

GOD'S REST.

HEBREWS iv.

It is a blessed thing, though in one sense a terrible one (terrible ever to the flesh), to know that we "have to do" with God. (v. 13.) Yet there is nothing that we so easily forget, or so often lose sight of. The natural tendency of our hearts is to get out of, and then (as the disobedient child that of the parent whose eye he fears to meet) to dislike and dread God's presence. Always, every moment, under every circumstance, it is God with whom we "have to do."

People who are ever looking at second causes are led into practical infidelity; and so is it in measure with the saint of God. If he be resting in circumstances, he loses the sense of "having to do" with God.

But whether it be for blessing or for profit to the conscience, we have alike "to do" with God.

Are we seeking happiness, where shall we find it? where shall we get blessing that nothing can touch or hinder, that nothing can separate from, except in God? He is not only the source of our blessing, but the blessing itself. There are indeed many outward blessings given to His children by the way, and these even the unconverted may have; but the strength, the comfort, the joy of the Christian is this—he "has to do" with God. God is the source and centre of his blessing.

When once we come really to know God, we know Him as love. Then, knowing that everything comes to us from Him, though we be in a desert—no matter where or what the circumstances—we interpret all by His love. I may be called on to pass through pain, and sorrow, and trial, as part of His discipline; but everything that comes from God, comes from a source and spring in which I have confidence. I look through the circumstances to Him, and nothing can separate me from His love.

Where God is but little known, and where there is not therefore confidence in His love, there will be repining at circumstances, and murmuring, and rebellion. In such a case the sense of "having to do" with God will cause more fear than gladness. St. John says, "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."

Is it not quite true that we often stop, practically, at the circumstances in which we find ourselves placed, and consider only our own feelings and judgment about them? Now this is a proof that our souls are not living in the fulness of communion with God. That with which we should be occupied is not the circumstances, but what God intends by them.

Conscience must be in exercise as well; for it is equally true that in our consciences we "have to do" with God. This is very profitable, though not so pleasant. "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."

(v. 13.) And after all, dear brethren, is it not a blessed thing to know that nothing can escape either the hand or the eye of God? What a comfort that He discerns every thought of our hearts that would hinder blessing, or dim communion with Himself! There may be some secret evil (one of the ten thousand things that, if indulged, would hinder the enjoyment of God) working in my heart, and yet I remain unconscious of it. Well, God sends some circumstance that discovers to me the evil, in order that it may be put away. Is not this a blessing? The circumstance does not create the evil which it excites; it only acts upon what it finds to be in my heart, and makes it manifest. Since I "have to do" with God, I am made to understand evil in myself which I had never understood before, or known to be there. God discovers the "thoughts and intents of the heart;" He could not rest whilst leaving anything there that would hinder our love and confidence, our comfort and peace in Himself. The evil being discovered, circumstances are all forgotten—God's end alone is seen.

The heart of man naturally seeks rest, and seeks it here. Now there is no rest to be found here for the saint; but it is written, "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." (v. 9.) To know this is both full of blessing and full of sorrow—sorrow to the flesh because, as it is always seeking its rest here, it has always to be disappointed; blessing to the spirit because the spirit, being born

of God, can only rest in God's own rest, as it is said, "If they shall enter into my rest." (vv. 3, 5.)

God cannot rest in the corruption of sin. He can only rest in that which is perfectly holy. And because He who thus rests is love and loves us, He makes us understand that He will bring us into His own rest, into His own delight.

Now let the soul once know what this rest of God is, let the heart once be set upon it, there will be joy unspeakable in understanding that God's love can rest in nothing short of bringing us into His own delight. There will then also be the full, settled consciousness that we cannot find rest elsewhere. There are indeed joys by the way, but the moment we rest in them they become, as the quails to Israel, (Num. xi.), poison.

Whenever the soul loses practically the knowledge that its rest is in God's rest, the moment the eye is off that which "remaineth," we begin to seek a rest here, and consequently get uneasy, restless, and dissatisfied. Every time we find something on which we attempt to settle, that very thing proves but a new source of trouble and conflict to us, a new source of exercise and weariness of heart. God loves us too well to let us rest here.

Are you content, dear brother, to have or seek your rest nowhere, save in God's rest?

