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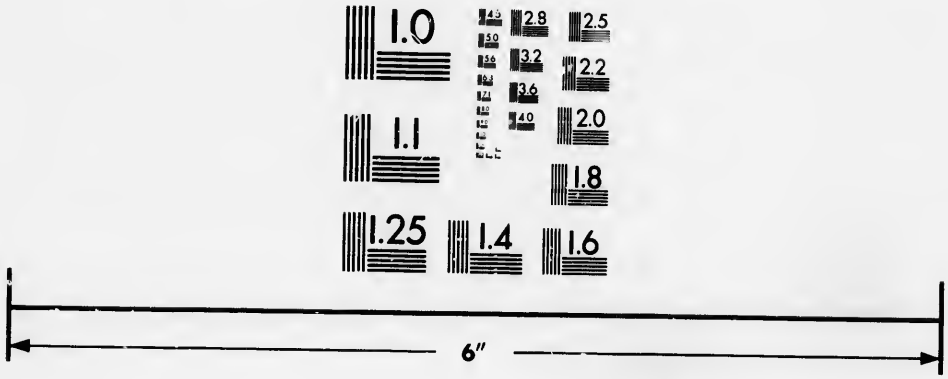

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SIX LECTURES

ON THE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES,

DELIVERED IN THE

PARISH CHURCH OF ST. PAUL,

HALIFAX, NOVA-SCOTIA,

DURING THE SEASON OF LENT,

A. D. 1836.

BY

WILLIAM COGSWELL, M. A.

CURATE.

HALIFAX,

PRINTED BY J. S. CUNNABELL, ARGYLE-STREET.

1836.

To the Parishioners of St. Paul's.

Dearly Beloved in the Lord,

In complying with the wish, expressed by several among you, that I should commit these Lectures to the press, I have had many feelings to struggle with. The fear, lest the love of your approbation should weigh more with my heart than the desire of promoting the glory of God, on the one hand, and on the other, the fear lest the vanity of appearing in print should be attributed to me as my motive, had nearly decided me against publishing them. But I could not feel justified, when committing the matter in prayer to God, in refusing on this account to commit them to the press, when a good hope was set before me of being useful, in the smallest degree, to any one soul. In this hope, Brethren, I cast my bread upon the waters, and pray that the Lord may cause the seed sown to take root, and bring forth fruit to your present edification, and your everlasting blessedness. I remain, Brethren,

Your servant for Christ's sake,

WILLIAM COGSWELL.

Halifax, April 11th, 1836.

PREFACE.

It can hardly be necessary to inform any, into whose hands these Lectures may fall, that they make no pretensions to any merit as a composition, and aim at nothing but a simple statement of Gospel truths, and exhortation to Gospel conduct. They were undertaken singly with a desire of making the usual week-day services, appointed by the Church for the Season of Lent, more interesting and more profitable. They were composed in the midst of ordinary parish duties, and

were an addition to the preparation necessary to be made for the similar exercises of the Lord's day. Little time could therefore be found for any other study, than that of the word of God, in preparing them.

It has also been the Author's desire to make these Lectures merely the vehicles of practical instruction, without bringing forward doctrinal discussions, or enlarging upon the peculiarities of the Church of England. The second Lecture is the only one which can be considered at all to contradict this view; but even this, he hopes, will be found to contain nothing which can be offensive to any one who dissents from that Church, into whose hands it may fall, while it affords him an opportunity of expressing on his own behalf, and urging upon others, that conscientious and hearty attachment to our Zion, which she merits at the hands of all her children.

It is the Author's wish, and (should the grace of God permit, and his Superiors in the Ministry of the Gospel sanction), his intention, to continue these Lectures in future years, and—should the present undertaking warrant it—to give them to the public as they are delivered. Thus in the course of a few years, it is hoped, by the blessing of God, an entire series of practical Lectures, upon that interesting portion of the word of God which is here entered upon, will be completed.

It only remains to state, that should the sale of this Work be such as to produce a surplus above the expense of publication, that surplus shall be devoted towards the establishment or support of a House of Industry in this Town.

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LECTURES

ON THE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

LECTURE I.

ACTS, I. 1.—11.

THE FORMER TREATISE HAVE I MADE, O THEOPHILUS, OF ALL THAT JESUS BEGAN BOTH TO DO AND TEACH, UNTIL THE DAY IN WHICH HE WAS TAKEN UP, AFTER THAT HE THROUGH THE HOLY GHOST HAD GIVEN COMMANDMENTS UNTO THE APOSTLES WHOM HE HAD CHOSEN: TO WHOM ALSO HE SHEWED HIMSELF ALIVE AFTER HIS PASSION BY MANY INFALLIBLE PROOFS, BEING SEEN OF THEM FORTY DAYS, AND SPEAKING OF THE THINGS PERTAINING TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD; AND, BEING ASSEMBLED TOGETHER WITH THEM, COMMANDED THEM THAT THEY SHOULD NOT DEPART FROM JERUSALEM, BUT WAIT FOR THE PROMISE OF

THE FATHER, WHICH, SAITH HE, YE HAVE HEARD OF ME. FOR JOHN TRULY BAPTIZED WITH WATER; BUT YE SHALL BE BAPTIZED WITH THE HOLY GHOST, NOT MANY DAYS HENCE. WHEN THEY THEREFORE WERE COME TOGETHER, THEY ASKED OF HIM, SAYING, LORD, WILT THOU AT THIS TIME RESTORE AGAIN THE KINGDOM TO ISRAEL? AND HE SAID UNTO THEM, IT IS NOT FOR YOU TO KNOW THE TIMES OR THE SEASONS WHICH THE FATHER HATH PUT IN HIS OWN POWER. BUT YE SHALL RECEIVE POWER, AFTER THAT THE HOLY GHOST IS COME UPON YOU: AND YE SHALL BE WITNESSES UNTO ME, BOTH IN JERUSALEM, AND IN ALL JUDÆA, AND IN SAMARIA, AND UNTO THE UTTERMOST PART OF THE EARTH. AND WHEN HE HAD SPOKEN THESE THINGS, WHILE THEY BEHELD, HE WAS TAKEN UP; AND A CLOUD RECEIVED HIM OUT OF THEIR SIGHT. AND WHILE THEY LOOKED STEDFASTLY TOWARD HEAVEN, AS HE WENT UP, BEHOLD, TWO MEN STOOD BY THEM IN WHITE APPAREL; WHICH ALSO SAID, YE MEN OF GALILEE, WHY STAND YE GAZING UP INTO HEAVEN? THIS SAME JESUS, WHICH IS TAKEN UP FROM YOU INTO HEAVEN, SHALL SO COME IN LIKE MANNER AS YE HAVE SEEN HIM GO INTO HEAVEN.

THE return of the solemn season of Lent, which the wisdom of our Church has appointed, for the purpose of preparing our minds, by meditation, by fasting, and by prayer, for the solemnities of that time, at which we shall be called upon to sympathize with the fearful passion, and gaze upon the stupendous agonies of the Son of GOD, has brought us again within these

walls, my brethren, to pay a week-day tribute of prayer and praise to God. While this is the great object of our assembling, an object superior to all others which call us together within this house of God, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to make known our requests unto God,* still it is hoped, that our coming together may be made yet further profitable, by our making some portion of the divine word the subject of meditation, and thus aiming, not only at an increase of faith, but also at some spiritual edification, some instruction in righteousness.

To this end, my brethren, it is my desire, in humble dependance upon the promised presence of the Saviour Jesus, wherever two or three are gathered together in His Name,† and upon the help of that blessed Spirit of the Most High, which

*Phil. iv. 6. †Matt. xviii. 20.

He hath received for His people and is ever ready to impart to them, to present to you, upon the successive Fridays of this season of Lent, a series of meditations upon that portion of Scripture of which my text is the commencement, the record, the only record which has reached us, of the Acts of the Apostles.

The choice of this portion of the Sacred Volume, as the subject of our meditations, may be justified on several grounds, but principally upon this, that the Acts of the Apostles present to us a view of the Christian religion *in its practice.* In the Gospels, we find pictured to us the life and conversation, the sufferings, and death of the blessed Jesus, and we are but too willing to satisfy ourselves, that His example is too high for our attainment, and to be contented with the reflection, that the infirmities of our imperfect nature are such, as to render an exact copy

of the conduct of Jesus impossible for us. We turn to the Epistles, and find in them men, under the influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit, addressing men of like passions with themselves,* and urging on them the unspeakable love of Jesus, as a reason why they should turn from the vanities of the world and the flesh, and serve the living God. But here, also, are we but too apt to lose ourselves in mere speculations upon their doctrines, to explain away the high requirements of their spiritual precepts, or to satisfy ourselves, that they set up a standard, which though they thought it desirable for us to aim at, they never supposed that we could reach. But in the account given us of the Acts of the Apostles, we see precept illustrated by practice; we see, not only how men taught, but how they acted when influenced by the Spirit; we are called upon to consider not

*Acts xiv. 15.

doctrines but examples, and to perceive how bold and uncompromising in the love of the truth, how sincere and earnest in their separation from the world, how distrustful of themselves, how charitable to others, how guileless in prosperity, how zealous in health and vigor, how patient in sufferings, how meek under persecution, how devoted to Christ, and how loving to one another, the true disciples of the Saviour are found to be. Here we see, how men like ourselves acted under the guidance of the Lord's grace, and if we believe His word, which declares Him to be the same yesterday, to day, and for ever,* and trust to the promises which he has sealed with His blood, we cannot doubt that such as they were, such the Lord is now ready to make all that seek Him; that such as the Apostles' conduct, and character, and conversation were, such must those, who

* Heb. xiii. 8.

are the truly converted followers of them, as they were of Christ,* now show, in the midst of the ungodly world, as the fruit of their faith in Jesus, the evidence of their acceptance with God for His sake.

It cannot be my expectation, Brethren, to present to you, in these lectures, any thing that shall be attractive from its novelty, interesting from its originality, or striking from its force. My humble object will be attained, if, by the favour of God, I may but stir up your minds by way of remembrance† of some forgotten or neglected truth, some omitted duty, or some slumbering resolution: if I may but promote your more intimate acquaintance with God's Holy Word; if I may but lead you to a more spiritual perception of the truth as it is in Jesus,‡ and to a cordial admiration, and, thro' grace, a decided imitation of that simplicity and

*1 Cor. xi. 1. †2 Pet. iii. 1. ‡Ephes iv. 12.

godly sincerity,* which was exhibited in the life and conversation, as well as in the preachings, of the Apostles. And Oh! can this be a subject of so little importance to you, as to require novelty to make it interesting to you? Can the plain and simple truths of God's word ever become so valueless in your eyes, as to need the graces of language, or the force of eloquence to make them impressive? Can any thing, more than the remembrance that ye have souls to be saved, be necessary to give an interest to the most common-place exhibition of the Gospel way of salvation, and to engage your attention for the most unadorned inculcation of Gospel motives, of Gospel principles, and of Gospel conduct?

That this aim may be steadily kept in view on my part, that this end may be answered with respect to you, Brethren, let

*2 Cor. i. 12.

us now present our earnest petitions before the mercy seat of the Most High, and pray that His Spirit may give me a mouth and wisdom* in setting before you the truths of His word—that His grace may open your hearts to attend to the things spoken,† and bless and sanctify the word delivered, so that it may be to your profit by being mixed with faith in you that hear it.‡

Let us proceed then, Brethren, to consider at present the first part of the first chapter of the Acts. The commencement of this history, may perhaps be more properly considered as the conclusion of the history of our Lord, as it gives us the most particular account we have of the completion of His wonderful career on earth, when, having finished the work which was given Him to do,‖ and proved

*Luke xxi. 15. † Acts xvi. 14.
‡Heb. iv. 2. ‖John xvii. 4.

the acceptance of the atonement He had made, by appearing alive again after having suffered death, He went up in the sight of His chosen disciples to that glory which He had with His Father before the foundation of the world. Yet its place cannot be considered inappropriate here, at the commencement of a history, which professes to be a history of the doings of the Apostles only, when we perceive that it contains their last attendance upon their Lord while He was on earth; that it shews us, as it were, their place of starting, when they set out without the bodily presence of the Saviour as their master; and that it gives us that parting charge, which accounts for their remaining in the very scene of the persecution and sufferings of their beloved Lord, and the promise which was their comfort in all their after troubles, their support in all their trials, their defence in all their dangers, their strength

in all their labours, their joy and consolation in persecution, in tribulation, and in death. O! when we shall view them in these varied circumstances of trouble, and of trial, of danger, and of death, who will not wish to cling to the same promise, who will not wish to be built upon the same Rock? Brethren! their Rock was Christ; their confidence was in His promise; their strength was in His word!

It may be well, before proceeding further, to remind you, that the book of the Acts of the Apostles was written by St. Luke. Its commencement refers to a former treatise, made by him upon the subject of that wonderful life whose completion he here announces, which treatise is the Gospel that bears his name. This St. Luke is styled by St. Paul, the beloved physician,* whose praise is in the Gospel,† and he records of him, that in

* Col. iv. 14. † 2 Cor. viii 18.

times of peculiar difficulty and trial, while he was awaiting in bonds the finishing of his earthly course, only Luke was with him.* That he was the companion also of many of St. Paul's travels, is evident from the book itself, and he distinctly states at the commencement of his Gospel that he had a perfect understanding of all things from the very first.† The evidence which our examination of his writings itself affords is most satisfactory with regard to the minute accuracy of his statements, as well as the elegance of his style, and the zealous fervor of his spirit.

Both his histories, which may rather be considered as one history in two parts, are addressed to a valued friend, whom he calls the most Excellent Theophilus. This has been supposed by some to be merely an ideal name; but it seems more consistent with the simplicity of the Gos-

* 2 Tim. iv. 11. † Luke i. 3.

pel, to believe that it was the real name of some beloved convert to the Gospel, to whom, it may be, that St. Luke had been himself the instrument employed by God in making known the way of life. Yet what a precious name it is! It signifies "the friend of God." Who would not wish to bear that name? O! much as the friendship of the world is preferred, who, in their serious moments, who, especially in the time of trouble, or the hour of death, would not desire to be truly called the friend of God? But how may we obtain a title to that name? Can we purchase it by our works? Can we earn it for ourselves? Hear the Scripture! "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God."* "Ye are my friends," saith the blessed Jesus, "if ye do whatsoever I command you:" and "this is my

* James ii. 23.

commandment, that ye love one another."* This, then, is the mark of the friends of God, FAITH WORKING BY LOVE.† This it is, which alone availeth in Christ Jesus; this it is, which is the soul's admission to the friendship of God here; this it is, which is the soul's meetness for the enjoyment of the Lord's friendship and His love for ever.

