

2 CORINTHIANS XII.

The way in which, in this chapter, we find the highest state to which a Christian can be elevated, an exceptional one, no doubt, as an experience, and the lowest condition to which he can fall, and all the practical principles on which the divine work is carried on between these two extremes, is very striking. In the beginning of the chapter we find a saint in the third heaven, in paradise, where flesh could have no part in apprehension or in communication. He knew not whether he was in the body or out of the body. There was no consciousness of human existence in flesh; so he could not tell, nor could he utter what he had heard when he returned to the consciousness of flesh again. Such is the saint at the beginning of the chapter. At the end we find one, perhaps many, fallen into fornication, uncleanness, and lasciviousness, and unrepentant yet of their sins. What a contrast of the highest heavenly elevation, and the lowest carnal degradation! And the Christian capable of both! What a lesson for every saint, though he may reach neither extreme, as a warning; and how suited to give the consciousness of what natures are at work, and of the elements which are in conflict in him in his spiritual life down here! Another part of this chapter will show us where power alone is to be found to carry him along his path upon the earth in a way consistently with the heavenly good to which he is called. Paul uses a remarkable expres-

sion as to himself when speaking of his elevation to the third heaven: "I knew a man in Christ."

A few preliminary thoughts as to the law will facilitate our understanding this expression. The law gave to man a perfect and divine rule for his conduct upon the earth. But it never took him up into heaven. Heavenly beings, indeed, such as the Angels, act upon the abstract perfection of this divine rule as it is stated by the Lord Himself; they love God with all their heart, and their neighbour as themselves. This is creature perfection. But that is their nature in which God has maintained them. To prescribe feelings and conduct by law is another thing. Christians often forget this. The contents of the law are perfect in their place and for their objects. It tells us what the right state of a creature is, and forbids the wrong that the flesh is inclined to. But why *prescribe* this? No doubt obedience is a part of perfection in a creature. Mere doing right would not suffice for a being subject to God to walk righteously, because God has absolute authority over him. Thus God can, and we know does, prescribe certain particular acts of service to angels; and they obey.

But when a state of soul is prescribed—why is that? Because it is needed. It becomes necessary because of the state of the person to whom the command is addressed. He is otherwise inclined, in danger from other dispositions of doing otherwise. To command a person to do a thing supposes that he is not doing it, nor about to do it without a

command. If we add to this that nine out of the ten commandments forbid positive sins and evil dispositions, because men are disposed to them (or there would be no need to prohibit them), we shall find that the very nature and existence of a law which prescribes the good on God's authority, supposes the evil in man's nature which is opposed to it. This is a deplorable truth, take either aspect of the case. You cannot command love (that is produce it by commanding it), and you cannot put out lusts by forbidding them to a nature which has them as nature. Yet this is what the law does, and must do if God gives one. It proves that what is forbidden is sin, and that it is in man to be forbidden; but law never takes it away. It prescribes good in the creature, but does not produce it. It shows what is right on earth in the creature, but how far is it from taking man into heavenly places! Law can have no pretension to it. Man has now, *by the fall*, the knowledge of good and evil. The law acts on this amazing faculty, of which God could say, "the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil." But how? Man is under the evil; and it requires good in him which is not, and shows him all the evil which is in him. It presses the evil on him, and its consequences in judgment; and, as to the good it requires *in* him, it only gives the consciousness that it is not there.

Further, it shows no good to him as an object before his soul. I repeat, to make the distinction clear, it requires good in him, (loving God and his

neighbour, for example,) but it presents no good to him. There is no revealed object to produce good nor be man's good in him in living power. It works therefore wrath. Where no law is, there is no transgression.

Now grace works quite otherwise ; it does not require good where it is not, though it may *produce* it. It does not condemn the wicked, but forgives and puts away their sin. It presents to us an object, God Himself, but God come near to us in love. It does more, it communicates what is good. It is not a law. It does not require good where it is not, but produces it. It does not condemn the wicked, but it forgives and puts away their wickedness. It does not lead us to carry on the conflict between good and evil by pressing the evil on us, and making us feel it a burden not to be got rid of, and ourselves slaves to it, which the law does, making us feel "this body of death" as that *under whose power we are*, sold to sin, and, supposing we are regenerate, making us feel more truly and deeply that even this does not make us meet its requirements, so that we should be righteous by it, however much "to will is present with us," but the contrary. In a word, grace does not, in the knowledge of good and evil with which it deals, lead us to carry on the conflict by the sense of the power and dreadfulness of evil to which we are subject, and its consequences, but by the possession of perfect and divine good through which we judge the evil as raised above it by the possession of an ob-

ject perfectly good, and which is our delight as well as our life, by the possession of Christ (being in Him and He in us) "I knew," says the apostle, "a man in Christ."