What is the secret of the unhappiness and restlessness of many a saint? A hankering after rest here. God is therefore obliged to discipline and exercise that soul; to allow, it may be, some cir-

cumstance to detect the real state of the heart by touching that about which the will is concerned. Circumstances would not trouble if they did not find something in us contrary to God; they would rustle by as the wind. God deals with that in us which hinders communion, and prevents our seeking rest in Him alone. His discipline is the continual and unwearied exercise of love, which rests not now, in order that we may enter into His rest. If He destroy our rest here, if He turn our meat into poison, it is only that He may bring us into His own rest, that we may have that which satisfies His desires, not ours. "He will rest in His love."

"For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his works, as God did from His own."* (v. 10.) This is not a question about justification or rest of conscience as to judgment: that is all settled. "As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous." (Rom. v. 19.) There we rest, and there God rests. Again, "By one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." (Heb. x. 14.) The believer has already and altogether come to rest on Christ's work as to that. He has peace through the blood of Christ.

The point is one which concerns those who are justified, whom God has brought into His family: God is training such, and bringing them up into full enjoyment of His own blessedness and rest. If

[Such is the true force.—Ed.]

I, being a parent, enjoy anything, it is impossible (if I really love my child) not to wish him to enjoy it with me. And if we, who are evil, do this, how much more our heavenly Father! What God desires for us, as we have seen (and He delights to do it), is to bring us into the enjoyment of all that which He Himself enjoys. He has made us partakers of the divine nature that we may enjoy it. The Hebrews were continually liable to sink into the seeking a rest here; in short, not to live a life of faith. The great point on which the apostle insists is that God has not His rest here—that while there was that which hindered the comfort of His love He could not rest. And this is proved by a variety of testimonies. (See vv. 3-8.)

As to their own state, though He says, "We which have believed do enter into rest" (v. 3.), it was not needful to prove to them, any more than it would be to ourselves, that they were not in the rest. We read of their enduring a great fight of afflictions, of their being made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions, and of their becoming companions of them that were so used. They were still in circumstances in which it could be said to them, "Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise." The exhortations—"Let us therefore fear" (v. 1); "Let us labour therefore" (v. 11)—are plainly inconsistent with a state of rest.

It may seem strange to have pressed upon us at one moment unqualified assurance in the love and

faithfulness of God, and at the next to be addressed thus, "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." (v. 1.) But God never ceases to warn in order that there may be the exercise of responsibility towards Himself, while we are on our way to the rest. Were justification spoken of, had that been the point in question, it would have been said, "Do not fear, and do not labour; for Christ has done all for you." "To him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt."

This "fear" and this "labour" begin when that question is settled, and settled for ever. The blessed principle brought out is, that they are consequences of our "having to do" with God. Because we have full confidence in the love of God, and because we value the rest of God, we fear everything; not only the temptations and snares that are in the way, but every working of the flesh and the like that would come in between us and God. Blessing is secured at the end, "reserved," as it is said, "in heaven" for us; but conscience reasons thus, "How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" It is "through faith" that we are "kept by the power of God" "unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." Faith realizes the presence of God. Therefore there is this holy fear: we pass the time of our sojourning here in fear.

St. Paul, in writing to the Philippians, says, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehend-

ed: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus;" and again, "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." (Chapter iii.) Was it that he did not see the certainty of the end? No, but because he saw the way as well as the end, and all the difficulties of the way. Paul greatly feared whatever might distract him in his course, or lead him for a moment in the downward path (the flesh, whenever indulged, does this); and then he adds, "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things."

Where there is this holy fear, the promise made being that of God's rest, we know the end of the path; but we "labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief." (v. 11) Grace will prevent such a result; but it is that to which the flesh—the working of man's will—must bring the unrenewed professor.

There is no such evidence of a true-hearted saint as this holy fear. An unconverted man has, properly speaking, no dread of Satan; but, if not quite hardened, he has great dread of God. The saint of

God has no fear (that is, dread) of God, whilst he has great fear of Satan. Jesus, speaking of His sheep (John x.), says, "A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers." (v. 5.) There is in them the distrust of everything but the known voice of their own shepherd. (v. 27.) Above all they fear the wolf, because conscious of their weakness. If any were to say, "The end is sure, never mind the means," the sheep would know that that was no true shepherd's voice. Everything that would dim our eye as to the glory, or prevent its being single unto God, however precious or valuable it may seem, has to be watched against, for its tendency is to hurry us on in the downward road. Where the eye is single, the whole body is full of light; and therefore every evil is detected, every hindrance to the affections being fixed simply and undividedly on God.

