

Simon Peter — His life and its lessons.

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Part 1

We propose, in dependence upon the Spirit's guidance, to write a few papers on the life and ministry of the blessed servant of Christ whose name stands at the head of this paper. We shall trace him through the Gospels, through the Acts, and through the Epistles, for he appears in all the three grand divisions of the New Testament. We shall meditate upon his call, upon his conversion, his confession, his fall, his restoration; in a word, we shall glance at all the scenes and circumstances of his remarkable history, in which we shall find, if we mistake not, many valuable lessons which we may well ponder. May the Lord the Spirit be our Guide and Teacher!

For the earliest notice of Simon Peter, we must turn to the first chapter of the Gospel of John. Here we find, at the very outset, a scene full of interest and instruction. Amongst those who had been gathered by the powerful ministry of John the Baptist there were two men who heard him deliver his glowing testimony to the Lamb of God. We must quote the words: "Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God."

These words fell with peculiar power upon the hearts of two of John's disciples. Not that the words were specially addressed to them; at least, we are not told so. But they were words of life, freshness, and power — words welling up from the depths of a heart that had found an object in the Person of Christ. On the preceding day, John had spoken of the work of Christ. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." And again, "The same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost."

But let the reader note particularly John's testimony to the *person* of the Lamb of God. "John stood," riveted, no doubt, by the object which filled the vision of his soul. "And looking upon Jesus, as He walked, he said, Behold the Lamb of God." It was this that went right to the very heart of the two disciples who stood beside him, and so affected them that they left their master to follow this new and infinitely more glorious Object that had been presented to their notice.

There is always immense moral power in the testimony that emanates from an absorbed heart. There is nothing formal, official, or mechanical, in such testimony. It is the pure fruit of heart communion; and there is nothing like it. It is not the mere statement of true things about Christ. It is the heart occupied and satisfied with Christ. It is the eye riveted, the heart fixed, the whole moral being centred and absorbed in that one commanding object that fills all Heaven with His glory.

This is the kind of testimony we so much want both in our private life and in our public reunions. It is this that tells, with such marvellous power, on others. We never can speak effectively for Christ, unless our hearts are filled with Him. And so it is also, in reference to our meetings. When Christ is the one absorbing object of every heart, there will be a tone and an atmosphere which must tell in some way or other on all who enter the place. There may not be much gift, not much teaching — very little charm in the singing, for persons of musical taste; but oh! there is heart-enjoyment of Christ. His name is as ointment poured forth. Every eye is fixed on Him; every heart is centred in Him; He is the commanding object — the satisfying portion. The unanimous voice of the assembly seems to say, "Behold the Lamb of God," and this must produce its own powerful effect, either in attracting souls to

Him, or in convincing them that the people in that assembly have gotten something of which they know nothing at all.

But let us note particularly the effect produced on the two disciples of John. "They heard him speak and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto Him, Rabbi — which is to say, being interpreted, Master — where dwellest Thou? He said unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him that day; for it was about the tenth hour." Thus the blessed testimony of the Baptist led them to follow Jesus, and as they followed on, fresh light was poured upon their path, and they found themselves at length, in the very abode of that One of whom they had heard their master speak.

Nor was this all, though it was much — with their own hearts' deepest longings satisfied. There was now that delightful going out after others which must, in every instance, be the result of close personal acquaintance and occupation with the Person of Christ. "One of the two which heard John, and followed Jesus, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus."

Here is something which we may well ponder. See how the circle of blessing widens! See the result of a single sentence uttered in truth and reality! It might seem to a carnal observer as though John had lost by his testimony. Far from it. That honoured servant found his joy in pointing souls to Jesus. He did not want to link them on to himself, or to gather a party round himself. "John bare witness of Him, and cried saying, This was He of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me." And again, "This is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they ask him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. And they which were sent were of the Pharisees." What a fine moral lesson for Pharisees to be set down to! "And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth One among you, whom ye know not. He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose."

It is not very likely that the man who could give such answers, and bear such a testimony, would be, in the smallest degree, affected by the loss of a few disciples. But, in good truth it was not losing them when they followed Jesus and found their abode with Him. Of this we have the very finest evidence that could be furnished, from John's own lips, in reply to those who evidently thought that their master might possibly feel at being left in the shade. "They came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, He that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all come to Him. John answered and said, *A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.* Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before Him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: *this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease*" (John 3: 26-30).

Noble words! It was the joy of this most illustrious servant — this greatest of woman born, to hide himself behind his Master, and find all his personal springs in Him. As to himself, he was but a voice. As to his work, he was only baptising with water, he was not worthy to loose the latchet of his

Master's shoe.

Such was John. Such the man whose glowing testimony led the brother of Simon Peter to the feet of the Son of God. The testimony was clear and distinct, and the work deep and real in the souls of those who received it.

