautiful typical history of Joseph. In a word, we find in Genesis, not only a history, but the grand basis of God's relations with man. Abram in this respect holds a chief place as the depository of the promises. We may understand that by what the apostle Paul says to the Galatians (iii. 13, 14), "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us ; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree : that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

We see by this word, "the blessing of Abraham," the importance of that which is attributed to him. In considering it we shall see the position God has made for us, in His grace, as to the accomplishment of the promises ; even in looking at it as a principle, we shall understand the glory of Christ, Heir of all the promises of God. It is true that the relations of Christ with the Church were yet hidden, having been revealed only after

His death, save at least in type ; nevertheless, the various aspects of the relations of God with man, in all their freshness, and the various cases in which they have existed, are found in the germ, in this book.

In the ninth chapter, after the account of the deluge, we find that Noah, to whom the government of the earth has been entrusted, fails in his position. He got drunk. We see afterwards the iniquity of Ham, who mocked his father ; then, in Babel, the separation of the nations, each after its tongue. In the tenth chapter, men, united amongst one another, exalt themselves against God. In the midst appears Nimrod, the violent man upon the earth ; while the family of Seth, blessed in the earth, is that in the bosom of which God establishes particular relations with men. Babel presents itself, whether as the commencement of the kingdom of Nimrod, or as the false glory of those men whose unity was in Babel, and who were dispersed of God. Such are the principal features of the three preceding chapters. Noah had failed ; then the nations. Men exalted themselves against God, instead of being subject to Him ; they joined themselves together to make themselves a name, and not to be scattered ; but their exaltation becomes the cause of their dispersion.

Before we stop at the race of Shem, concerning whom God is particularly occupied, one remark is needed. A terrible principle is come up in this

state of things ! Man exalts himself in separating from God. But, insufficient to himself, he becomes a slave ; he submits to Satan's power, serves him and adores him. Having abandoned God, Satan usurps His place ; he alarms the conscience ; he takes possession of the heart and energy of man, who gives himself up to idolatry. You will find this fact in Joshua xxiv. 2, (where for "flood" read "river," i. e., the Euphrates). It is the principle of Satan's power on earth ; that adds to the history of man. Joshua furnishes us with what we add to this account of the things which came to pass after the deluge,—the violence of man, the dispersion of the nations ; namely, that even the family of Shem, these children of Heber, worshipped other gods than the true and living God. The apostle tells us they were demons : "The things which they sacrificed, they sacrificed to demons, and not to God" (1 Cor. x. 20—cf. Deut. xxxii. 16, 17). Such is the new world : Satan becomes the ruler of the one we inhabit (a circumstance we set too much aside). God can deliver us, in one sense, from the yoke of Satan as ruler, although it abides true that he can tempt us by the lusts of this world, and make us fall morally under his yoke. For example, if the Gospel be received outwardly in a country, and if the word of God have free course there, whilst in another country evangelization is not even permitted, it is evident that, in this latter, souls labour under a yoke which does not weigh in the former, and that Satan

rules over one of these countries as he does not over the other. I believe it is important in these times to discern these two things. The simple fact of being entrapped by one's own lusts is a yoke of Satan, but is not the rule of which we speak. Now, it may happen that many individuals in the enfranchised country may be more guilty ; for the very reason that they have superior advantages : but the yoke is not the same.

Independence of God is the desire of all men. Man will do his own will, and he falls into the enemy's hand. Such was the state of Abram's family, as of all other men. Into the midst of all this evil God comes, and manifests these three principles to Abram : election, calling, and the promises. He finds him in the evil, and He calls Him according to the choice He has made ; then He gives the promises to him He has called, and Abram receives them.

Besides this, we get the manner in which God does this. He manifests Himself, then He speaks. Often, in those days, He visibly did this. He came down to the earth and spoke to the individuals, and He has even done this since. Let the manner be what it may, He manifests Himself to faith, by producing confidence. For example, when Jesus manifested Himself to Paul on the road to Damascus, He did so by a visible glory, and by acting on the conscience and drawing the heart. Paul says himself (1 Cor. ix.), "Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord ?"