It is not then from any uncertainty about God's love, but from the certainty of being in the desert, that we are to "fear" and to "labour." The saint knows that this is a "dry and thirsty land, where no water is:" bring him into God's presence, and his soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness—it is made to drink of the river of His pleasures. Redemption from Egypt brings into the desert. If we have not God there, we have nothing. There is nothing in this wide world, or of it, which can refresh the new man, any more than there is in heaven to satisfy the old. Should we lose sight of

God's eye and hand, we have nothing but our own folly and the desert sands around us. One may say to a saint, "The rest is pleasant at the end." "Ah!" he replies, "it is not enough for me to know that by-and-by I shall be with God, I have rest in God now, I enjoy God's presence now, I cannot be satisfied without having God as a present portion, and I exceedingly dread anything that would come in between me and God."

While the eye is fixed on God, and the soul is resting on Him, the ways, and not the end only, are in our hearts, and become to us channels of communion with Him.

Everything, dear friends, proves to us that our rest is not here. Fearing, because I am in the desert with a heart prone to depart from God, is not rest. Having to conflict with Satan is not rest. Labour is not rest. "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God."

Then there is also the diligence and activity of the new man in its own portion. It is of real importance for our joy that we should be diligent in our own portion. The church needs to know that it has its own proper portion—its own peculiar sphere of labour. "Much food is in the tillage of the poor; but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment." When we are poor in spirit, and are labouring to enter into God's rest, there is a reality found to be in the riches which are in Christ Jesus that many a saint has no conception of. Have we not a sphere in which our life has its portion? The

men of this world have their own pursuits; they have that which occupies and engages them, and has the life of God in us no resources to strengthen it—no riches in Christ to feed on? Yes, "We have an altar whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle." We have a sphere in which the divine life communicated to us can exercise its own faculties, and find its own resources. The church has its own joys, its own interests, its own treasures, its own sphere of life, its own field for the affections, its own topics—its own world, in short, in which there is fruit unto God. Have you, dear reader, consciously this portion; and is it the delight of your soul to search out therein the riches of Christ? the goodness that is in God? All that I have yet got of Christ's riches is only in order that I may become the more enriched, a means by which to attain those riches which are unsearchable.

This holy labour, in searching out the riches that are in Christ, keeps us in the lively sense of what is ours in Him, and therefore makes all else worthless. Having the soul fixed on Christ will enable us to resist temptation and sin. It is not so much by thinking of the object that may be a temptation to us that we shall get strength; it is not in letting our minds dwell on it, even though it be with the effort to resist it. Our privilege is to be occupied with Christ, and thus obtain the victory. Our liberty is to be no longer, and never, subject to sin—a liberty to serve God without hindrance of the

flesh. I do not want liberty to the flesh, but liberty to the new man, and that is to do my Father's will. If anything could have taken away the liberty of the Lord Jesus when on earth (which, of course, was impossible), it would have been this—His being prevented doing the will of His Father.

It may not, perhaps, sound like privilege to talk of "fear" and "labour," but it really is so. And because we fail so much in these things, it is also a blessed privilege to know that God searches the heart and deals with the conscience, that "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."

If we do not judge ourselves, God will judge us. But "when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world."

Is it not a comfort to the soul that really loves holiness, to know that God will come and sweep the house, lest there should be a single thing left there to offend His eye, or to hinder us from walking in the light in which He dwells? Grace emboldens the saint to say, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." What amazing confidence! And God does search us, and that by the light of the Word. He shows us the evil by the Word. This is the use the Spirit makes of the Word: "For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the

dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (v. 12.) We are brought into God's presence; we have, as it were, God speaking to us. He searches my heart even in the sweetest testimonies of His grace; and then, having discovered to me the evil, does He speak about it in judgment, as that which is imputed to me as sin? No; He says, "Here is something not in accordance with my love, something that does not satisfy my love."

If we have neglected to judge ourselves by God's word, there may be something more needful in the way of discipline; but still it is our comfort and consolation that we "have to do" with God. Perhaps, for instance, we have been seeking rest here, and have at last well-nigh settled down, and found a home in the wilderness. Then God begins to work in uprooting us again; unless indeed He sees it needful to leave us to ourselves for awhile, in order that, by stumbling, our consciences may be awakened.

If there are circumstances that try and perplex our hearts, let us just say, It is God with whom I "have to do," and what is He about with me? The moment the heart is brought into the recognition of God's presence all is done—it submits. The soul finds itself in communion with Him about the circumstances. All is peace.

It is not rest to be searched and tried. Rest, blessed be God, is not to be our portion here. His

holiness will not let us rest where there is sin : His love will not let us rest where there is sorrow. There "remaineth a rest" for us, His own rest—God's rest. There will be neither sin, nor trouble, nor sorrow in God's rest. There will be Himself there. And we shall rest in Him.