In recapitulating to his friend the matters contained in his former treatise, St. Luke reminds him, that he had informed him of all things that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up. And he dwells particularly here upon the last things which He did and taught, when, after having risen from the dead, he shewed himself alive by many infallible proofs. You will remember, Brethren, that there were no eye-witnesses of His resurrection itself,

*John xv. 12. 14. †Gal. v. 6.

except that Roman guard, who, St. Matthew tells us, were bribed to perjure themselves.* But if it be certain that He was dead, before He was laid in the grave, His being seen alive after that time was a sufficient proof of his resurrection. And that He was really dead before He was taken down from the cross, we have most abundant proof. Not only did the soldiers refrain from breaking His legs, because they saw that He was dead, but one of them with a spear pierced His side.† This appears to have been done from mere wantonness and mischief, yet, while it is a completion of all the prophecies, which related to the Saviour's sufferings, it is also the fullest possible evidence of His being really dead. From the wound made by that spear, there came out blood and water; which shows that the spear pierced the region of the heart, and must have

*Matt. xxviii. 11—15. † John xix. 34.

caused instant death, even if any life had, at the time, been remaining in him. Thus doth the wrath of man turn to the Lord's praise; thus is their fierceness overruled to the glory of His name.* Every measure, which either malice impelled, which mere mischief urged, or which the deepest cunning contrived, only turned out to the more complete and abundant proof of the certainty of that very fact which they wished to prevent. What a lesson this to us, my Brethren, to trust and cling to the Lord's word, and to shelter ourselves in its faithfulness, tho' heaven and earth should seem to conspire against its fulfilment!

But while He shewed himself alive to them after his passion, it was not only for the establishment of the certainty of His resurrection, but He occupied the hours of His last intercourse with them upon earth,

*Ps. lxxvi. 10.

in speaking to them of the things which pertain to the kingdom of God. How many have envied the disciples that blessed privilege, or at least have wished, that they might have been partakers with them of that delightful communion, that sweet, that heavenly converse! How many have deceived themselves into imagining, that if they had had the Apostles advantages, they would have been more sincere, more devoted, more holy men! How many have thought upon those hours of sweet and solemn intercourse, in which the Lord unbosomed himself to his disciples as to His beloved and chosen friends, and have persuaded themselves, that had they but heard that voice which spake as never man spake, had they but been animated by those words which spoke so glowingly of heaven, they would have been contented to forego the world, and all its vanities; they would have been willing to renounce them-

selves and all their selfish interests and selfish pursuits; they would have been faithful to the death, in the remembrance of that heavenly converse, which had so cheered, so comforted, so taught them! But ah! my Brethren, how little know we of our own hearts? If we hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will we be persuaded though one rise from the dead.* If we hear not, if we follow not, if we love not Jesus, speaking to us by His word, and calling on us to look unto Him and be saved, neither would we have been persuaded, though we had stood beside the doubting Thomas, and heard the Saviour's own lips exclaim, Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself, handle me and see† what I have suffered, what I have borne for you! Let us look at the Apostles. While the blessed Jesus was thus conversing with them on the important things relating to His

* Luke xvi. 31. †Luke xxiv. 39.

kingdom, and charging them to await in Jerusalem the promise of the Father, which promise, saith he, ye have heard of me, that, as John baptized with water, so shall ye be baptized with the Holy Ghost, the force of their old prejudices, and of their long cherished notions, prevailed to draw from them the question, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? Surely they had seen enough, to show them that Christ's kingdom was not of this world.* Surely they had heard enough to convince them, that it was expedient for Him to go away† and prepare for them a kingdom which shall never be moved.‡ Yet hear the mildness and yet the firmness of his reproof! It is not for you, He saith, to know the times and the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power; but ye shall be endued with power from on high, after that the Holy

*John xviii. 36. †John xvi. 7. ‡Heb. xii. 28.

Ghost is come upon you, and shall be witnesses unto me.

This same spirit which the Apostles showed, still manifests itself, in all its force, among the professed followers of the same Divine Master. How willing are they now to engage in speculative discussions, to talk, and argue, and reason about some of the mysterious doctrines of the Gospel, and to persuade themselves, because they are interested in these things, that all is right with them. Men will argue about the state of the soul between the time of death and the time of judgment; will discuss the probability of our having the same bodies in a glorious state to which our souls are united in this world; will agitate their minds about the condition of the lost angels; and a thousand such things will draw away their thoughts from the one great question, whether the promise of the Father be yet come upon them,

whether the Spirit of the Most High hath yet converted their souls, and given them power over the defilement of their hearts, over the temptation of the world, over the lusts of the flesh, over the devices of the devil. This, my Brethren, is the great point! It is not for us to know the times and seasons; it is not for us to pry into the secret things of the Most High! But it is for us to wait for the promise of the Father: it is for us to pray and strive for the sanctification of our souls, and the purifying our hearts by faith; it is for us to be witnesses to Jesus by the daily taking up our cross and following Him! Yet alas! this is the point, which we find least interesting; this is the part of religion, which is most dry and tedious. But, O! my Brethren, deceive not yourselves; this is the great point, this is the one thing needful. Leave unprofitable discussions, which gender strife! Leave speculative arguments,

which minister only to the imagination! Leave the pursuit of that unrevealed knowledge, which only puffeth up! and cling to the promise of the Father, and pray for the blessed gift of the Holy Spirit, and meditate, and consider, and examine yourselves, whether your hearts have been changed, and your lives bear testimony for Jesus by their simplicity, their charity, their faith, their patience, their meekness, and their holiness!

It came to pass on one of these occasions, on which our Lord thus conversed with His disciples, that, while they beheld, He was taken up and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they gazed after Him, two of the heavenly host appeared, and said to them, Ye men of Israel, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven. O!

blessed news! The Lord our Saviour hath gone to appear in the presence of God for us,* and to prepare a mansion for His chosen ones.† Heaven hath been opened to admit our fallen, but ransomed, nature in the mediator Jesus: our great HighPriest hath entered into the Holiest,‡ and hath borne with him the body glorified, in which he suffered, agonized, and died for us, to present our natures before God washed in His blood. But He shall come again. And He shall come in like manner as He has gone. Yes! indeed alike, and yet how different! He went into a cloud, while a few eyes that loved Him gazed on Him. He shall come in a cloud, but every eye shall see Him, yea, they also that pierced Him, and all the kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him.‡ He shall come, but to those only will He be welcome, who are look-

*Heb. ix. 24. †John xiv. 2. ‡Rev. i. 7.

ing for and hasting unto His coming,* waiting in the way of His promise and of His commandment. It may be, my Brethren, that he cometh *now*. For He shall come as a thief in the night;† the hour of His approach no man knoweth. Behold! He cometh in the clouds. O! are ye ready to meet Him? Doth the contemplation of His coming cause you to rejoice, to look up and lift up your heads, seeing your redemption draweth nigh?‡ Brethren, that solemn moment cometh. O! will ye not live more in the remembrance of it? The hour approaches! O! will ye not reflect, of what that hour will be the commencement to you?

Children of the world! O! do ye not tremble at the thought? Fly then, O! fly at once to Jesus. Look unto him and be ye saved.

Believers in Jesus! O! do ye not rejoice?

*2 Peter, iii. 12. †1 Thess. v. 2. ‡Luke xxi. 28.

The troubles and trials, the cares and sorrows, the temptations and the storms of life shall cease. God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain. Behold! the tabernacle of God shall be among men; and He shall dwell with you, and ye shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with you, and shall be your God.*

*Rev. xxi. 3. 4.

LECTURE II.

ACTS, I. 12.—26.

THEN RETURNED THEY UNTO JERUSALEM FROM THE MOUNT CALLED OLIVET, WHICH IS FROM JERUSALEM A SABBATH DAY'S JOURNEY. AND WHEN THEY WERE COME IN, THEY WENT UP INTO AN UPPER ROOM, WHERE ABODE BOTH PETER, AND JAMES, AND JOHN, AND ANDREW, PHILIP, AND THOMAS, BARTHOLOMEW, AND MATTHEW, JAMES THE SON OF ALPHÆUS, AND SIMON ZELOTES, AND JUDAS THE BROTHER OF JAMES. THESE ALL CONTINUED WITH ONE ACCORD IN PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION, WITH THE WOMEN, AND MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS, AND WITH HIS BRETHREN. AND IN THOSE DAYS PETER STOOD UP IN THE MIDST OF THE DISCIPLES AND SAID, (THE NUMBER OF THE NAMES TOGETHER, WERE ABOUT AN HUNDRED AND TWENTY,) MEN AND BRETHREN, THIS SCRIPTURE MUST NEEDS HAVE BEEN FULFILLED, WHICH THE HOLY GHOST, BY THE MOUTH OF DAVID, SPAKE BEFORE CONCERNING JUDAS, WHICH WAS GUIDE TO THEM THAT TOOK JESUS. FOR HE WAS NUMBERED WITH US, AND HAD OBTAINED PART OF THIS MINISTRY. NOW THIS MAN PURCHASED A FIELD WITH THE REWARD OF INIQUITY;

AND FALLING HEADLONG, HE BURST ASUNDER IN THE MIDST, AND ALL HIS BOWELS GUSHED OUT. AND IT WAS KNOWN UNTO ALL THE DWELLERS AT JERUSALEM; INSOMUCH AS THAT FIELD IS CALLED IN THEIR PROPER TONGUE, ACELDAMA, THAT IS TO SAY, THE FIELD OF BLOOD. FOR IT IS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF PSALMS, LET HIS HABITATION BE DESOLATE, AND LET NO MAN DWELL THEREIN: AND, HIS BISHOPRIC, LET ANOTHER TAKE. WHEREFORE, OF THESE MEN WHICH HAVE COMPANIED WITH US ALL THE TIME THAT THE LORD JESUS WENT IN AND OUT AMONG US, BEGINNING FROM THE BAPTISM OF JOHN, UNTO THAT SAME DAY THAT HE WAS TAKEN UP FROM US, MUST ONE BE ORDAINED TO BE A WITNESS WITH US OF HIS RESURRECTION. AND THEY APPOINTED TWO, JOSEPH, CALLED BARSABAS, WHO WAS SURNAMED JUSTUS, AND MATTHIAS. AND THEY PRAYED, AND SAID, THOU, LORD, WHICH KNOWEST THE HEARTS OF ALL MEN, SHEW WHETHER OF THESE TWO THOU HAST CHOSEN, THAT HE MAY TAKE PART OF THIS MINISTRY AND APOSTLESHIP, FROM WHICH JUDAS BY TRANSGRESSION FELL, THAT HE MIGHT GO TO HIS OWN PLACE. AND THEY GAVE FORTH THEIR LOTS; AND THE LOT FELL UPON MATTHIAS; AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH THE ELEVEN APOSTLES.

WE left the Apostles upon the Mount of Olives, where they had been parted from their beloved Lord, and, while gazing after Him as He went up to His glory, had received the blessed assurance, that He should come again in like manner as they had seen Him go into heaven. While an end had thus been put to all their hopes

of worldly advancement; while all the expectations they had formed, and, in spite of all the Saviour's teachings, had so pertinaciously cherished, of temporal dominion and earthly aggrandizement, were thus for ever crushed; they were cheered with the brighter hopes of a re-union with their heavenly Master, when He, having received a kingdom for them in a far country, should return, and receive them to Himself, that, where He is, there they should be also.*

The narrative proceeds then by relating to us that they returned to Jerusalem. We cannot but remark the readiness with which the disciples of Jesus acted upon the declaration of His will, as soon as that will was clearly revealed to them. We find them, indeed, sometimes in doubt which way the will of the Lord is leading them; but when, in answer to the faith-

*John xiv. 3.

ful petition for instruction, the way of the Lord is made plain before them, we find no more hesitation, no more lingering, no more doubt. A Saul, brought to the ground by a light from heaven, may ask, Lord! what wilt thou have me to do; a Peter may meditate and think within himself what the vision which he had seen should mean, and hesitate about the instruction which it was designed to convey; the eleven may gaze after their Master into heaven, and wait in doubt and ignorance of their further proceedings: but Arise, and go into Damascus;* or Go with the men, for I have sent them†, is enough to call forth their immediate and active compliance, and to set them at once upon obedience to the Lord's will.

There may be now, in the disciples of Jesus, a hesitation about the leadings of the Lord's will; the dimness of the eye

*Acts ix. 6. †Acts x. 17—20.

of faith may, for a time, cloud the believer's perception of the will of the Lord concerning him; but let some word of the Lord be brought home with light and power to his soul, and he is no true believer in Jesus, who does not instantly and readily comply, and follow without hesitation where his Master leads. Before the plain direction of the Lord's will, prejudices, as strong as those of the Jew against communion with a Gentile, instantly give way: at His command, affections, or pursuits, as dear to our self-love as a right hand or a right eye, will instantly be laid aside.

It is to an obedience like this that the true believer in Christ is called: it is by such an obedience that the simplicity and firmness of his faith is tried. Brethren! ye profess to be believers; to be followers of a crucified, a risen, an ascended Saviour! O! let not your profession be

in name only! The sheep of Christ hear His voice, and follow Him whithersoever he goeth,* even though His footsteps lead them to a cross.

But the disciples returned not unto Jerusalem, till they had paid their adorations to their risen Lord. At the close of his Gospel, St. Luke informs us, that they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.† It was not very long since they had all forsaken Him, and fled,‡ through fear of that persecution of which He was the object. Now behold them, clinging to Him till the last moment of His stay on earth, worshipping Him, when parted from them by a cloud, and returning, even with great joy, to that city, where they had enjoyed so much sweet and heavenly converse with Him, and where, they were assured, such treatment awaited them, as He had himself met

*John x. 27. †Luke xxiv. 52. ‡Matt. xxvi. 56.

with. O! with what courage can the grace of God inspire the faintest heart! O! with what peace and joy can it sustain the most tried and tempted soul! What, but that grace, had made the difference here? What, but that grace can now sustain the soul, can enlighten it to the true [illegible]-tion and spiritual worship of the Saviour, can strengthen it to bear shame, reproach, and hatred for His sake, and can give joy and peace to all that must encounter an ungodly world, and, in the face of its enmity, or persecution, bear testimony to the name of Jesus? And what a heavenly savor of delight doth the spiritual worship of Jesus diffuse over the whole conduct, and walk, and conversation of the humble believer in Him! And how, indeed, can one, that knows at all the frailty of His nature, trust himself in the most ordinary contact with the world, without the previous adoration, without the previ-

ous pleading of the promises, of the divine Redeemer. The soul, indeed, needs nothing but the promise of the Lord, to comfort and support it in circumstances of whatever trial: but those promises need to be much dwelt upon, and oft presented before the Lord in prayer, that we may feel our personal interest in them, and have them ever ready to wield against temptation or assault.