In Acts vii. 2, you will find these words of Stephen : "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran."

God manifests Himself to the conscience : it sees itself in the presence of God ; it feels that God is there ; it perceives beforehand a judgment which is impending, and, whatever be the lack of outward manifestation, man must find himself before God, must follow Him, whereas before this he did his own will. So it happened to Saul of Tarsus : Saul had not troubled himself about God's will ; but as soon as he had heard Christ, he must enlist himself. The effect produced in the heart is expressed in these words : "What wilt Thou have me to do ?" The communication of life, we know, takes place in the soul. Also, God speaks, even though He should have manifested Himself to the sight, as to Saul. It is His word which makes itself to be heard, even when it is written ; and the written word is in fact of authority, without question, to judge what is said, though it were an apostle who spoke. The Lord Himself refers His disciples to it ("They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them"—Luke xvi. 29), and places it as an instrument above His own words (see John v. 46, 47). I say as an instrument, or, rather, as a rule ; for, whether written or from His own lips, it is from Himself.

This authority of the word is immediate. The Lord may employ Paul, Peter, John, as messen-

gers, but He wills that it be received from Himself. The word of God addressed to man, must be received on this sole authority, that it is God who has spoken it : if he does not know how to discern the voice of God and to submit to it without the authority of man, it is not faith in God ; the man does not receive it because it is from God. In the natural state, the heart does not hear His voice. The principle of Abram is, that he believed God, and God puts him to this trial. There is hard work in the heart of man before the authority of God Himself is established in it,

I daily perceive more and more the importance of this. In an exercised soul which has felt that God has manifested Himself to it, which has known its responsibility, whose affection is in activity, the word has often but little authority ; such a soul may have received a strong impression ; God has manifested Himself, the conscience is awakened ; but it does not receive what God has said in that quiet faith which, having owned that God has spoken, is arrested by His word, confides to it unhesitatingly, unquestioningly, and is found in peace.

We must not despise the first of these positions, neither must we abide in it. If I belong to God, I can no longer do my own will, and this is what God says to Abram : "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred" This is neither pleasant nor easy ; but hearken to what Jesus says : "Whosoever forsaketh not all that he hath,

cannot be my disciple." There is the grand principle. God will have a people that absolutely belongs to Him. Christ gave not Himself by halves ; circumstances may vary, but the principle is ever the same. Whatsoever be the friends, the things which retain us, we must nevertheless come to this : "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred." This order is terrible to the flesh ; it is not that we must hate our father and our mother as the flesh hates ; but it is the chain that is in one's self that must be broken ; it is from within the heart that we are detained ; it is also from that we would escape, it is with *self* that we must break. But God, who knows the heart, makes it deny itself, by making it break the ties with the world, which are outside it. "Get thee out of thy country," says He. He goes further : "And from thy kindred, and from thy father's house." Because God had manifested Himself to Abram he must belong to Him entirely.

Abram does it, but not completely. He did not at first, all he ought to have done. He truly left his country and his kindred generally, but not his father's house ; he goes no further than Haran, and stays there. He desires not, like many, to take all with him ; he gives up a great deal ; but that is useless : Terah cannot enter into Canaan. He was not called. In chapter xi. verse 31, "Terah took his son Abram, and Lot his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, Abram's wife, and they went forth with them from

Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan ; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there." We see by this verse that Terah took Abram, who did not quit his father's house, and could not make much way. The thing is evident in the eleventh chapter of Genesis ; and Stephen speaks of it in these words (Acts vii. 2-4) : "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, etc., and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land wherein ye now dwell." God had said to him, "Get thee out of thy father's house," but he leaves it not. Just so it happens to a heart that has not understood that it must give itself wholly to God. It gives up a great deal for duty, it receives nothing. When the question is of following God, it keeps something for itself. Nevertheless, grace acted towards Abram, but thus it is that one often plunges one's self into doubt.