But this we must a little explain and open out. It is often very vague in many a Christian's heart. In paradise, without law, under law and through the presenting of Christ to him, man was responsible for his own conduct as a living man for things done in the body. He was viewed as a child of Adam, or "in the flesh." He stood, that is, before God in the nature in which he had been created, responsible for his conduct in it, for what he was in the flesh. The result was that in respect of these conditions he had failed, failed in paradise, lawless without law, a transgressor when under law, and last and worst of all, the closing ground of judgment, when Christ came, proved to be without a cloak for sin, the hater of Him and His Father. Man was lost.

In a state of probation for four thousand years, the tree had been proved bad; and the more the care, the worse the fruit. All flesh was judged. The tree was to bear no fruit for ever. Not only had he been proved to be a sinner in every way, but he had rejected the remedy presented in grace, for Christ came into an already sinful world, and He was despised and rejected of men. It was not all that man, fallen and guilty, was driven out of paradise; but Christ come in grace was, as far as man's will was concerned, driven out of the world

which was plunged in the misery to which sin had led, and which He had visited in goodness.

Man's history was morally closed. "Now," says the Lord, when Greeks came up, "is the judgment of this world." Hence it is we have "He appeared once in the *end* of the world." But now comes God's work for the sinner. He who knew no sin, was made sin for us. He drinks graciously and willingly the cup given Him to drink. He lays down the life in which He bore the sin—gives it up; and all is gone with it. The very life our sin was borne in on the cross was given up, His blood was shed. He has put away sin for every believer by the sacrifice of Himself—has perfected them for ever. He that is dead is freed from sin. But Christ died. He then is freed from sin. But whose? Ours who believe in Him. It is all gone, gone with the life to which it was attached, in which He bore it. The death of Christ has closed, for faith, the existence of the old man, the flesh, the first Adam life in which we stood as responsible before God, and whose place Christ took for us in grace. What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His only Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh. In that He died, He died unto sin once; in that He liveth, He liveth unto God.

(To be continued, D. V.)

THE NUMBERING AND SERVICE OF THE LEVITES.

NUMBERS, CHAPTERS III. & IV.

The Levites were taken up that the ways of God toward His redeemed firstborn might specially be shown out in them.

The Lord took them from among the children of Israel, instead of all the firstborn. "Therefore," said He, "the Levites shall be mine; because all the firstborn are mine; for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: mine shall they be; I am the Lord." (Num. iii. 11-13.)

They who were the special witnesses of the grace of God, in the day when judgment was poured out, were in a special way to be His own, serving Him in the ways of redemption, as set up in the mercy of God—the ways of His mercy and love to poor sinners lying under judgment. Such, in the shadows of the law, was the service of the Levites; and such, in the good things that have come to us in Christ, is the service of the saints.

There are two numberings of the Levites marked, one in the third chapter, and the other in the fourth chapter of Numbers; but with striking difference between them. In chapter iii. they are reckoned from a month old and upwards; but in chapter iv. they are numbered from thirty years old and upward, even unto fifty years old; they are reckoned

according to the days of their strength in this chapter, and, accordingly, their several services are here revealed to them ; but they were set in blessing as GOD's firstborn in the days of their weakness ; for, not what they did for Him, but what He did for them, was the ground of their standing.

Here two things are taught us. First, the question of service does not come in, when we are taken up as the redeemed in Christ. Second, the demand for service begins at once, when we are looked at as strengthened by Christ. In this service, He reveals His mind, and we obey it.