Having joined the Apostles, then, in their worship of their ascended Lord, let us accompany them from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem. We find them entering in, and going up into the upper chamber, where the eleven dwelt. To the small assembly contained within that room, we look for the commencement of the Christian Church. For we find not only the eleven Apostles assembled there, but the women also, who had been the last to linger with a fond affection near

the cross,* and the first to run, so soon as the solemnities of the Sabbath permitted them, to the sepulchre, where they supposed Him laid.† There, too, we find the blessed Virgin mother of our Lord, certainly not an object of adoration at this early planting of the Gospel church, of whom this passing mention is all the notice which the Scriptures take, from the time that she was entrusted by the dying Jesus to the affectionate care of the disciple whom He loved.‡ And there too we find the brethren of Jesus, those of whom it was not long since testified, that not even they believed on Him,§ and among whom the first exercise of His ministry had been without honor.‖ And from this little band, amounting to about half the number, that is sprinkled over this sacred building, of you whom I now address;

*Mark xv. 40. 41. †Matt. xxviii. 1.
‡John xix. 26. 27. §John vii. 5.
‖ Matt. xiii. 57.

from this little band, may it be said, as it was of the sons of Noah, that the whole earth was overspread.*

Who can look back upon the little assemblage of praying people, met in an upper room in Jerusalem, and then, by way of contrast, glance his eye over the vast portion of the world in which the name of Jesus is now adored, and not recognize the mighty power of God, by which the little grain of mustard seed†, planted upon Calvary, and watered with the blood that there was shed, hath been nourished and sustained, until, at the present day, nations, as numerous, and as various, as the very birds of heaven, are lodging in the branches of it. And yet, O! who can contemplate the amazing deal, which yet remaineth to be done, not only before the whole world shall bow in adoration of the Holy Name of Jesus, but even before the

*Gen. viii. 19. †Matt. xiii. 31, 32.

world of professing Christians shall be, in heart and mind, like that band of holy ones assembled at Jerusalem, and not feel the need of daily and unceasing prayer, that the kingdom of the Lord may indeed come, and so come, that among the professing subjects of that kingdom, His will may be done here on earth, as it is done among the willing and obedient hosts of heaven.* When we talk about the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom, we are apt to turn our eyes abroad, and look for the result of Missionary labour among the blind idolaters of heathen lands; while there remains a work to be done around our very doors, in the bosom of our own families, perhaps within our own hearts, as extensive, and as much demanding the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit, as the turning a deluded pagan from the error of his ways. O! let us look first into our

*Matt. vi. 10.

own hearts, my Brethren, and see how the kingdom of the Redeemer is flourishing there. I would not check one stream, in which the benevolence of a Christian heart is flowing, nor close one outlet of that Christian sympathy with a dying world, which the love of souls for Jesus' sake must inspire; but still we must return to one point, as the most important, yea, of single importance to ourselves, whether we are ourselves of that number, whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall receive to His kingdom, and welcome to mansions in His Father's House.

In considering the character of the infant Church, as it is displayed to us in the verses of this first chapter of the Acts, which have to day been read to you, there are several things worthy of being noticed by us, as members now of that branch of the Church of Christ, which is accustomed to

assemble within these walls, for the bearing they have upon our public service, our ecclesiastical government, and our every-day walk and conversation.

I. And, first, with regard to our public worship. We are called upon to observe, that the eleven, having returned from the Mount of Olives, and being assembled, as already alluded to, continued WITH ONE ACCORD in prayer and supplication. And this we humbly think to be of the very essence of public or congregational devotion, that the prayers and supplications presented unto GOD by the assembled Church, should be offered with one accord, with unanimity, with harmony, with mutual understanding, and with mutual sympathy. Now it is not my intention, Brethren, to say one word of those, who differ from us in that view, and think that it better answers the purposes of public devotion, that one person should present

the petitions of the whole assemblage in his own language, and according to his own sense of the wants of those before him. We and they stand or fall to our own Master. And they, we hope, and believe, aim, as much as we do, at doing all things for edification, for the increase of the body of Christ in spiritual growth. But, my Brethren, though I have but lately endeavoured to call your attention to this subject, I would again urge on you, that our different opinion should produce a different practice. It is one of the chief advantages of our Liturgy, to whose beauty, spirituality, and devotional tendency, most of those who dissent from the use of it bear a ready testimony, that it is so well adapted for a union of Minister and people, in presenting together the same petitions at the throne of grace. It is certainly no part of its design, that the people, knowing what is coming next, may

be inattentive and listless, or at most silently acquiesce in the petitions offered up. This would be, indeed, to make our forms the essence of formality. But it is your part, in joining in this spiritual and holy worship, to lift up your voices with your hearts in those portions allotted to you, and WITH ONE ACCORD to make your common supplications to the Lord. This, you will have heard, was so universal in the primitive times of the Church, that, St. Chrysostom declares, the uttering the Amen was like a clap of thunder. But, while we aim not at this standard, surely it becomes you, Brethren! to testify, that your hearts are in the offering ye are presenting to the Lord, by letting the abundance of your devotion flow out in the utterance of the mouth.* And O! who, how little soever imbued with feelings of devotion, who could come among you at

Matt. xii. 34.

such a moment, and hear the voices of parent and child, of husband and wife, of brother and sister, mingling in one sweet accord of prayer and praise, and rising with their minister's in that truest harmony, the unison of devotion, to the Mercy Seat of God, and not be constrained to fall down on his face and worship God, and confess that God is in you of a truth.* Brethren! ye cannot but have perceived the need of improvement among us in this respect. Let but the few, here present, commence in the larger congregations of the Sabbath day, and ye would soon find that your example would influence others around you, so that ye would be able soon to thank God with truth for having enabled you, by His grace, with one accord to make your common supplications unto Him.†

II. We would turn your attention,

*1 Cor. xiv. 25. †Prayer of St. Chrysostom.

secondly, in the briefest manner possible, to the example, which this primitive Church affords us, with regard to the ministerial order. Through the dark treachery of the apostate Judas, whose fate gives us a solemn but true picture of the manner in which Satan urges to their destruction those that give him an entrance into their hearts, and shews us how he rewards those that are traitors to their God for his sake; and through the awful issue to which the craft of Satan, working upon his despair, had driven him who once was a disciple, a vacancy had occurred in the number of the Apostles. Peter, who appears to have been actuated by the remembrance of his having denied his Lord, to be now the foremost in confessing Him, and in proposing measures for His glory, stood up in the midst of the assembled disciples, and after some calm, but decided, remarks upon the

treachery of Judas, and the dark consequences of his foul apostacy, (in which remarks, the opening of their understandings, that they might understand and apply the Scriptures, was clearly seen,) urged on them the necessity of choosing one, from those who had been their companions all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among them, that he might fill up the vacant place in the number of the Apostles. Now we would humbly inquire, what necessity there could have been for this appointment, if there were to be no distinction of privilege, or of order between the Apostles and the Elders. The seventy disciples, from among whom all agree in thinking that Matthias was chosen, had already received authority from our Lord, to preach His Gospel, and bear witness to His Name. What, then, was the necessity for his advancement, if the office, to which he was

chosen, were not a higher one; and if it were not the design, to exhibit to those who afterwards should believe in Jesus, the pattern of the Gospel Church, with its distinct orders of the Ministry. In the office of an Apostle, in that day, we surely see the pattern of the Episcopal charge of the present age; in the seventy Elders, from whom the twelfth Apostle was chosen, we see the Presbyters or Priests of this period of the Church; and we shall not be able to proceed far in this history before finding the necessity for a larger ministry supplied, by the appointment of Deacons. I dwell no longer upon this point, than to give you the words of Ignatius, the follower, the contemporary, the companion, the bosom-friend of that disciple whom Jesus loved. "Do nothing," he says, "without the Bishop. My "soul for theirs who submit to the Bishop, "with the Presbyters, and Deacons, and

"let my portion be with them in the Lord."

III. But let us turn back a little, in order to discover what we desired to learn, thirdly, from this infant Church, which is, the instruction it affords us with regard to our daily walk and conversation. The last charge given by our blessed Lord to His Apostles, was, that they should wait for the promise of the Father.* This promise He himself repeats in the most express and decided terms, As, John baptized with water, so shall ye be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. Now no promise could be more positive than this. As surely as a thing, of which yourselves were witnesses, *has* happened: so surely, what I now promise *shall* happen. They returned, then, to Jerusalem to wait for this promise; and how do we find them waiting? In listlessness and apathy, contenting them-

* Luke xxiv. 49.

selves that what was promised would come in good time? No! but they continued in prayer and supplication.

Can we need a more abundant answer than is here supplied, to those who excuse their want of diligence, and their want of prayer, by saying, that the grace they need is a free gift of God, and they trust it will come all in good time. If that grace be not promised them, they are wrong, they are presumptuous in expecting it; for it is arrogance for a guilty sinner to ask for, to look for, any thing which has not been promised. If it be promised them, and they are at all sincere in believing that God has promised it to them, then the Apostles' and disciples' conduct shews, in what way the promise should be waited for. To expect the fulfilment of a promise of God, and not pray, yea, and not continue in prayer, for its accomplishment, is to shew that we are careless and

unconcerned about the matter, willing to be saved, if God chooses to save us—ready to be everlastingly damned, if so it must be. Is not this an awful state of mind, Brethren? Is it not enough to make the blood run cold to hear a sinner make so impious a declaration? Yes! few would utter such language with their lips, but O! take care, lest such impiety be found, practically, among you. Are there none of you, who know that ye are not what ye ought to be, who are yet waiting, as ye say, the Lord's time to make you so, but waiting for it in the amusements of the world, or in the indulgence of the flesh? Brethren! ye are mocking God, deceiving your souls, and casting away your salvation, if ye profess to wait the Lord's time to change your hearts, and convert your souls, and yet are not waiting by continuing in prayer and supplication to the Lord!

The same instruction may be derived, from the conduct of the infant Church, to every believer in Jesus, who feels that he comes behind in any gift, of which the Lord has graciously given a promise. Any one, at all conversant with the word of God, must see, that there is nothing which a poor sinner can possibly need in his prilgrimage to Zion, which is not promised to the believer in Jesus. Pardon, holiness, grace, peace and joy; protection and preservation; defence in danger, succor in temptation, comfort in affliction, support in death-all are promised, freely and abundantly promised, to the believer. But, can a believer feel his need of these things, and believe the faithfulness of God's promise, and yet not be earnest and constant in prayer and supplication for them. Whatever we ask in prayer, believing, we receive.* It is in

*Matt. xxi. 22.

believing that we have them, that we experience the possession of the things we need. O! wait then, Brethren, who believe in Jesus! wait in prayer and supplication; wait, like suppliants besieging the doors of the Lord's treasure-house, and the cast down shall be cheered, the mourner shall be comforted, the sorrowing shall rejoice, the penitent be glad. Tarry ye the Lord's leisure; be strong, yea, be strong in supplication, powerful in prayer, and He shall establish your hearts, all ye that put your trust in the Lord!*

*Ps. xxxi. 24.

LECTURE III.

ACTS, 2. 1.—11.

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem, Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed, and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilæans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elam-

ITES, AND THE DWELLERS IN MESOPOTAMIA, AND IN JUDÆA, AND CAPPADOCIA, IN PONTUS, AND ASIA, PHRYGIA, AND PAMPHYLIA, IN EGYPT, AND IN THE PARTS OF LIBYA ABOUT CYRENE, AND STRANGERS OF ROME, JEWS AND PROSELYTES, CRETES AND ARABIANS, WE DO HEAR THEM SPEAK IN OUR TONGUES THE WONDERFUL WORKS OF GOD.

TEN days alone had passed, from the time at which the disciples of the Lord Jesus had received from Him the renewed promise of their baptism with the Holy Ghost, when, being with one accord in one place, it pleased the Lord, who had ascended up on high, had led captivity captive, and received gifts for men,* to make His promise good, and to bestow upon them the precious gift of the Spirit. It was when the day of Pentecost was fully come, that is, the fiftieth day after the Jewish Passover, on which the Saviour rose from the dead; after which resurrection He had been seen alive forty days. Ten, then, remained, in which the fulfilment of the promise was waited for, in earnest

*Ps. lxviii. 18.

and harmonious prayer and supplication; a time, which, while it was some trial of their faith, was also a proof that the Lord is not willing to keep His people long in suspense.

Imagine them, while these ten days were passing. Each day they met in anxious supplication, and pleaded with the Lord the faithfulness of His promise; and yet, at each day's close, they seemed no nearer the fulfilment of their hopes. And were there no scoffers by, to ask, Where is the promise of His coming?* And were there no weak and fearful believers, sincerely asking, Where is the Lord your God? Ten days seem but a short period to look back upon; but while each day, each hour, of it is passing in the suspense of anxious expectation, what a life does it appear! But did the Apostles waver in their hopes, did they falter

*2 Pet. iii. 4.

in the faithfulness of their petitions? No! surely not. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea: and let not such a one think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.* There is a comfort and a confidence, imparted in the very presenting of the prayer of faith before the throne of Grace, which is, to the really humbled and believing soul, a stay, and an encouragement, even tho' the immediate object of the prayer may seem to be for a time refused. At the end of the ten days, when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place still. Still were they waiting in prayer and supplication, still trusting with an unsinking confidence to the word of promise. And when their faith had but increased by being exercised; when the trial of their faith had wrought patience, and patience had had its work

*James i. 6.

within them;* then did it please the Lord, who chooses His own time, as well as His own way, of bestowing His own gifts, to reply to their petitions, and to accord their prayers, with a full measure of the promised blessing.