The Lord had said, Get out, and come into the country that I will shew thee. Abram, not having done so, might have said, What will become of me ? I have not left my father's house, what will befall me ? I have only followed half-way the command of the Lord ; I have not done all that He said to me ; my heart not being in it, I have here neither the word nor the promises ; I am about to perish in Charran. But such was not God's thought. Now in chapter xii. 4, it is said, "So Abram departed, as the Lord had said to

him." All goes well, Lot goes with him ; Abram was seventy-five years old. They came not to Haran to live there, but into the land of Canaan they came ; that is to say, as to us, as soon as we will do God's will, all goes well, God takes care of everything. Before this Abram had stayed at Haran, and there was no blessing. It is only when his father Terah is dead that he goes forth and comes into Canaan. This is what we see in the first four verses of chapter xii. We may remark how God presents Himself to Abram. He does not reproach him. The obstacles are removed, he is put in the way of faith.

In the seventh verse, God appears to Abram ; it is a fresh manifestation. He says to him, "unto thy seed will I give this land." He renews the promises in a more definite way ; He had already brought him to live and walk in dependence on Himself ; now He shews him the hand and renews to him the promises, explaining to him the accomplishment of them : He will give the land to his posterity. In our case, it is heaven. God wills that we also should be blessed, walking in dependence on Him.

In the second verse, God had said to him : I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee." Verse 3 : "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee ; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." God will be glorified, and He will bless ; two precious things, for He glorifies Himself in blessing. He en-

courages Abram in the pathway of faith, by identifying Himself with the blessing. He engages him to trust in Him ; "those who bless thee shall be blessed."

Thus Balaam cannot curse ; and in Jesus we are blessed. God Himself conducts us, and identifies us with the blessing of Christ. The church may be tried, may encounter difficulties ; but the blessing resulting from them is assured in Christ.

God then brings Abram into Canaan ; what is there for him there ? Nothing as yet to be possessed. The Canaanites are there—enemies all around in this land of promise. He has only his faith for his pains—not a place whereon to set his foot as properly belonging to him. Stephen tells us so in Acts vii. 5 : "And He gave him none inheritance, no, not so much as to set his foot on ; yet He promised that He would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child."

This also happens to the church ; in the land of promise we find the wicked spirits, and we are *pilgrims* here below. Abram also was a stranger and a pilgrim. He had not where to set his foot. It is a little hard to the flesh to have forsaken all and to have found nothing. But he cannot yet possess the country. This happens to us as well as to the Jewish people : they go up into the wilderness, and find but a *wilderness*. Man must sacrifice all he loves, and rise to the height of the

thoughts of God. But thus it is that the call and the deliverance make us strangers even in the very land of promise, until the execution of judgment be come.

We read in Heb. xi. 8 : " By faith, Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed ; and he went out, *not knowing whither he went.*" There is that which characterises this faith. " By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country ; for he looked for the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." In drawing him by the path of faith and renunciation in the land of promise, God gives him nothing ; but He sets him on a position elevated enough to see the city which hath foundations.

God draws us also into the wilderness ; and, when we are there, He gives us nothing, and, if we ask for anything, He answers : " It is not *good* enough." The disciples would have liked to remain and for Jesus to remain ; but Jesus tells them, It is good enough for your heart, but not enough for Mine ; I would not that you should remain where ye are ; but where I am, there ye shall be also. He desires a complete felicity for His own. He tells them, before leaving them, " I go to prepare a place for you." For where I am, I desire that there ye may be also.

When we are come out of this world and of that which keeps back our heart, then He can re-

ceive us. When Abram was thus separated from his earthly ties God shewed him the city which hath foundations. The great principle we find here is, that these Canaanites (to us the wicked spirits, see Eph. vi. 12) not being yet driven out, we are strangers in the land ; but on the other hand, Abram being in the land, the Lord appears to him.

I have wished you to observe that God begins by making the conscience act ; afterwards He gives the enjoyment of Himself and of converse with Him after we have set out. There is this difference. The God of glory appeared indeed to Abram in Ur. Thus perhaps He reveals Himself to our souls, to attract them. But after that, He will have the conscience reached, and completely separates us from all that nature would retain, or by which nature would retain us, and He will have us walk as called of God and belonging to Him that the heart may thus peaceably enjoy Him, in communion with Him, when we have gone out.