If we did but know a little more of the comfort and joy of drinking into the fulness of God's love, we should feel present circumstances to be as nothing. Nay, if we entered a little more into His purpose towards us, we should say, "Let Him deal with us, let Him chasten us, let Him uproot us as He will, so that we have but full fellowship with His love."

Oh, let us not be satisfied with small portions of blessing—low measure, low enjoyments! Let us press forward ; let our eyes look right onward ; let us seek, through the power of the Spirit, after the realization of all that is ours in Christ.

THE MARROW OF PEACE IS TO REST ON WHAT GOD SAYS TO ME.

"Why is it that the people of God are not in the full enjoyment of the Gospel? Many whom one recognises as fully the Lord's, have but little joy in the Holy Ghost. The reason often is that they have not got a clear view of the Gospel ; and in others, where it has been clearly seen, it is not sustained as it should be for their comfort and the glory of the Lord Jesus.

"If I fail ^{as} much as Peter, or more than any other, the truth is that Christ is still sitting at the right hand of God *for me*—all my inconsistencies cannot change that truth of God. They had heard 'from the beginning' that 'Jesus is the Christ.' He says 'Let that, therefore, abide in you which ye have heard from the beginning. If that, therefore, which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son and in the Father.' This is the marrow of peace when the soul is tried—God's certificate to the soul that the value of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ belongs to it individually. People say: It is mine, because I have had such a deep experience; I feel so and so. But God has not said that. He has said that there is the testimony of His Christ, and that if that dwell in me, I shall continue in the Son and in the Father.

"You have lost peace. Why? Because, doubtless you have forged a link of your own, and not had that of God's invention; so that, directly your joy or experience is gone, you are miserable. *Keep fast hold of the testimony of God about His Christ.* A person keeping hold of this, cannot have a single bit of rest apart from the Person of the Lord Jesus and God's testimony about Him. There is nothing more gracious than God not allowing peace apart from the way in which He has given it, for nothing else has sanctifying power. Though only fit for the Anti-Christ, God has taken me up and connected me with His Christ."

EXTRACTS FROM A LETTER.

It is pleasant to be in the Lord's paths, though *the cross* be found in them, only we must *walk close with Him*, or else the very *goodness* of them *reproaches us!*

I am the servant of the *Lord's will* and He will do His work, that I am assured of. May the Lord only enable me to finish the course He has appointed to me, in peace and earnestness. Here I have naught else to do, that I feel more than ever, and desire nothing else.

I trust the beloved brethren are looking for Christ's coming. Not that I am moved by events; strange to say all that is passing in Europe, though evidently leading on to it, as to *this world*, rather puts it off for me, as showing a progress of arrangements which may take time for our being caught up to meet Him, our own hope. I have *no time* at all; we "wait for God's Son from heaven." I believe that where we walk in the simplicity that is in Christ it is a very happy time, we enjoy the Lord, Himself, and His coming in hope, in an especial way as to opposition and shame. If it be for Christ's sake, happy are ye. If we are in the events, of course we suffer one and hardly enjoy the other; but one hears little of them, walking with the Lord. Only they that will *live godly* in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But one ought to feel much, and in all love, for the *whole* church. They are dear to Christ, washed in His precious blood, and dwelt in by the Spirit. If *we* want to comprehend, it must be "with all saints," for *they* are the dearest to His heart of all the counsels of God. The Lord give us diligence of heart *with Christ*, that is the great thing, and He, Himself, becomes infinitely precious to us with the sweet consciousness that we shall see Him face to face, and be with Him for ever. May He enable us to glorify Him here. My kindest love to—and all the beloved ones. It would refresh my heart to see them all again.

See how Christ has given us the record of *our place through redemption*, in the end of Matt. iii., and then taken up *our conflict* in chap. iv.

Your affectionate brother in Christ.

"LO! I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS."

MATT. xxviii. 20.

We come, we go, the Lord be with you say,
There is but *One* who can both go and stay;
His presence frees our hearts from every dread,
"Lo! I am with you *always*," He hath said,

Then not with me alone, nor with you,
But with us both, for thus His word comes true;
Let us take comfort then, what room for fear,
What harm can come to us if He be near.

You on your journey, go with Him for guide,
I stay at home and He is at my side;
"Lo! I am with you" are His words of cheer,
Our Lord, our Saviour, and our Master dear.