Let the tried soul of the sorrowing believer look upon these disciples. How often doth Satan tempt such a one to think, because his prayers for joy and peace in believing,† or for whatever grace he needs, are not immediately granted, that, therefore, he has no interest in the promises of God, no acceptance at His hands. Yet let the believer recollect, that it is the prayer of faith—of faith which the promise of the Lord has inspired—that the Lord vouchsafes to answer, and that the trial of a true faith worketh patience. The true believer, then, whose hope is only in the Lord, and by

*James i. 4. †Rom. xv. 13.

whom all trust in self is renounced, will but be urged, by the apparent delay of an answer to his prayer, unto a more patient waiting upon God.*

Such were David's trials, and such was David's conduct under trial. In the day of his trouble, he sought the Lord; his soul refused to be comforted. He communed with his own heart, saying, "Will the Lord cast off for ever; will He be favourable no more? Hath God forgotten to be gracious; hath He in anger shut up his tender mercies?" Such were the reflections suggested by the evil of his heart; but they came not from the Lord. Still had his soul refused comfort, till he bethought himself of the Lord's faithfulness, and said, "It is mine own infirmity, but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most Highest."

* 2 Thess. iii. 5.

Then he cried unto God with his voice, and the Lord gave ear unto him.*

Let such be the believer's case now! The vision is for an appointed time, and at the end of that time it shall surely come, it shall not tarry†. The ten days of suspense may be an anxious period; but if the anxiety be expressed in prayer and supplication, they will be succeeded by a light and fire from heaven, enlightening, animating, cheering, comforting, purifying, quickening the soul.

It is worthy of being remarked, as one among the many proofs of the harmony of design of the Mosaic and Christian dispensations, that the three great feasts of the Jews appear to have been chosen, as the time for the three greatest events which are commemorated in the Christian year. Three times in a year were all the Jews obliged to go to Jerusalem to worship,

*Ps. lxxvii. 1, 2, 7, 9, 10. †Hab. ii. 3.

at the feast of Tabernacles, the feast of the Passover, and the feast of Pentecost.* It seems most probable, that it was at the first mentioned, that the Word was made flesh, and tabernacled among men;† it was certainly at the time of the second, that Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us;‡ and we have just remarked that it was at the celebration of the third, the day of Pentecost, that the great scheme of Salvation was completed in all its parts--the keystone inserted in that narrow gateway, which opens on the road that leadeth to eternal life‖—by the gift of the Holy Spirit. How does it serve to increase our admiration of those wondrous counsels, in which all things have been planned before the foundation of the world, to look back for thousands of years before the Saviour's coming, and to see, in the tabernacle-wor-

*Deut. xvi. 16. †John i. 14.
‡1 Cor. v. 7. ‖ Matt. vii. 14.

ship of the Jews, and in their own inhabiting of tents during the sojourning in the wilderness, a type of that great event, then so far off, the coming down of the glory of the Lord to dwell in the tabernacle of the flesh, in this drear wilderness of sin. How does it serve to magnify the Omniscience of Jehovah, to behold in the lamb slain, and the blood sprinkled on the doors, the type of the wounded, and pierced Jesus, whose blood was shed for the remission of sins; and to see in the commemoration of the giving of the Law from Sinai, and the sanctifying the first fruits to the Lord, a figure of that glorious discovery of the Gospel, and the anointing of the first fruits of the Christian Church, which the day of Pentecost now calls to mind.

And is not the same Providence, which thus ordered these more wonderful events to bear witness to one another, engaged still, in ordering all the smaller things which

befal the people of the Lord, in their wanderings through this wicked world. Yes! it is the Christian's delightful confidence that it is so; that, as not a sparrow falls to the ground without the permission of the Father,* so there is not one thing which befals the believer in his course through life, so minute as even the falling of an hair of his head, which is not seen, which is not ordered, or permitted by his Father. And where this confidence is lively, where it is, by prayer and supplication, kept flourishing in the soul, what more can be desired to make up the highest meed of human happiness? Doth sorrow press me to the ground, calamity overwhelm me, affliction grasp me in its iron hand? It is my Father, that hath sent it: and doth not He know what is best for me? Doth He not see in me some grace deficient, which he would thus im-

*Matt. x. 29.

part to me? Is He not thus conforming me to the image of Jesus, who bore so much for me, and, by being resembled to whom alone, can I enjoy His presence? Doth prosperity smile upon me, health animate me, comforts cheer me? It is my Father's will, and good is His will concerning me. He knows that the trials of prosperity are greater than those of adversity, but His grace is sufficient in one case as in the other,* and He maketh all things work together for good to those that love Him.† Why then need a believer in Jesus be careful for any thing? Come sorrow, come joy—come hope, come disappointment--come health, come pain—the Lord is his Shepherd, and leads him to the still waters of comfort, preparing for him a table, that the world knows not of, in the face of the things that trouble him, causing his cup

*2 Cor. xii. 9. †Rom. viii. 28.

to run over in the midst of poverty, and, in the very agony of the hour of death, consoling, supporting, upholding his soul.* Brethren, do ye know this friendly Shepherd? Are ye in His flock? Do ye know His voice, and follow Him?† If so, happy are ye; if not, O! as ye value comfort, peace, happiness, joy and salvation, seek Him, where He loveth to meet you, in prayer and supplication.

While the disciples were thus, on the morning of the Feast of Pentecost, with one accord in one place, suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. "The wind bloweth where it listeth," saith the Redeemer, "and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."‡ So

*Ps. xxiii. †John x. 4. ‡John iii. 8.

clearly did He foretel, in the minutest circumstances, the coming of that blessed Spirit, which it was His design, when He should return to the Father, to send as a Comforter to His Church. He spoke, indeed, of the ordinary operations of the Spirit, of its bestowal upon all that should, through its regenerating influence, be born again, and this similarity between His description of its ordinary influences, and the actual occurrence of its extraordinary out-pouring, leads us to observe, in its coming on the day of Pentecost, the manner, at least, though not the measure of its acting upon the souls of the present followers of the Lamb.

"The wind bloweth where it listeth." The Spirit of the Lord quickeneth those on whom it pleaseth the Son of God to send it.* The narrative, which we are

*John v. 21. vi. 63. Rom. ix. 15. &c.

considering, proves to us that it was not *the reward* of labour or of prayer. The prayer, in which its coming was waited for, was itself the fruit of the promise of the Spirit, which had already been freely and graciously given.—So is it now, that those, whose hearts the Lord toucheth, and whom He animates, by holding out the promises of His word, to seek Him in prayer and supplication--these, in His good time, receive that full measure of the Spirit, of which the promise is prayerfully, and faithfully received. It pleases the Lord indeed, to bestow His most precious gifts as the *answer*, but not the *reward* of prayer; it is not *because* we pray ever so earnestly, that we are to expect the blessing of the Lord; it is not that His favour is *the purchase* of our prayers; but that by prayer is shewn our belief of that promise, in which the very earnestness of our prayers shews us to

be interested. The earnestness of prayer we have seen in the Apostles' case, not to precede, but to be the consequence of that promise, of whose faithfulness they had not one doubt. The coldness of prayer proceeds from the want of believing the promise on which alone the hope of whatever we need is safely grounded. Are ye then, Brethren, really sensible of your need of God's Holy Spirit, to dwell in you, and to sanctify you, but feel that your prayers for it are cold, and dull? Take the Apostles' example for your guidance. Meditate prayerfully upon the Lord's promises; dwell upon them, and upon the title, which has been purchased you, of an interest in them; contemplate your security in trusting to them—the oath of God; examine the seal of the covenant, by which they are assured to you—the blood of Jesus; and, upon their faithfulness, present yourselves to the Lord, yea,

come to Him with His own promise upon your lips, and assuredly your heart will glow, your feelings warm, with the earnestness of affection, the animation of gratitude.

"Thou hearest the sound thereof." "There was a sound as of a rushing mighty wind." Here was evidence to them of the coming of the promise of the Father upon them. "Thou canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth;" but you know that it comes from the direction, which God, the ruler of the elements, appoints; you know that it goes, when, but not until, it has accomplished His design. So the sound of the mighty wind cometh FROM HEAVEN; nor doth it return thither, till it hath gathered glory to the Lord. The evidence thus suggested to the Apostles' own minds was complete. They needed no argument to prove to them, that the promise of the

Spirit was come upon them. So the Spirit of God beareth witness with the spirits of His people, that they are the children of God:* they need no other evidence for their own satisfaction, than the change of their affections,† the glowing love of their hearts towards God,‡ His House,§ His Sabbaths,‖ and His Word,¶ and the delight with which they resort to God,[1] and seek and enjoy communion with Him and with His Son, Christ Jesus.[2] The inward evidence of the soul's conversion, felt in the devotion of its energies to His service,[3] in the longing desire for His glory,[4] the perpetual struggle against selfish feelings,[5] the constant lifting of the soul to God,[6] and the delight in the law of God after the inward

*Rom. viii. 16.
†Col. iii. 2.
‡1 John, iv. 16.
§Ps. xxvi. 8.
‖Ps. lviii. 13.
¶Job xxiii. 12.
[1]Ps. xlii. 1, 2.
[2]1 John, i. 3.
[3]Rom. xii. 1.
[4]2 Sam. vii. 18—26. & Phil. i. 20.
[5]1 Cor. xiii. 4, 5.
[6]Ps. cxliii. 8. &c.

man,*in spite of that law in the members, which is unceasingly warring against the law of the mind, and sometimes even bringing it into captivity for a while—this evidence is such as stands the test of Scripture, and answers to the marks therein set down; and may therefore encourage the soul to hope, not that its work is done, but that it is in that narrow way, in which those who walk are kept by a power that fainteth not, and watched by an eye that slumbereth not, nor sleepeth. Brethren, have ye this inward evidence of the dwelling of the Spirit within you? Works are the evidence for which the world looks, as proof of the conversion of the soul; and without question, a faith, which produces not works, is a dead and unprofitable faith.† But still there may be works, which do not proceed at all from faith, yet so closely resembling the

*Rom. vii. 22. 23. † James ii. 26.

fruits of the Spirit, that the most practised eye of man cannot distinguish them: but the inward struggle against corruption, the continued warring with self, the unceasing hatred and abhorrence of that inquity, which is within, and the deep humbling of the soul before God, when His eye only witnesses the humiliation--these are things, which the true believer only can experience—these are signs, in which there is less danger of deception, of the Spirit's indwelling. O! then, look within, Brethren, O! look within! Examine your hearts; search well your inmost souls; look into your motives; examine your ruling principles; search, with the candle of the Lord, the deepest recesses of your minds, the most secret workings of your spirits; judge yourselves, that ye be not judged of the Lord;* for if your hearts shall condemn you, God is greater

*1 Cor. xi. 31.

than your hearts, and knoweth all things.*

But again: "Thou hearest the sound thereof." "There appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Soon was the sound of this event heard in Jerusalem, and soon assembled, at the noise of it, Jews from every nation under heaven, who, having been dispersed abroad, and taken up their abode among other nations, had come up to worship at this feast. And we may well conceive their surprize, at hearing these unlearned Galileans, speaking in every variety of language, which prevailed among the different persons then collected, and proclaiming, in their various tongues, the wondrous works of God. The inward evidence which

*1 John, iii. 20.

the disciples had, when they heard the rushing mighty wind, was enough for their own consolation, and to satisfy them of the faithfulness of God; but it was not enough for the glory of the Lord. They were not only vessels chosen unto salvation* themselves: but vehicles of mercy also to a ruined world; and through their word, was it the Lord's design, that sinners should be converted unto Him.† Therefore, like David, did they praise the Lord, and tell of all His wondrous works; He had opened their lips, and their mouths were shewing forth His praise.‡ Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth will speak.‖ Not only is the heart changed of him in whom the Spirit dwells, but from his spiritualised heart will flow the words, the language of the Spirit. He, who before spoke his own

*2 Thess. ii. 13. †John xvii. 20.
‡Ps. li. 15. ‖Matt. xii. 34.

words, now speaketh as the Spirit gives him utterance. He, who could dwell before upon the things of this life, and find his pleasure in the passing vanities and gossip of the world, now speaks, in language of the Spirit's teaching, the wondrous works of the Lord's free grace. This was not an effect peculiar to the operations of the Spirit upon the Apostles; it was not an extraordinary influence upon them only; it is, and will be till the latest time, the constant fruit of the Spirit. That love, which is the fruit of the Spirit, forbids that he, who has tasted that the Lord is gracious*, should feed in solitude and silence upon the precious banquet: he must, the love of souls for Jesus' sake constrains him, to cry to all that have ears to hear, how gracious the Lord is. The word is as fire in the bones of one that would restrain it, which must,

*1 Peter, ii. 3.

which will break forth.* Brethren, where is the spirituality of *your* conversation; where the heavenly fervour of *your* testimony for the Lord? Can ye not be more animated on every other topic than the love of God? Do ye not dwell with greater spirit on any other subject than the grace of God? O! search and look, then, whether the Spirit of Jesus be within you or no. Are your words such, as indicate the utterance which the Spirit gives? Is your language, your whole conversation, such, as speaks the dwelling of the Holy Ghost within you. O! search and look, for if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.†

We have considered the miraculous effusion of the Spirit, only as it represents to us His ordinary operations. But there is one effect of His extraordinary influences, worthy of being briefly no-

*Jer. xx. 9. †Rom. viii. 9.

ticed, as being the most important to us in the present day. This is—His leading the Apostles into all truth, and bringing all things to their remembrance, whatsoever Jesus had said unto them.* The importance of this to us is, that it assures us, that not one word of the whole truth necessary to salvation, is deficient in those writings which they penned, under His guidance: and that there is not one word they penned, at all affecting salvation, which is not the truth of God Himself. With what reverence, then, with what confidence, with what affection should we regard the precious book of God! It is the charter of the Christian's liberty; the title-deed of that inheritance which is reserved in heaven for him.† And, remember! it is also the register of condemnation against the impenitent and unbelieving, the flying roll‡ of curses against

*John xiv. 26 †1 Peter i. 4. ‡Zech. v. 1—3.

those who have not fled to Jesus as a refuge from the wrath to come. O! then, how should we prize it, Brethren; with what diligence, with what devotion should we meditate thereon! It is a message from God to us! O! with what reverence, with what affection should we receive it! It is a message of reconciliation to us who had rebelled against Him! O! with what earnestness, with what eagerness should we embrace it! It is a message, sealed with the blood of Jesus, attested by the Holy Spirit! O! with what confidence should we rely on it, with what love and thankfulness should we hug it to our hearts! O! may the Lord make it precious to us, and fruitful to His own glory, in our salvation, for the sake of Jesus, His dear Son, our Lord.