God can speak to Abram, not now to make him set out, but that he may enjoy Him and converse with Him ; and further, to communicate to him all His thoughts as to the fulfilment of the promises. God will bless. This is his position : he has walked with God, but as yet possesses nothing of the inheritance in the place to which God has led him. The enemies are there. But the Lord appears to faithful Abram. In the enjoyment there of this communion and hope, Abram,

builds an altar to Him, who thus appeared to him.

God introduces us into the position of promises, in order that we should worship Him, and He makes us understand distinctly how He will accomplish His promises. When Christ shall appear, then we shall also appear with Him in glory. We shall have all things in Him.

The portion of God's child is communion, intelligence of the counsels of God for the enjoyment of what God will accomplish. Thou shalt be a stranger, but I will accomplish My promises in giving the land to thy posterity. "And Abram builded an altar to God, who had appeared to him." His first manifestation made him walk; this makes him worship in the joy of communion in the land of promise whereinto faith introduced him, and in the intelligence of the promises that relate to it. We see God by faith, and how, by and by, He will fulfil the promise. He makes us see Jesus, true "*Seed*" and "*Heir*" of all things, and gives us the enjoyment of it in our souls.

Abram, stranger-like, goes here and there. He pitches his tent and builds an altar. It is all he has in the land. Happy and quiet he rests in the promise of God. And this also is what we ourselves have to do. Perhaps it will happen to us, as to Abram, to buy a *sepulchre* (chap. xxiii), and that is all.

The Lord give to us a like position; that is to say, a quiet faith like his who left all. God can-

not be satisfied with a half obedience, but, having walked in what God says, we may rest in His love, and have our altar until He come in whom are all the promises; even JESUS, in whom all the promises of God are YEA and AMEN, to the glory of God by us.

"CONCERNING THE COLLECTION FOR THE SAINTS . . . UPON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK."

I COR. XVI. 1, 2.

In the above Scripture we get a connection with the Lord's day which is worthy of notice. The apostle says, "Concerning the collection for the saints, as I gave order to the assemblies of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him [or at home] in store whatsoever he may be prospered in, that there be not collections then when I come." Here is a duty of love associated with the first day of the week. If it were a mere question of the saints remembering their poor brethren, there seems no reason why the collections might not have been from time to time as need was made known. Nor is it certainly a bare question of laying by at home, though it is well known that some learned commentators declare this to be the meaning of "by him" (*par' heautou*). As if it were some great matter, they tell us that "laying by him," as a phrase taken by itself, means nothing more.

Supposing this to be certain, and I am not going to dispute with them about it, is this all? Did the apostle mean nothing more? It does seem to me that the truth greatly supplements what they say; for one may justly ask the question, Why, if so, stress should be laid on the first day of the week? Why not on any other day? Why was the collection (for this it was) on that day above all others? Beyond a doubt it is good and wholesome for a Christian to lay by at home for the need of others. It is well that he should consider gravely, and not on mere impulse or when he is on the spot, what he is going to give in the Lord's name. It is evident that the Lord meant each believer to challenge his heart in view of any prosperity he may have had in the course of the week. But that each was to accumulate a separate store in his own house from week to week appears to me the merest assumption, and indeed mistake. The apostle would have it to be a grave matter of inquiry before the Lord, and of course therefore rather a question raised at home than, as is common in modern times, an emulous act when people flock together, or perhaps at haphazard, whether they be duly provided or not, and often under moving appeals to act on their feelings. All these are but poor ways of giving, and by no means answer to the intention of the Spirit of God here for His saints on the first day of the week.

The apostle wished giving to be a grave habit, and one that should be settled, as we have been

prospered, with one's self or at home. He wished to avoid a special collection at the time of his visit, not merely, as it seems to me, because his time could be better employed than in such diaconal work, but because he felt it to be an affair for the Christian conscience and heart, not for influence of his own, still less for emulation, nor yet the gusts of some passing impulse. What a contrast is the getting a popular man to come and preach a moving sermon in order to work upon people's feelings ! Far different is the principle laid down here. He urges on the saints to consider gravely before the Lord, and each by himself to lay by at home, not to act on impulse, but conscientiously, according as he had been that week prospered.