Among the Levites, some had one service to do, and some had another ; but responsibility to GOD made each do what he did. The sons of Kohath carried the sanctuary ; the sons of Gershon carried the curtains of the tabernacle, and the hangings of the court ; and the sons of Merari bore the boards of the tabernacle, the bars, the pillars, the sockets, and the pins. Such was the choice of the Lord for them, not of them for themselves. Had the sons of Gershon carried the ark, this would have been self-will in them, not service for GOD, because He said to them, Carry the curtains. Responsibility to GOD made each do what he did, and kept him from interfering in other things : and so it is now with the brethren in the Lord. " I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of GOD, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto GOD, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world : but be ye trans-

formed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of GOD. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as GOD hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation." (Rom. xii. 1-8.) The brethren are entreated by the mercies of GOD, to holy devotedness of themselves to GOD, and are exhorted against being conformed to the world. Conformity with the world blinds men's perception of the will of GOD, and sets them doing their own will; but he who is transformed by the renewing of his mind, *proves* what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of GOD: his affections and purposes are after his renewed mind; and the Lord has promised to him who has a single eye, that his whole body shall be full of light. All are called to their labours in subjection to GOD, as were the families of the sons of Levi. If the mercies of GOD are not kept before our hearts, then we fail in presenting ourselves aright. If conformity to the world comes

in, and we lose spiritual energy in our renewed minds then we fail in proving what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God. And if we go beyond our measure of faith, then we assume what we are unfit for.

This varied labour in service is all for perfect order. He among the sons of Merari who carried even the pins, bore what was necessary for the perfection of the tabernacle: *better for him to do this for God than to despise His work, and assume another.* Equally would subjection to God keep the sons of Kohath happy in the holy service of bearing on their shoulders the ark, and table of shewbread, and all that belonged to the sanctuary.

We have God to serve as our purpose; we have His word and Spirit to guide and lead us to the way of service; and all as His redeemed, through the blood of Christ.

The burden of a Levite, as he went forward through the dreary wilderness, was a glorious burden: it belonged to the sanctuary of God, and was the witness of His grace and mercy to sinful men; and so with the service of the saints in the world; their service is in what belongs not to the world. "The bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world." (John vi. 33.) "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again I leave the world, and go to the Father." (John xvi. 28.)

In the sanctuary the uncovered ark of pure gold, with the cherubims overshadowing the mercy-seat,

rested in the most holy place: the priest alone could there see and enjoy it. In Levite service,* the ark was covered over; still it was the ark; from the sanctuary it came; and inside that covering lay all the hidden splendour in which, in the sanctuary, it appeared. This made the burden a precious one to a devoted Levite; he knew whence it came, and what it was; and so, if it was *only a pin*, it belonged to the tabernacle, and the Lord told him to carry it.

In all this, the service of the Levite waited on and followed the service of the priest; this was the order established of God; and in all our service of testimony in the world, communion in the holiest with the things of which we testify, should ever go before. Thus it is that in responsibility we shall be led out, but also controlled. In the holiest we have our communion *with* Christ: in our service in the world we have our testimony *about* Christ; but this should ever follow, and be connected with the other.

If the acts of service of the sons of Kohath were made the standard to judge the conduct of the sons of Merari, then they might be despised in their service; but they did unto the Lord what they did, according to His will concerning them; and in His good will the sons of Kohath and the sons of Merari were all fellow labourers in the same tabernacle.

* The communion of the saints, as having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, is according to the service of the priests.

The testimony of the saints, as sent into the world to give glory to Christ's name, is according to the service of the Levites.

So it was, that when Gaius, for the Lord's sake, received the strangers who, for His name's sake, went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles, the apostle adds, "We ought therefore to receive such, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth." The poor preacher was a *helper* to the truth when he proclaimed Christ's name. And Gaius was a *fellow-helper* to the truth when he took him into his house, and fed and lodged him.

So again, "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward." Here is one who is not a prophet himself; but he loves a prophet, and receives him as such, and thus becomes associated in blessing with a prophet. Did he assume to be a prophet when he was not one, then there would be no such association, and no blessing.

In all this may we learn subjection to God, knowing that if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.

Such is the grace of God our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

NOTES AND RECOLLECTIONS OF A READING.

There is never any light from God without love. Whenever there is a *real* revelation of God to a soul, you always get the *conscience reached* and the *heart affected*.