LECTURE IV.

ACTS, 2. 12.—36.

AND THEY WERE ALL AMAZED, AND WERE IN DOUBT, SAYING ONE TO ANOTHER, WHAT MEANETH THIS? OTHERS MOCKING SAID, THESE MEN ARE FULL OF NEW WINE. BUT PETER, STANDING UP WITH THE ELEVEN, LIFTED UP HIS VOICE, AND SAID UNTO THEM, YE MEN OF JUDÆA, AND ALL YE THAT DWELL AT JERUSALEM, BE THIS KNOWN UNTO YOU, AND HEARKEN TO MY WORDS: FOR THESE ARE NOT DRUNKEN, AS YE SUPPOSE, SEEING IT IS BUT THE THIRD HOUR OF THE DAY. BUT THIS IS THAT WHICH WAS SPOKEN BY THE PROPHET JOEL; AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS IN THE LAST DAYS, SAITH GOD, I WILL POUR OUT OF MY SPIRIT UPON ALL FLESH: AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHESY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS; AND ON MY SERVANTS AND ON MY HAND-MAIDENS I WILL POUR OUT IN THOSE DAYS OF MY SPIRIT; AND THEY SHALL PROPHESY; AND I WILL SHEW WONDERS IN HEAVEN ABOVE, AND SIGNS IN THE EARTH BENEATH; BLOOD, AND

FIRE, AND VAPOUR OF SMOKE: THE SUN SHALL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS, AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD, BEFORE THAT GREAT AND NOTABLE DAY OF THE LORD COME: AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS, THAT WHOSOEVER SHALL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED. YE MEN OF ISRAEL, HEAR THESE WORDS; JESUS OF NAZARETH, A MAN APPROVED OF GOD AMONG YOU BY MIRACLES AND WONDERS AND SIGNS, WHICH GOD DID BY HIM IN THE MIDST OF YOU, AS YE YOURSELVES ALSO KNOW: HIM, BEING DELIVERED BY THE DETERMINATE COUNSEL AND FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD, YE HAVE TAKEN, AND BY WICKED HANDS HAVE CRUCIFIED AND SLAIN: WHOM GOD HATH RAISED UP, HAVING LOOSED THE PAINS OF DEATH: BECAUSE IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE THAT HE SHOULD BE HOLDEN OF IT. FOR DAVID SPEAKETH CONCERNING HIM, I FORESAW THE LORD ALWAYS BEFORE MY FACE, FOR HE IS ON MY RIGHT HAND THAT I SHOULD NOT BE MOVED; THEREFORE DID MY HEART REJOICE, AND MY TONGUE WAS GLAD; MOREOVER ALSO MY FLESH SHALL REST IN HOPE: BECAUSE THOU WILT NOT LEAVE MY SOUL IN HELL, NEITHER WILT THOU SUFFER THINE HOLY ONE TO SEE CORRUPTION. THOU HAST MADE KNOWN TO ME THE WAYS OF LIFE; THOU SHALT MAKE ME FULL OF JOY WITH THY COUNTENANCE. MEN AND BRETHREN, LET ME FREELY SPEAK UNTO YOU OF THE PATRIARCH DAVID, THAT HE IS BOTH DEAD AND BURIED, AND HIS SEPULCHRE IS WITH US UNTO THIS DAY. THEREFORE BEING A PROPHET, AND KNOWING THAT GOD HAD SWORN WITH AN OATH TO HIM, THAT OF THE FRUIT OF HIS LOINS, ACCORDING TO THE FLESH, HE WOULD RAISE UP CHRIST TO SIT ON HIS THRONE; HE, SEEING THIS BEFORE, SPAKE OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST, THAT HIS SOUL WAS NOT LEFT IN HELL, NEITHER HIS FLESH DID SEE CORRUPTION. THIS JESUS HATH GOD RAISED UP, WHEREOF WE ALL ARE WITNESSES. THEREFORE, BEING BY THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD EXALTED, AND HAVING RECEIVED OF THE FATHER THE PROMISE OF THE HOLY GHOST, HE HATH SHED FORTH THIS, WHICH YE NOW SEE AND HEAR. FOR DAVID IS NOT ASCENDED INTO THE HEAVENS: BUT HE SAITH HIMSELF, THE LORD SAID UNTO MY LORD, SIT THOU ON MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE THY FOES THY FOOTSTOOL. THEREFORE LET

ALL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL KNOW ASSUREDLY, THAT GOD HATH MADE THAT SAME JESUS, WHOM YE HAVE CRUCIFIED, BOTH LORD AND CHRIST.

WHEN the wondrous effusion of the Holy Spirit, upon the day of Pentecost, had brought together, by the report made of its effects, the people of all nations and tongues, that were dwelling at Jerusalem; and when they had heard the unlearned Galileans–the natives of that part of Palestine which, as we may gather from the various taunts cast at the Saviour,* was no less remarkable for the low state of its learning, than of its morals, descanting in every variety of language upon the wondrous works of GOD, we read that they were all amazed and in doubt, saying, What meaneth this? Like St. Paul in after days,† the disciples brought strange things to their ears, provoking again the inquiry, made before concerning the Saviour himself,

* John i. 46. & vii. 52. †Acts xvii. 20.

Whence know these men letters, having never learned?* but astonishing them much more by the wondrous nature of the message itself, which they were enabled to deliver with so miraculous an adaptation to the peculiarities of those around them. And yet, while all—the multitude, that is, the large proportion of the assembled crowd—thus wondered at the event they witnessed, and were, perhaps, disposed to glorify Him, from whom alone such a power could proceed; there were some standing by, some who had persevered, with a zeal worthy a better cause, in aiming to entrap the Saviour in His talk,† in contradicting and blaspheming Him,‡ in ascribing His miracles to the agency of Beelzebub,§ and at last in exhorting the people to demand his crucifixion,‖ who persisted in filling to the

*John vii. 15. †Matt. xxii. 15. ‡John viii. 52. §Matt. xii 24 ‖Matt. xxvii. 20.

brim their measure of iniquity, and with mockery charged upon drunkenness the wondrous miracle they witnessed.

O! what a picture is here afforded us of the awful depravity of the heart of man! What a view of its blindness, even when the depravity is in some measure concealed! Surely we should suppose, that men, to whom, strangers though they were in Jerusalem, the things that had come to pass there in those days, concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a Prophet mighty in word and deed before God and all the people,* could not have been unknown, would have been ready, at the very sound of such a miracle as this, wrought upon His known disciples, to ascribe at once the glory to the Lord, and to fall down and worship. Yet, instead of this, there seemeth to have been but a stupid wonder; and, in doubting and amazement,

*Luke xxiv. 18, 19.

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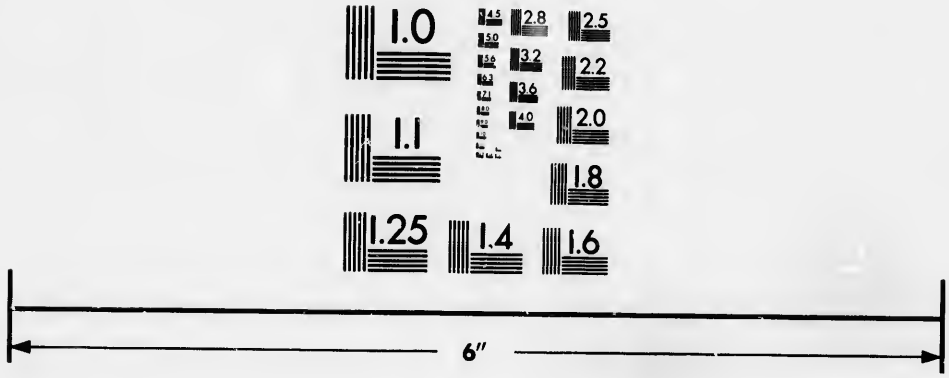

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they enquire one of another, What meaneth this? And, surely, we would again have supposed, that malice the most inveterate, and the most provoked, would have been unable any longer to stand out against evidence so complete, so wonderful, of the design and blessing of the Lord upon that plan of salvation, which they called heresy;* and that the most obstinate prejudices must have yielded to so miraculous an attestation of the power of God attending and dwelling in that meek and lowly Being, whose every word was heavenly, whose every action was divine. Yet we find them, with a perseverance in malice, which almost terrifies us, and makes us ashamed of our race; with an obstinacy, which was determined to resist conviction, even of a truth which a voice from heaven itself attested, mock-

*Acts xxiv. 14.

ing, and saying, These men are full of new wine!

But we see, in their conduct, a picture, not only of man's depravity in the abstract, but, more particularly, of the natural enmity of the heart to spiritual things. As, in the days of Cain and Abel, the child of the world persecuted the child of GOD;* as, in the days of Abraham and his children, he that was born after the flesh, persecuted him that was born after the Spirit;† so was it in the days of the Apostles, that the MIRACULOUS operations of the Holy Ghost—so is it now, that the ORDINARY influences of His grace upon the converted soul, are the subjects of the world's ridicule and mockery, and readily ascribed to folly, to fanaticism, to craft, or to hypocrisy, though the evidence of their reality be manifest in the change of language, the

*1 John, iii. 12. †Gal. iv. 29.

change of principles, the change of conduct. And O! how sadly fatal is this weapon of the enemy, in the destruction of many a rising desire of separation from the world, and of living to God. How many, that have courage enough to go to the faggot or the stake, if necessary, have not enough to bear the jibe of mockery! How many, that, for the world's honour, have braved the cannon's mouth, have yet quailed, and shrunk away from the shaft of ridicule, though the honour that cometh from God only isat stake! How many can make themselves ridiculous in folly, and singular in vice, can bear the world's frown upon their courses, can dare the laws of man, and face the wrath of God, who yet tremble at the very idea of being laughed at for the singular desire of glorifying God, and having their souls saved! Perhaps I now address some, who are weary of the ways of the world,

and of sin, and anxious to live more worthily of the great end of their existence—perhaps some, who have even set out upon an attempt to live more to God, who have yet been unable to stand the sneer of their companions, and have quailed before the taunting charge of setting up to be something better than their neighbours. O! think, my friends, how important is the matter which is at stake! Will ye be content to lose a crown of glory for the fear of being laughed at? And are ye willing to give up your hope of heaven, because others think it folly to be so anxious about it? O! remember, that ye stand or fall to your own Master; and that, far from being justified by being afraid of setting yourselves up above your neighbours, ye are expressly charged not to follow a multitude to do evil,* and commanded to forsake the dearest relationships

*Ex. xxiii. 2.

of life, father, mother, brother, sister, wife, or children, rather than give up the following of Jesus.* The Lord knoweth whereof ye are made; He remembereth that ye are but dust;† He pitieth your weakness, and hath compassion on your frailty; but He does not therefore promise you that He will consider it as nothing, and forgive it, but has promised you help to overcome it. He hath laid help upon one that is mighty;‡ yea! He will not plead against you by His great power, but He will put strength in you.§ O! then, when ye feel this weakness; O! ye that have felt this weakness, and sunk under it; O! seek ye the help of the Lord's Spirit; call on Him, and ye shall not be confounded; but O! remember, Brethren, that whosoever, having put his hand to the plough, looketh back, is unfit for the kingdom of God.‖

*Luke xiv. 26. †Ps. ciii. 14. ‡Ps. lxxxix. 19. §Job xxiii. 6. ‖Luke ix. 62.

The taunting charge, thus brought upon the disciples, gave an occasion to Peter, who was now as forward in acting, as he had formerly been in professing, to state to the assembled multitude the nature of that wondrous event, on which they were thus commenting. He explains to them, that it was the accomplishment of a prophecy contained in their own Scriptures, and to which they professed respect. Having thus gained their attention, he draws them to a consideration of that wondrous Being, whose disciple he was, and explains to them, how all that had befallen Him had been foreknown and foredetermined in the counsel of God. He appeals to the knowledge of his hearers, for the truth of the extraordinary character which Jesus had sustained, while living, and going about doing good, and healing them that were oppressed of the devil;* he boldly brings home to them-

*Acts x. 38.

selves the guilt of having taken, and, by wicked hands, crucified and slain one, who was so evidently approved of God among them; and, lastly, declares upon the testimony of his own eye-sight, and that of the disciples who were with him, that this same Jesus had been raised from the dead. That this resurrection was also in accordance with the predeterminate counsel of the Lord, he proves by quoting the words uttered by David* at least a thousand years before, which, they were well aware, could not apply to David himself, as he had long since been dead and buried, and had seen corruption; but which were spoken by him as a prophet, in reference to Him, who, being David's Son, was also David's Lord. He, who had thus prophesied of His resurrection, had also predicted His ascension into the heavens, to sit there at the Lord's

*Ps. xvi. 8—11, & cx. 1.

right hand, till He should make His foes His footstool. This ascension, he and his fellow disciples had also witnessed; and the miracle, which now called forth their wonder, was the accomplishment of that prediction, that having ascended up on high, He received gifts for men,* even the gift, which by the mouth of Joel, had been promised.† What testimony, then, he demands, can be further needed? This Jesus, whom His life hath proved to be more than man—whom death had no power over—whom the grave could not detain—who has ascended up into the heavens, and is sitting at the right hand of God—this Jesus had shed forth this which ye now see and hear. Let then the whole house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made this same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

*Ps. lxviii. 18. †Joel ii. 28—32.

This sermon of St. Peter's, which was attended by the most wonderful effects, with which the preaching of the word of the truth of the Gospel was ever blessed, presents to us several things, as worthy of being noticed.