Accordingly the saints at Corinth, as elsewhere, are called in the name of the Lord to give on the first day of the week. "Let every one of you," i. e., each of them. Is this always remembered ? It is not the rich alone. Is there not sometimes the thought that they are to give that can out of their abundance ? Is Christ in this thought, or self ? Not a word about wealth is breathed here, but "as he may have been prospered." The poor man may be prospered just as really in proportion as the rich ; perhaps it might be even more sensibly. Many a rich man has nothing in particular different one week from another, but the poor man may often have ; and the Lord thinks about the poor. The Spirit of God takes care to give him

who has been ever so little prospered during the week a living and personal interest in everything that is connected with the name and saints of the Lord. Certainly it is not meant that those who are always in prosperity, and may not have any special abundance, should think themselves absolved from their duty of gravely considering with a view to giving. God forbid! Thus did the Lord ordain, that the poorest might not conceive himself left out, that the simplest might know that he has an integral interest in all that concerns the glory of God. There is, too, the gracious wisdom that connects all with Christ and His resurrection, and thus with the joy and the deliverance and the eternal blessing into which we are brought, and know we are brought, and which we are intended to manifest in gathering together to His name, breaking bread in the remembrance of Him. What an association for our little contribution to the poor saints!

This then is the meaning of the first day of the week as here introduced, showing plainly that, as in the verse stated, there is a laying-up by each at home, so on the first day of the week they contributed when they came together; for we know, from Acts xx. 7, that they met on that day to break bread. Be it so, then, that the laying-up was at home, the day on which it was done implies that whatever might be thus separated to the need of the saints was not to be kept there. As they came together then, so they had fellowship in casting

their offerings into the common treasury of the church in the name of the Lord. This appears to me the point here in connecting all together. Where would be the force of pressing the collection for the saints on the first day of the week, if it went no farther than each laying by at home? Why might it not be as well done on any other day? We can see its importance if they contributed on that day what each laid by at home, when they came together to break bread. Thus was communion best maintained among those that belonged to Christ; especially as it was also for the express purpose of avoiding collections when the apostle came. He would not mix it up with personal feeling. He desired not that money should be drawn out because *Paul* was there. He would have souls exercised in love and liberty but withal conscientious care, and the motive Christ for the needy that are His. And He is always there; and this especially, let me repeat, on the first day of the week. No doubt withal there is liberty for every holy service in prayer, preaching, and visiting; and we may well thank God for all. But these are not confined to the Lord's day, having their place as God gives opportunity on any if not on every day; whereas the breaking of bread is the standing institution of the church's communion; and the Lord's day is the standing day for it, though it might be every day. The Lord's supper and the Lord's day answer to each other, being mutual complements in the witness

of Christianity ; and as the one is especially the expression of Christ's death, so is the other especially of His resurrection.

Thus too is all duly kept in its place and tone. For we are not meant to come together in sadness, in a spirit of mourning, or with garments of heaviness. There is set forth then the most affecting sign of our Saviour's humiliation in unfathomable love, the most solemn witness of our sin and shame and ruin. How overwhelming the evidence in His death that we were sinners, and what sinners we ! But no less is it a demonstration of our blessedness, through His infinite work, as believers. God is not only satisfied as to sin and our sins, but glorified, and ourselves by grace washed, sanctified, justified, in the name of our Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. And our Lord, though on high, deigns to be with us till He come again and take us to be with Him.

Meanwhile the Lord's day, where the grace and truth expressed in it is understood, and the Lord's supper, observed as it should be in its original integrity as the central institution for the gathered worshippers in Spirit and in truth, have their own appointed and appropriate aim—the best means according to God's wisdom—for the testimony and enjoyment of Christian privilege here below in His assembly to His glory. May our part, if indeed we are Christ's, be holily and happily in it all evermore. Amen.