I believe we never know anything about God with the mind, save that we cannot know Him. All true knowledge humbles, because it brings something to me of God that I did not know before, and it finds in me something contrary to it; truth perfectly divine and heavenly in its character, yet suited to me,—it brings what is heavenly, and shows me I am not that and humbles me. Take the thief on the cross; light shines in, and see the effect: "Dost not thou fear God seeing thou art in the same condemnation, and we indeed justly." Truth is of no use until it is subjective, i.e., *until it affects me*, otherwise it is only a matter of memory. Thus church truth may be held by one who does not know what it is to be in the Spirit, it is only a matter of memory. The Holy Ghost does not merely say there is a church, but *we* are members of His body, of His flesh, of His bones; it is not a mere dogma.

The tendency with us is to make theology, and not to take what Scripture says. I do not get merely a statement, but *God connects it livingly with my heart and affections*. Another important thing is how far the actual condition of a soul is such, that it is *able to receive truth*. Thus at Corinth the Apostle fed them with milk, they were not able to take strong meat, so also in Hebrews; we need to bear this in mind, if you talk to a person about truth that he is not in a state to receive, you only puff him up. *If a Christian walks unfaithfully he may lose even what he knows*. All living truth becomes *a part of myself like food*; thus it is said "if any man *thirst*," and then it speaks of coming out of his belly, that is out of the very inmost part of the man himself. I do not believe any one has got the truth unless it has engaged his affections to Christ and moved his conscience.

CHRISTIAN CHARACTER.

The courage, patience, firmness, and zeal of a Christian, are a perfectly distinct order of character from the courage, firmness, patience, and zeal of a natural man—self confidence, self glory, self preservation, self exaltation, are the essential principles of one; confidence in God, self renunciation, subjection to God, glory to God, abasement of self, being essential principles of the other. So that the essential principles that formed the character of Paul as a natural man, were destroyed through the cross, in order that his soul should imbibe the life of Christ, which was the principle that formed his character as a christian, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Though Christ was a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which he suffered. *In any instance that we give up our own will, without sacrificing conscience, we are gainers.* If but my dog exercises my patience and makes me yield my will, he is a blessing to me. Christ never willed anything but what was good and holy; yet how often was His will thwarted, how often hindered in designs of good.

FRAGMENTS.

"Search *The Scriptures*.....they are they which testify of ME." "All *Scripture* is given by inspiration of GOD." "*The Scriptures*" have a *living* source, and *living* power has pervaded their com-

position: hence their infiniteness of bearing, and the impossibility of separating any one part from its connection with the whole, because *One* GOD is the *living* centre from which all flows; *One* CHRIST, the *living* centre round which all its truth circles, and to which it refers, though in various glory; and *One* SPIRIT, the *divine* sap which carries its power from its source in GOD to the minutest branches of the all-united truth, testifying of the glory, the grace, and the truth of Him whom GOD sets forth as the object and centre and head of all that is in connection with Himself, of HIM who is, withal, God over all, blessed for evermore!

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“ALL THINGS ARE OURS.”—Every possible glory indeed is ours. The blessedness that is in God Himself, as far as it can be communicated, for we dwell in God and God in us. Relative blessedness, for we are children. Associated blessedness, in union with the blessed One, for we are the Bride. Official nearness and glory, for we are kings and priests. Human blessedness, for we shall be perfect men, after the image of the Second Adam. Corporate blessedness, for we shall have joy together. Individual, for we shall have a name given which no one knows but he that receives it; and we shall have the fulness of the Holy Ghost dwelling in us, unbindered by these poor bodies; yea, clothed upon by a vessel suited to the power of the divine inhabitant, so as to be able in full largeness of heart to enjoy all this.

"THE BELIEVER'S PORTION."

Jesus, my Saviour! Thou art mine,
The Father's gift of love divine;
All Thou hast done, and all Thou art,
Are now the portion of my heart.

Poor, feeble, wretched, as I am,
I now can glory in Thy name;
Now cleansed in Thy most precious blood
And made the righteousness of God.

All that Thou hast, Thou hast for me,
All my fresh springs are hid in Thee;
In Thee I live; while I confess
I nothing am, yet all possess.

O Saviour, teach me to abide
Close sheltered at Thy wounded side,
Each hour receiving "grace on grace,"
Until I see Thee face to face.