And, in the first place, we may well remark the spirit in which the Apostle spoke–the spirit of boldness and of meekness together, which ever after characterized him, as they are also still united in the true followers of the Lamb. As we have remarked, there had before been abundance of profession, but none of the practice of a real courage, in adhering to the Saviour. He who had declared, that tho' he should die with the Saviour, he would never deny Him, had yet shrunk from the inquiry of a maid servant, and, even with oaths and curses, denied that he even knew who Jesus was.* But now, he is

*Matt. xxvi. 35, 74.

not afraid to charge the multitude who heard him, to their faces, with being the murderers of the Prince of Life. And yet, how different was the exercise of this true Christian courage, from his former conduct, either in profession or in practice. The spirit, which the contradiction of sinners had called forth, was a desire of calling down fire from heaven to consume them.* Yea, Peter himself had been the first to draw his sword in a moment of danger, and smite the servant of the High Priest.† Yet now, behold his meekness! He treats the taunting charge of drunkenness, with a serious and calm consideration; and though he knew it was only urged in mockery, yet did he meekly repel it, by appealing to the hour at which they were assembled—an hour at which no devout Jew had eaten or drunken any thing—the hour of morning prayer which

*Luke ix. 54. †John xviii. 10.

they attended fasting. The spirit which he thus displayed, in strong evidence of the change which had taken place within him, he urges upon his converts afterwards, as an evidence of their salvation also. Be ready, saith he, always to give an answer to every one that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear: having a good conscience, that whereas they speak evil against you as of evil doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.* Oh! that there were more of this spirit abroad now, among those who profess to be followers of those, who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises;† more of the spirit which Peter thus inculcated, and which he thus displayed! It is not alone in public controversial discussions, in which railing is so often mistaken for reasoning,

*1 Peter, iii. 15, 16. †Heb. vi. 12.

and personal recrimination is brought in to supply the deficiencies of unsound argument, that the spirit of St. Peter is thus absent. But, even in the common intercourse of life, how little do we witness of that readiness to explain even wilful misconstructions, and of that meekness and gentleness in replying, even to the most wanton insinuations, which not the conduct of Peter only, but the whole precept and practice of the Gospel enjoin. May we not hear even professing Christians declaring, that the impudence or malice of some neighbour is more than they will bear; and persuading themselves that there is some point, after which meekness becomes meanness, and gentleness savors of servility? But, may we not ask, what point they fix upon in the Saviour's life, as the utmost bound of meekness; or what limit they find in the conduct of the Apostles, when gifted with

the Spirit, after which endurance becomes meanness? The Christian must not let his good be evil spoken of;* but how may he prevent it? Not surely by such an exhibition of temper, as his enemy delighteth to provoke, and the greater enemy, the roaring Lion, exults in beholding: but by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, and by shaming those that speak evil of him by the heavenliness of his conversation. But O! if Christian love were shed abroad among all who bear the Christian name, or profess to be living upon the Christian's hope; if Christians now walked in love as Christ loved them, how little would cautions such as these be needed. O! if we would bring all our tempers, and our feelings to the test of that blessed pattern which Christ Jesus left us; and if we would only, in the remembrance of His constant presence,

*Rom. xiv. 16.

consider how our conduct in any circumstances is tending to the edification of His body, and to the preparation of our souls for the enjoyment of that home of love, eternal in the heavens, to which we profess to be looking forward, surely our conduct would come back more nearly to that primitive standard, which called forth even from a heathen the exclamation, See how these Christians love one another!

But let us observe one or two points in St. Peter's discourse itself. There is one thing in it most striking, most encouraging, most consoling; which is, the prevailing efficacy of the prayer of faith. The passage which he quotes from the prophet Joel, concludes with a declaration concerning the last days, which St. Paul also dwells upon in his writings to his converts,* that whosoever shall call upon

* Rom. x. 13.

the name of the Lord shall be saved. There is a name, a blessed name, beside which there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we can be saved,* and that name, that blessed name of JESUS, through faith in that name, can make the vilest, clean; the poorest, rich; the weakest, strong. And such is the blessed effect promised by the Lord to ALL that shall in earnest call upon that name. Yet remember, Brethren, that it is the promise of the Lord which gives to prayer its efficacy, and that it is through a lively faith in that promise, that the desired blessing is imparted. Prayer, considered in itself, has no intrinsic efficacy—no merit—no claim to favour; it is only from the promise of the Lord that it derives its power. He knoweth what things we need before we ask:† and knowing them, he has promised them to all that

*Acts iv. 12. † Matt. vi. 8.

do ask; he then that, believing the Lord, asketh, receiveth, not because he prays, but because the Lord has promised. That many shall call upon the name of the Lord, who yet shall not be saved, our Saviour himself declares: for many shall come to Him, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us! to whom He shall say, I know you not, depart from me.* But why? Because they seek Him not by faith! Because they believe not, and trust not to His promise only, but to the power of their own petitions, or to the influence of something which they endeavour to bring in their hands to Him. The word of God then does not fail; but whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord, in a simple, but complete dependance upon the promised efficacy of that name, shall be saved! O blessed promise! Strange, that its simplicity should cause so many

*Matt. xxv. 11, 12.

to stumble over it, and fall! Let us look into ourselves, Brethren, and examine ourselves in the light of God's commandments, and, the Spirit being our helper, we shall soon see enough to make us fly from ourselves, and glad to cling to that name, in which alone is full and free salvation.

But is there no danger of our being deceived in trusting to that name? Is there nothing to fear with regard to its efficacy? What is it that gives it such amazing power? It is because it is the name of God; it is that this man, through whom is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins,* is also God of Gods, and Lord of Lords. This we find proved to us by the Apostle's declaration of the reason, why the pains of death, in which Jesus lay, were loosed, even because it was not possible that He should be holden

*Acts xiii. 38.

of it. Why was it not possible? If He were the highest created being it is possible to imagine, and, still more, if He were a mere man, there could have been no impossibility in the way of His being held by the bands of death. He that created can, if He pleases, annihilate the highest of His creatures; there is no life in them, but what they derive from the will and pleasure of JEHOVAH. But in Jesus there dwelt the fulness of the Godhead bodily,* and therefore it was that He could not be detained by death. He laid down His life, as he had power to do, in accomplishment of His wondrous purpose of redemption; He took again the life He had laid down, as He had in himself power, not only to lay down His life, but also to take it again.† There can be no truth in the whole compass of Christian doctrine, more important than this, which

*Col. ii. 9. †John x. 18.

the Apostle thus proves—the full divinity of Christ. It is the chief front of that corner-stone, on which the religion of the Gospel rests—the very basis, the foundation itself, of the whole Christian system. Man had sinned, and, without a full and perfect atonement for his sins, Divine Justice never could look favourably upon him again. To satisfy justice by an such atonement, was the object for which Christ came. But what creature can atone for another? Hath the highest archangel, who rejoices in the Lord's presence, any thing independent of God—any thing which he does not owe to God? Nay, surely not! All that the creature is—all that he has—all that he does, belongs, of right, to God, and to God he is responsible for it all. He can have nothing then to make over to another—no righteousness which he can give as a covering to another's sins. No creature can atone

for sin! If Jesus were a creature, He could have made no atonement for sin! If He made no atonement, Divine Justice still has an unsatisfied claim against us for ten thousand talents, of which we have not one penny to pay! And, if God be true, justice must have its demand, and death, with all its horrors, must be our portion! But, blessed be God! He hath made this same Jesus, whom our sins have crucified, both Lord and Christ. He hath suffered for sins: and as He was man, He bore the sins which man committed, and suffered the consequences of sin for man; as He was God, the atonement which He made was infinite, and, by one offering, He has perfected for ever them that are sanctified.*

"This Jesus, whom ye have crucified." Who? the Jews only: nay! but ye, my Brethren, ye whom I now address, as

*Heb. x. 14.

much as those whom Peter was addressing. If He died for you, ye crucified Him. If He bore your sins in His body on the tree, it was your sins, that crowned His brow with thorns—your sins that pierced His precious hands and feet, and lifted Him in agony upon the tree. O! what then must your sins have been, O! what must sin be, since nothing but the blood of God himself, could make atonement for it! Brethren! do ye feel the guilt of your transgressions, and have ye fled beneath the burden, to the dying, bleeding Jesus? In Him is plenteous redemption—in Him is full salvation—in Him is abundant righteousness. But out of Him there is no righteousness for the transgressor, no salvation for the lost—beside Him there is no Saviour. O! then behold Him, Brethren, crucified *for you!* O! look upon the love which bore such sufferings without a murmur *for*

your sins. And can ye love the sins, which so tormented Him? Can ye, for the present pleasures of transgression, reject such love as His? O! by His agony and bloody sweat, does He appeal to you--by His cross and passion, He intreats you--by His precious death and burial, He implores you, to go and sin no more; by His glorious resurrection and ascension, and by the gift of the Holy Spirit, He assures you of His power, and His willingness to save you all from sin, and to give you an inheritance among them that are sanctified.* May His own Spirit now press His appeals to your hearts, and make His word the power of God unto your salvation, for the sake of the abundant sacrifice of the blood of Jesus!

* Acts xx. 32.

LECTURE V.

ACTS, 2. 37.—40.

NOW WHEN THEY HEARD THIS, THEY WERE PRICKED IN THEIR HEART, AND SAID UNTO PETER AND TO THE REST OF THE APOSTLES, MEN AND BRETHREN, WHAT SHALL WE DO? THEN PETER SAID UNTO THEM, REPENT, AND BE BAPTIZED EVERY ONE OF YOU IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS; AND YE SHALL RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST. FOR THE PROMISE IS UNTO YOU, AND TO YOUR CHILDREN, AND TO ALL THAT ARE AFAR OFF, EVEN AS MANY AS THE LORD OUR GOD SHALL CALL. AND WITH MANY OTHER WORDS DID HE TESTIFY AND EXHORT, SAYING, SAVE YOURSELVES FROM THIS UNTOWARD GENERATION.

AT the early period of the Gospel Church, described to us in that narrative

which we have made the subject of the present lectures, we are enabled at once to trace the difference between the *ordinary*, and the *peculiar* operations of the Holy Spirit. Our Saviour, a short time before He suffered, and in one of those last conversations with His disciples, in which He strove to explain to them, most fully, the nature of His kingdom, and to arm them for the trials which, He foresaw, were coming upon them, had declared that, when the Spirit should come, He should reprove, or convince the world of sin.* And with this His ordinary influence, He appears to have attended that more miraculous operation, by which the Apostles were enabled to speak with tongues and magnify God, on the very first occasion on which that power was displayed. For when Peter, in the exercise of his miraculous gift, had set be-

* John xvi. 8.

fore all the people the wonderful works of God—when he had simply exhibited, in all His fulness, the wondrous character of a crucified, a risen, and ascended Saviour, and announced the precious truth, that God had made the same Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Christ, we find that they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the disciples, Men and Brethren, what shall we do?

That there was no power in the particular words which Peter uttered, at all sufficient of itself to produce this effect, is evident. How often have the same words been sounded in the ears of sinners, from his day to the present, and yet have been but as the noise of sounding brass, or the tinkling cymbal,* as far as regards any impression made upon their hearts! How often have the same truths, which he held

* 1 Cor. xiii. 1.

out, been urged upon the minds and consciences of sinners, according as the Lord gave to every man* the words in which to utter them, and yet been powerless in awakening the slumbers of the sinful, in arousing the careless, in quickening the dead! How often, my Brethren, hath Christ Jesus been set forth among you†—how often hath His love in dying for you been presssed upon your affections—how often have your sins, which slew Him, been urged upon your consciences for their conviction—how often hath the power of God, which raised Him from the dead, been pointed out to you, as the only means of quickening your souls unto righteousness of life‡—and yet without effect, leaving you still as careless, as worldly, as much the enemies of God as ever! Surely, it was the present power and operation of the Holy Spirit,

*1 Cor. iii.5. †Gal. iii. 1. ‡Eph. i. 19, 20, & ii. 4—6.

which alone gave efficacy to the words which Peter uttered! Surely it is only the same power--that wind which bloweth where it listeth—which now can give the word of truth its influence in pulling down the strong holds* of sin, and establishing the reign of Christ within the heart! How many read their Bibles—how many hear the preached word, whose hearts are evidently yet untouched by the truth, whose souls are yet unconvinced of sin, yet unenlightened, yet unchanged! And why? Because the co-operation of the Holy Spirit is not earnestly and duly sought; because His aid is not relied on, His blessed influence not duly cultivated and courted. Without that influence, the very page of inspiration itself is but as the face of a sun-dial, while the sun is beclouded; we may trace the marks, may gaze upon the characters; but we can gain

* 2 Cor. x. 4.

no information, and receive no profit, because the spiritual things therein contained are spiritually discerned.* Without the Spirit's influence, the sound of the preacher's word will be but as the notes of an instrument of music: they may, at the time of their utterance, excite by their animation, or lull by their softness, or impress by their earnestness; but the effect is but transient—the impression passes off, as the sounds die away; for nothing but the Spirit can effectually touch the heart, or feed the soul with the true consolations of the Gospel.

But at the same time we may gather from the event before us, the nature of that preaching of the Gospel, on which alone the Spirit's blessing can be expected to rest. We hear the Apostle simply dwelling upon facts, and proving their correspondence with the prophecies

*1 Cor. ii. 14.

of God's word; we find him simply setting forth Christ Jesus crucified among them, delivered for their offences and raised again for their justification *; and this truth, applied by the Spirit, drove the arrows of conviction deep into their souls. This was the preaching, which the great Apostle of the Gentiles afterwards found so successful. He preached Christ crucified; he determined to know nothing among those whom He addressed, but Jesus Christ and Him crucified.† And this is the only preaching, which, however unsatisfactory to itching ears, however unpalateable to the pride of human intellect, can expect the accompanying teaching of the Holy Spirit now. It were not difficult, my Brethren, to address you with the enticing words of man's wisdom, to amuse your minds with efforts of the imagination, or to engage your sympa-

*Rom. iv. 25. †1 Cor. i. 23. & ii, 2.

thies with sketches of woe; but from these we could not expect the demonstration of the Spirit and of power* to break forth—these we could not, consistently with the Divine promise, expect to be fruitful to that one end, at which alone the Minister of Christ should aim, the conversion of your souls. When man begins to think that the simple exhibition of the truth as it is in Jesus is likely to be distasteful, and aims at making it more palateable, by clothing it in the garb of man's wisdom, or decking it in the flowers of poetic imagery, even though his hope may be thus to gain attention to unpleasing truths—does he not forget, that the work is the Lord's—does he not set up his judgment against the plan, which the Lord has devised, of making the foolish things of the world confound the wise,† and aim at improving, by human art, the

*1Cor. ii. 4. †1Cor. i. 27.

wondrous message, which is itself the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.* The preaching of the cross always has been, and always will be, foolishness unto them that perish, but unto the saved, it is the power of God.†

When the manifestation of the truth had commended itself to the consciences of those who heard it, by pricking their hearts with conviction of their sinfulness, it brought them in humility to Peter and his fellow-disciples with the enquiry, Men and brethren, what shall we do? We perceive in such their conduct one of the first evidences, that the convictions which had been produced were in effect the work of the Spirit. They had already made them so far like little children, that they came in a humble and teachable spirit, to learn of the Lord by His minis-

*Rom. i. 16. †1 Cor. i. 18.

ters, the way of Salvation. A few moments before, their enquiry among themselves had been, Are not these men that speak, Galileans? This enquiry did not express merely their astonishment, at hearing the natives of one country discourse in the languages of so many others, but indicated also a contempt for them. "Are not they men proverbially ignorant, and so notoriously illiterate, that it is a common saying, Out of Galilee ariseth no prophet?* This is a strange thing indeed which has happened to them, but can they teach us?" Now behold them humbly asking of them, what they must do—glad to call them brethren, and to wait upon their lips for instruction in the great mystery of redemption. Behold them, now that the word of God has come home with power to their hearts, casting away their pride and self-complacency, and

*John vii. 52.

meekly asking to be taught their duty by these very men, whom they had before despised. O! what sight can be more delightful, what sound more cheering to the heart, in which the love of Christ has been shed abroad by the Holy Spirit, than such as is here displayed! Is there joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth--* and can there fail to be joy on earth also, in the hearts of those who have themselves tasted how gracious the Lord is,† at witnessing a proud sinner humbled and alarmed, and hearing from his lips the anxious inquiry, What shall I do? Truly here the Saviour sees the travail of His soul and is satisfied;‡ and here the Saviour's servant, who loves the honour of his Lord, will find delight and satisfaction, when he sees the purpose of his Lord's sufferings beginning to be answered, and contemplates the rising of that glorious

*Luke xv. 10. † 1 Peter ii. 3. ‡Ps. lviii. 11.

work in the sinner's soul, for which the Saviour bled and died.

Let us observe how that work proceeds.

We have seen, in the case of those whom the Apostles addressed, what a large amount of personal prejudice against the Apostles, as Galileans, and of opposition to the truth they delivered, was surmounted by the gentle teaching of the Holy Spirit. So is it now. The worldly heart is, in general, no less prejudiced against the *person* of him who tells the sinner of his sins, than it is against the *doctrine* he delivers. This St. Paul experienced, being counted as an enemy because he told the truth.* And this has been the experience of many successors of St. Paul, from his day to the present, who have heard, from those that were convinced of the truth, the confession, that their most affectionate warnings

* Gal. iv. 16.

had been construed into peevish threats—their most earnest intreaties into enthusiasm—their plainest instructions into dogmatism. But behold the really convinced sinner, and you find him glad to hail as a brother, and to intreat instruction in the way of salvation from, him whom he had before disliked and despised, principally for that very simplicity, and earnestness, and zeal, and self-devotion, in which he now perceives the witness of the Spirit. You will find the truly awakened soul willing to sit at the feet of the humblest disciple of the Saviour, and eager to learn, from the lowliest imitator of Jesus, that secret of the Lord, which is with them that fear Him.*

Thus is one symptom of the pride of the heart subdued—one feature of a corrupt nature altered and improved. But the change is principally apparent in the

*Ps. xxiv. 14.

renunciation of every former confidence, the distrust of self, and the simple but earnest inquiry of the Lord, Lord! what wilt thou have me to do. St. Peter's audience consisted principally of moral persons—of persons, who, according to their light, were religious—of persons, who had almost all come great distances, to attend the worship of the Lord. Their natural reflections upon themselves, would have been: "We are no great sinners—we worship the God of Israel—we are no extortioners, no knaves; no adulterers—we fast—we give tythes—we have come all this distance, in compliance with the Lord's command, to worship at the stated feasts." And such are the natural reflections of the yet unconverted heart of man in the present day. We are no dissolutes, no profligates, no drunkards—may a large portion, it may be hoped, of most communities now say—we worship God—

we believe in Christ—we observe the ordinances of religion, as far as we conveniently can—we are moral—we are charitable—what do we lack yet? But the light of the glorious Gospel of Jesus, who is the image of God, when it shines with convincing power into the sinner's heart,* shews him, that, with all this, he has nothing to depend upon—nothing to trust to. It shews him, that, for all this, he may still be dead in trespasses and sins—still without a saving interest in Jesus—still an alien from the covenant of promise, without hope, and without God in the world.† It shews him, then, how vain is a trust in mere outward duties, or external privileges—convinces him that he is not a Christian who is one outwardly—strikes from him every prop on which he leaned—and dashes from him every vain confidence in which he trusted.

* 2 Cor. iv. 4. †Eph. ii. 1, 12.

Those things which before were gain, he now sees to be complete loss *; he finds the bed, on which he lay, shorter than a man can stretch himself upon, and the covering narrower than he can wrap himself withal.† His round of duties fails to comfort him—he begins to see that the law of God is not satisfied with sincerity, but requires perfection—he finds that repentance may answer as a guard against future sins, but cannot atone for past ones--he sees all these things to be against him, and casting away all self-dependence, and renouncing every hope in any thing he can do, and feeling the vanity of every trust, on which he had formerly reposed, he comes with the earnest, but simple inquiry, What shall I do to be saved ?

Such appears to have been the manner in which the self-satisfaction of St. Peter's

*Phil. iii. 7. † Is. xxviii. 20.

audience was dispelled—their self-confidence broken—their awakened consciences convinced. And such is the process in which conviction now works upon the sinner's heart, casting down imaginations, and every high thing which exalteth itself against God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.* This is the process of the Holy Spirit's operations upon every heart, that is savingly brought to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. It may be said that the influence of the Spirit upon Peter and the Apostles was extraordinary, and miraculous, and so forms no rule for our guidance now; but such was not the case in those to whom St. Peter preached. Their convictions, too, were the work of the Holy Spirit, but they are such as are still, yes, as still MUST BE, produced in every heart, that is turned to seek the Lord. It is,

*2 Cor. x. 5.

then, Brethren, believe me! a most necessary and important enquiry, whether ye have ever been brought to such views of yourselves, and to such humiliation of soul before God, as this mingled crowd was. Until ye have seen the vanity of every dependance--have felt that your own morality is but the staff of a broken reed, your own righteousnesses but filthy rags—that ye are, by nature, dead in trespasses and sins—and by practice, far, far gone astray from holiness and purity; until ye have felt, that ye are nothing but sin—have nothing but misery, to recommend you; and in utter helplessness and self-renouncement, have cast yourselves upon the free mercy of the Lord--believe me, or, at least, believe the constant tenor of the word of God! ye have not yet moved the first step towards the conversion of your souls; ye have not even so far harboured the motions of the Spirit, as to have

been savingly convinced by Him of sin. If there be no conviction of sin, there can be no conversion from it—if there be no conversion, there is no salvation—if there is no salvation, there can be no heaven for the soul that is thus ignorant of the Holy Spirit's influences. Ye see, then, Brethren, how much is involved in the inquiry, which, in the name of Jesus, I intreat and call upon you to make into your condition, whether ye have yet been so convinced of your sin, so awakened to a sense of your danger, so aroused to a concern for your state, as to have in earnest asked the question, What must I do to be saved?

But what was the reply of the Apostles to the so anxious inquiry of their awakened hearers? Peter answered, and said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall re-

ceive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all that are far off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. He urges on them the promise of the Lord, and its universal application to all, as many as the Lord should call, as his authority for calling upon them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus. This Jesus, whom they had crucified, but whom God had exalted as a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins*—this Jesus had been already so set forth as crucified for their sins, that they had been pricked in the heart with a godly sorrow for the sins for which He had suffered, and had asked, how they might shew the depth of their sorrow—what they should render to the Lord, in testimony of the sincerity of their mourning for their sins. The Apostle charges them to shew

*Acts v. 31.

it by repentance, that is, by a change of heart and life, and, as a more immediate evidence, by coming forward, and being baptized in His name.

It is hard for us, in the present day, to estimate the amount of evidence given to the sincerity and depth of their convictions, by the simple fact of being baptized in the name of Jesus. In our day, all bear that name--all are nominally Christians; there is therefore no test of faith in merely having been baptized in the name of Jesus. But in the days of the commencement of theApostles' ministry, with the remembrance of the persecution unto death of Jesus of Nazareth fresh in their minds—with the assurance of the continued rage and enmity of the chief priests and elders staring them in the face—it was no trifling proof of their sincerity, and real belief in Christ—no trifling evidence of the operation of the

Holy Spirit, which they gave, when, in the face of all these things, they came forward to take on them the name and profession of Jesus. But such was the evidence which the Apostle urged on them to give, and which he yet further dwelt upon, when he testified to them, and in many words exhorted them to save themselves from that untoward generation.

To be willing to be called a Christian in the present day, is certainly no proof of the conversion of the heart to God; though indeed it might be so, if the name were confined to such as those to whom it was first given—the true followers, and real disciples, of the Lord Jesus. But to act up to the spiritual application of that name—to follow up the evidence which the Apostle demands, of the sincerity of the profession—to testify repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, on the one hand, and, on the

other, to save ourselves from this untoward generation—to come out and be separate from the world, to renounce it, to forsake it, as every one in baptism hath vowed that he will do—this is as difficult now—this is now as sure a sign of the operation of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of the heart, as it was in the days of the Apostle himself. For alas! the world has so enfolded the heart of man—it has so gained possession of his affections, so engrossed his feelings, so monopolized his regard, that nothing but the hammer of the Lord's Spirit can break the crust with which it has overlaid his soul. But when that hammer of the Lord hath been at work, this is a certain evidence of its powerful operation, that the soul has a distaste for the world—is wearied and ashamed of those things in which before it took delight—and flies, as for life, from the mere amusements and engagements, the occu-

pations and the indulgences of the world, because it sees in them snares and temptations to forgetfulness of God—because it fears their power to make it content with its present fleeting state, and forgetful of its heavenly resting-place—because it is aware of their tendency to draw away the mind from God, and to occupy, at least, a portion of the thoughts, the time, the talents, which belong exclusively to God, and which His mercies call upon it to present as a free will offering to Him.* Brethren, how is this with you? Have ye this evidence of the conversion of your hearts to God? O! search and look, and consider whether ye are willing for the mess of pottage of present enjoyment, to give up the heavenly birth-right which Jesus has purchased for you with His blood.†

The few verses which have engaged us

*Rom. xii. 1. †Gen. xxv. 29—34.

this morning, present a theme of comfort and encouragement to the fearful soul, which it were a pity to omit. St. Peter was addressing many, who were actual murderers of Jesus. Many had joined their voices to the infuriate cry of Crucify Him, Crucify Him,* were now pricked in their hearts at hearing of the same Jesus, and earnestly demanding what they must do. Did Peter make any distinction with regard to such--did he impose any limitation, any exclusion? No! To you, and to your seed, saith he, are the promises made! Believe in this same Jesus, and ye shall be saved! Who can consider his case more hopeless than theirs, who madly screamed, His blood be upon us, and on our children?† Yet for them there was the same hope--for them the same way of salvation--for them the same gracious promises as for

*Luke xxiii. 21. † Rom. v. 8

others. Who then now can doubt their title to the same promises, their interest in the same grace? Our believing a promise is a satisfactory evidence of its being meant for us. We need look for no other. Let us but believe the promise, and we shall not only have, but give the best evidence of our interest in it, by our conduct in living upon it. Mourning soul! what can your case be, which the promise of Jesus cannot meet? Are you a sinner? For such Christ Jesus died.* Are you the very chief of sinners, having crucified Christ Jesus afresh, and put Him to open shame?† Even to save such, Christ Jesus came into the world. Yea, He is able to save all, to the uttermost, that come unto God by Him;‡ and him that cometh unto Him, He will in no wise cast out. Whosoever believeth in Him—and

*Heb. vi. 6. †Heb. vii. 25. ‡John vi. 37.

that surely may include you—shall not perish, but have everlasting life.*

O! precious Gospel! which has thus a balm for every wound—a cordial for every fear! How shall we praise God for it—O! what shall we render to Him for it, and all His benefits? O! let us receive the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.† And whosoever calleth on that name, shall not be confounded.

*John iii. 16. † Ps. cxvi. 12, 13.

LECTURE VI.

ACTS, 2. 41—47.

THEN THEY THAT GLADLY RECEIVED HIS WORD WERE BAPTIZED: AND THE SAME DAY THERE WERE ADDED UNTO THEM ABOUT THREE THOUSAND SOULS. AND THEY CONTINUED STEDFASTLY IN THE APOSTLES' DOCTRINE AND FELLOWSHIP, AND IN BREAKING OF BREAD, AND IN PRAYERS. AND FEAR CAME UPON EVERY SOUL: AND MANY WONDERS AND SIGNS WERE DONE BY THE APOSTLES. AND ALL THAT BELIEVED WERE TOGETHER, AND HAD ALL THINGS COMMON; AND SOLD THEIR POSSESSIONS AND GOODS, AND PARTED THEM TO ALL MEN, AS EVERY MAN HAD NEED. AND THEY, CONTINUING DAILY WITH ONE ACCORD IN THE TEMPLE, AND BREAKING BREAD FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE, DID EAT THEIR MEAT WITH GLADNESS AND SINGLENESS OF HEART, PRAISING GOD, AND HAVING FAVOUR WITH ALL THE PEOPLE. AND THE LORD ADDED TO THE CHURCH DAILY SUCH AS SHOULD BE SAVED.

When the awakened hearers of St. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, had been instructed by him in the necessary evidences of the sincerity of that sorrow, by which their hearts were pricked at the consideration of a crucified Jesus, we find that those of them who gladly received his word were baptized. We may form some conception of the crowd, which the miraculous outpouring of the Spirit had called together, when we perceive that the portion of that crowd, which believed Peter speaking the things concerning Jesus Christ, and believing were baptized, amounted to three thousand souls. To these the Apostles words were the savor of life unto life; but to how many more they were the savor of death unto death,* we are not informed. But in all probability, it was with them as it had

*2 Cor. ii. 16.

ever been before, and as it has ever been since. While the few, comparatively, entered in at the strait gate, and commenced their walk in the narrow road, which leadeth to eternal life, the many persisted in their preference of the smoother path, and broader gate, which admitted them with all their lusts, with all their iniquity, with all their pride and self-sufficiency, and led them, in a quiet and comfortable security, to their destruction.*

But why need we look beyond the text to find out this? Why, when there is so much to rejoice at, seek out that which is a theme for lamentation? Is it from a mere love of looking at the gloomy side of things? O no! my Brethren, nor yet to lead those of you that have tasted that the Lord is gracious, to judge your neighbours. But it is to excite your sympathies for a perishing world, and to remind you how

*Matt. vii. 13, 14.

much need there is of constant and unwavering prayer for your brethren, your kinsmen according to the flesh,* and all among whom your lot is cast, that the Lord's Spirit may enlighten their understandings, convince their hearts, and bring them to the knowledge of the same Saviour, whom ye have found precious. To a Christian mind, seriously considering the matter, there cannot be a sadder subject of contemplation, nor a worthier theme for intercessory prayer, than the condition of the multitude in nominally Christian, no less than in heathen communities, who are unenlightened and unconverted. And yet it may be feared, that it is not in reality made so much the subject of earnest and importunate petition as it should be. The great concern of each individual is, indeed, the salvation of his own soul. But one of the first signs

*Rom. ix. 3.

of the soul being in a state of salvation, is found in the love of the souls of others. And in no way can that love of their souls manifest itself with so good hope and promise of effect, as in ardent and earnest prayer for them. We may reason with them—may aim at speaking to them in season, and out of season,* a word of exhortation, of caution, of admonition or instruction; but all must be in vain—at least we have no promise but that it will be in vain—unless it be spoken in a spirit of prayer--unless the Lord's blessing has been earnestly besought to bring it home to the heart. The very remembrance that salvation is all of grace—that it is from the free grace of God that the holy desire proceeds, as well as the just work, should convince us of this. Now it is a solemn consideration, Brethren, but it is

*2 Tim. iv. 2.

no less a true one, that a portion of the sins of all those who die unconverted, more especially if they be of our own kindred, lies at our door, if their condition has not been frequently and faithfully remembered before God in prayer—if we have not earnestly besought for them that grace, by which their understandings should be enlightened, their hearts convinced, their souls converted.

But to return from their case to that of the persons under consideration. When the sower went forth to sow his seed, some fell by the way-side; as the word now falleth upon the ears, but scarcely even makes an impression on the understanding, still less on the heart, of those that hear. Such were probably some of those who were assembled round St. Peter, who came around him—as many persons go to church—because others were coming, but took no thought what was

proceeding. Some fell on stony places. It reached the understanding, but made no entrance into the soft bed of the heart—it roused no affections, engaged no love—and it could therefore stand no test of discipleship, nor could bear up against any probabilities of trial, or persecution. Some fell among thorns. It got into the soul, and convinced it of its truth—even as the Pharisees, and mockers, could not resist the reasoning of the Apostles, and were probably convinced that they said what was true, but their pride, their prejudice, their ambition, their anger, choked conviction, and left them more barren than ever. But some fell among good ground, and sprang up, and brought forth fruit*. Such was the ground on which the word fell, when it brought these three thousand convinced sinners to the Apostle, and produced in them the fruit which

*Matt. xiii. 3—8.

is here recorded. They gladly received the word, and were baptized; and they continued stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

The conversion of these three thousand was sudden. But in this account of them we see, that it was not the less real.

How willingly, in the first place, do we see them take on them the token of discipleship—take up their cross to follow Jesus. By being baptized they did so most effectually. They came forward publicly to avow their faith in Him, to express their deep sense for their past sins, and to bind themselves by a perpetual covenant unto the Lord. They came forward to declare that they buried all their former dependances, renounced all their former hopes, abhorred their former refuges of lies: and that they betook themselves to the name of Jesus as a strong

tower, in which they were safe*, and put on His righteousness only, as their only ground of acceptance, their only hope, their only salvation.

But this was but the profession of their faith; and though, under these circumstances, it was some evidence, yet not a complete one, of the conversion of their hearts. But the next verse, taking a rapid view of their after conduct, gives us the full evidence of the completeness of the change in declaring that they continued stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine—the doctrine of an all-sufficient atonement for sins, and the necessary operations of the Holy Spirit to sanctify the soul; they continued in fellowship with them, and with one another—manifesting in their mutual love and tenderness, the genuine spirit of the Gospel which is love; they continued in breaking of bread—thus constantly remembering the sufferings of Je-

*Prov. xviii. 10.

sus, and renewing their covenanted interest in His salvation; and they persevered in prayer—the element of a converted soul, without which it can no more live, than the body can exist without air—without which it can no more be happy, than a dying creature could enjoy the pleasures and follies of life.

There is a difference between those whom the Apostle addressed, and those whom we address at the present day; but it is a difference principally of name, not of nature—of outward circumstances, not of the inward heart. They addressed, for the first time, persons who had not before heard of the Saviour, or at least had professed no faith in Him. We address in the present day those who are called by the name of Christ; those who profess to be followers of Him; those who have by baptism been outwardly joined to Him. But we address persons,

as they did, by nature dead in trespasses and sins*; and the evidence afforded by a mere difference in outward profession—by being partakers of a new and more perfect covenant than that in which the Jews were interested, is far from being sufficient testimony of that change in nature—that new life unto righteousness, without which none can enter heaven. The particulars necessary to complete the evidence of the conversion of the heart from sin to God, and the raising of the soul from death to life, are the same now as they were then. First among them, we find a glad reception of the word of God. The heart savingly awakened by the grace of God, and led to cry out in earnest, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do, proves the sincerity of the cry, by gladly and heartily following where it finds the word of God direct. Here we may see the differ-

*Eph. ii. 1.

ence between the mere convictions of natural conscience, and those produced by the Holy Spirit. The soul of the sinner is sometimes aroused to much apparent earnestness about its state, while it still shrinks from the burden of the cross. It finds the vanity of earthly things, but is not so in love with heavenly, as to be willing to cut off the right hand, or to pluck out the right eye for the sake of them. But it is not so with the heart in which the Holy Spirit is at work. That heart seeks the way of the commandment in order that it may walk in it*—not that it may calculate the proportions between the difficulties of the race and the glory of the crown—but that it may at once run in the way of the Lord's statutes, and give itself wholly to the Lord's glory. It will find it necessary to give up many formerly cherished pleasures, to renounce

*Ps. lxxxvi. 2.

many practices, perhaps to give up many friendships, in which the soul formerly delighted; but so far from regretting this, it feels it to be a privilege that it has any thing to surrender, or that it finds any thing to do, by which the Lord's glory may be manifested, by which His loving-kindness may be acknowledged.—Nor is this in the truly awakened soul, a mere burst of excitement, a mere rapture of enthusiasm. But, like the Apostles' hearers, he will continue stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine, and in the fellowship of believers. Doubtless his conduct will, in many cases, be called enthusiasm; for such is an easy term to reproach an earnestness and zeal which shames our own coldness and inactivity; but he will not the less constantly and consistently walk in the way of the Lord's precepts, as his delight and joy. Believing that salvation is freely and unconditionally given him of

God, he is led by that belief to a steady perseverance in endeavours to glorify the grace of God by a fruitful conformity to the image of His Son. His regard for truth even in the minutest particulars of daily intercourse—his horror of falsehood, however sanctioned by the forms and courtesies of life—his simplicity and godly sincerity of conduct, always aiming at the one point, the glory of God—his preference of the company and pursuits of those that have set out to Zion with their faces thitherward*--his restraint of his evil tempers—his humility of soul—his patience under injury—his steady adherence to the ordinances of grace—his delight in the Lord's House, His Word, His Sabbaths, His Sacraments, and finally, crowning all these his perseverence in prayer, his delight and unwearied earnestness in lifting up his soul to God—these are things by

*Jer. l. 5.

which the genuineness of the change which has taken place is tried, by which the reality of the convictions under which the soul cried out may be approved.

We say not, that a truly converted person never fails in keeping up this evidence of his acceptance with God. Alas! far from it! Too often doth the weakness of the flesh, the frailty of the nature, wrought upon by the malice of the wicked one, cause the believer in Jesus to fall from this persevering and consistent conduct—too often doth he so grieve the Spirit, as to provoke God to hide from him His glorious face, or to leave him for a time to the dullness and deadness of mere profession without the practice of holiness. But the converted soul cannot be *satisfied* so; having once fed in heavenly pastures, it cannot long be content in the earthly indulgences, or carnal practices of the pre-

sent sinful state. He is no true convert who satisfies himself in the willing practice of disobedience to any one, the minutest of the Lord's commands.

Now can there possibly, my Brethren, be a question of more direct and personal importance to each of us, than this, whether we are converted or not? Nay! surely all our hopes of happiness in this life, surely all our expectations of happiness in the life to come, hang upon the decision of that question. Dead in trespasses and sins, lying under the curse of God, at enmity with Him, we cannot have any true happiness here; and except we be converted, we cannot enter heaven hereafter*. To assist you in the decision of this point, my Brethren, have I dwelt upon the conduct of some of the first converts of the Gospel. O! apply the measure to yourselves, Brethren, compare

*Matt. xviii. 3.

yourselves with this rule! Have ye received with gladness the tidings of salvation, simply by faith in a crucified Redeemer, and, with equal joy, heard of the cross, the self-denial, and holiness of heart and life, by which the believers in Jesus must be known? Is it your delight to meditate in the law of God day and night*—your sweetest pleasure to dwell upon His precepts, and to have respect unto His ways?† Is your real enjoyment found in the company and conversation, the fellowship and doctrine of the Lord's people—of the humblest and most despised, it may be, but still simple and decided followers of the Lamb? And is it your joy above all joys to continue in the breaking of bread, in the public ordinances of religion, and in prayer—pouring out the sighings of a contrite heart—pleading the faithfulness of the promises—and, as accepted children, com-

*Ps. i. 2. †Ps. cxix. 15.

municating all your hopes and fears, your difficulties and your trials, your temptations and your troubles, to the bosom of your Heavenly Father? O! be candid with yourselves, Brethren, for it is answering a miserable purpose, to cry Peace, Peace, when there is no peace;*—be candid with yourselves in the examination of your characters, for if none but the converted can enter into heaven, it is time ye ascertained what title ye have to that kingdom!

From the consideration of those characteristics of the early Church, which are universal in the force of their example, and must be considered as equally the marks of the convertedin every age, we proceed to the view of some particulars about them, which, it is evident, cannot so universally apply. They that believed were together, and had all things

*Jer. vi. 14.

common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men as every man had need. Should their practice be now urged upon all who profess the name of Jesus, how completely would it tend to the dismemberment and confusion of the whole system of society. But tho' we should see this effect as the plainest possible consequence of such a system, we should not be justified in allowing our fears of such an issue to interfere with our obedience to a plain and positive command of Christ. Let us lay it down, my Brethren, as a universal rule, that wherever we see a plain precept of the Saviour, it is our duty to act upon it, and to leave the event to God. We are not responsible for events, which flow from a simple and spiritual obedience to the command of Christ. But we do not see that the believers, in the early Church, had any positive command for such community of

goods, but that it was a voluntary act, induced by the necessities of the poor among them, and proceeding from the universal principle of loving their brethren even as they loved themselves. But while this particular exercise of Christian love may be considered as local, and peculiar to the time and circumstances, the spirit which actuated them is of universal application, and should be of universal influence. Among those, at least, who profess to be Christians not in name only, but in deed and in truth, such a spirit may be expected—nay, is demanded, as an evidence of sincerity. For what sense can he have of the love of God, in not even sparing His own Son for his sake, who esteems any thing he may have too dear to be surrendered for the Lord's glory—who presumes to spend upon himself, for the feeding of his own pride, indulging his own appetite, or gratifying his

own ambition, what might be employed to the glory of the Lord, and the benefit of his fellow-men? It may be feared, my Brethren, that the standard of professing Christians in this respect comes far below that of Christ and His Apostles! There is little of that love for Christ, which Christ shewed for sinners—little of that love of our brethren, which is the surest evidence of the love of God*. O! that His Spirit would so shed abroad His love in our hearts, that, being animated and quickened by the Spirit, we might shew our love of Him by a Christian love of one another. O! that there were more readiness for self-sacrifice, more alacrity of self-devotion, more diligence in self-denal,—that the Gospel were planted, not in our heads, but in our hearts, that so from a consistent and holy walk, the glory of the Lord might be gathered, and the

*1 John iv. 21.

body of Christ built up in holiness, cemented by love!

How solemn is the obligation to such consistency of conduct in professing Christians, drawn from the account here given us of its effect in these early days. Not only did it promote the gladness of heart of the disciples themselves, but procured for them also favour with all the people. The most ignorant person is capable in judging, in some degree, of the consistency between profession and practice. Now if they perceive an entire variance between these, and see professing Christians as proud, as covetous, as passionate, as selfish, as those who make no profession--can we wonder at their setting down the whole thing as hypocrisy, and shutting their ears and their hearts against invitations to a condition of such inconsistency, such sin? Think then how many hardened hearts--how many seared

consciences--how many obstinate transgressions, lie at the inconsistent professor's door. O! think how many reasons of how many kinds there are, why the Christian should so let his light shine before men, that they, seeing his good works, may glorify his Father which is in heaven.* Brethren, is this your character? is this, think you, the effect, which your conduct and conversation have on those around you? Are ye thus leading sinners to heaven by the holiness of your walk? O! Brethren, whatsoever things are true--whatsoever things are honest--whatsoever things are just--whatsoever things are pure--whatsoever things are lovely--whatsoever things are of good report--if there be any virtue, or if there be any praise--think on these things, meditate on these things, do these things, and the God of love and peace shall be with you.†

* Matt v. 16. †Phil. iv. 8, 9.

With this lecture, my Brethren, this series closes for the present. Whether it shall be the will of God to permit me ever to resume them, is known to Him alone;—on His will must it depend, and good is His will. If those, which have been delivered, have been, in the minutest degree, profitable to any one soul, my aim will have been abundantly answered, and to the Lord's name I desire to ascribe the glory. The ensuing week is set apart for the most solemn contemplations which can engage the attention of an immortal soul--the contemplation of the last agonies of a dying Saviour. O! may the Lord's Spirit bring us here with hearts prepared to dwell upon the wondrous theme! May He give us such a sense of individual and personal interest in these sufferings, that in looking upon them, we may see the charter of our own salvation, and behold in them the seal of that inheritance, which is

laid up for all that are saved. The Lord add these daily to His Church, accomplish the number of His elect, and hasten His kingdom, for His abundant mercy's sake, in Christ Jesus.