It does the heart good to note the simple, earnest, forcible words of Simon's brother, Andrew. He is able to say, without reserve or hesitation, "*We have found the Messiah.*" It was this that led him to look after his brother. He lost no time. Saved and blessed himself, he would, at once, begin to lead his brother into the same blessing.

How simple! How morally lovely! How divinely natural! No sooner had he found the Messiah, than he went in search of his brother to tell him of his joy. It must ever be thus. We cannot doubt for a moment, that the actual finding Christ for ourselves is the true secret of looking after others. There is no uncertainty in Andrew's testimony — no wavering — no doubting or fearing. He does not even say, "I hope I have found." No; all is clear and distinct; and, we may say, with all possible assurance, it would not have done Simon Peter much good had it been anything else. An uncertain sound is not much use to any one.

It is a grand point to be able to say, "*I have found Christ.*" Reader, can you say it? Doubtless, you have heard of Him. It may be you have heard from the lips of some ardent lover of Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God." But have you followed that blessed One? If so, you will long to find some one to whom you can speak of your newly found treasure, and bring him to Jesus. Begin at home, Get hold of your brother or your sister, or your companion, your fellow-student, your fellow-shopman, your fellow-workman, your fellow-servant, and whisper lovingly, but clearly and decidedly, into his ear, "I have found Jesus. Do come, taste and see how gracious He is. Come! oh do come to Jesus." Remember this was the way that the great Apostle Peter was first called. He first heard of Jesus from the lips of his own brother Andrew. This mighty workman — this great preacher who was blessed, on one occasion, to three thousand souls — who opened the kingdom of Heaven to the Jew in Acts 3 and to the Gentile in Acts 10 — this blessed servant was brought to Christ by the hand of his own brother in the flesh.

Part 2

The notice which we have of our apostle, in John 1, is very brief indeed, though, doubtless, there is much wrapped up in it. "Andrew first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, He said, Thou art Simon, the son of Jonas: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone."

Now, we have no record here of any deep spiritual work in the soul of Simon. We are told his name in the old creation, and his name in the new; but there is no allusion whatever to those deep exercises of soul of which we know he was the subject. For these we must ask the reader to turn for a few moments to Luke 5, where we have a marvellous piece of divine workmanship.

"And it came to pass that, as the people pressed upon Him to hear the word of God, He stood by the lake of Gennesaret, and saw two ships standing by the lake; but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And He entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And He sat down, and taught the people out of the ship."

Mark especially the moral grace that shines here. "He *prayed* him that he would thrust out *a little* from the land." Though Lord of all creation — Possessor of Heaven and earth — He nevertheless, as

the lowly, gracious Man, courteously owns Simon's proprietorship, and asks, as a favour, that he would thrust out *a little* from the shore. This was morally lovely, and we may rest assured it produced its own effect upon the heart of Simon.

"Now when He had left speaking, He said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught." Simon was about to be well paid for the loan of his boat. "And Simon, answering, said unto Him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless, at Thy word, I will let down the net." There was power, as well as grace, in that word! "And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes; and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink." Neither their nets nor their ships were able to sustain the fruit of divine power and goodness. "When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

Here, then, we have the great practical effect produced in Peter's soul by the combined action of grace and power. He is brought to see himself in the light of the divine presence, where alone self can be truly seen and judged. Simon had heard the word of Jesus addressed to the multitude on the shore. He had felt the sweet grace and moral beauty of His way towards himself. He had marked the display of divine power in the astonishing draught of fish. All told powerfully upon his heart and conscience, and brought him on his face before the Lord.

Now this is what we may call a genuine work of conviction. Simon is in the place of true self-judgement — a very blessed place indeed — a place from which all must start if they are to be much used in the Lord's work, or if, indeed, they are ever to exhibit much depth or stability in the divine life. We need never look for any real power or progress unless there is a deep and solid work of the Spirit of God in the conscience. Persons who pass rapidly into what they call peace, are apt to pass as rapidly out of it again. It is a very serious thing indeed to be brought to see ourselves in the light of God's presence, to have our eyes opened to the truth of our past history, our present condition, and our future destiny. Simon Peter found it so in his day, and so have all those who have been brought to a saving knowledge of Christ. Harken to Isaiah's words, when he saw himself in the powerful light of the divine glory. "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: *for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.*" So also in the case of the patriarch, Job. "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now *mine eye seeth Thee.* Wherefore I *abhor myself*, and repent in dust and ashes."

These glowing utterances reveal a deep and genuine work in both the patriarch and the prophet. And surely our apostle occupied the same moral ground when he exclaimed, from the very depths of a broken heart, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." If Simon is to be called Cephas, he must be thoroughly broken up, and brought to the end of himself. If he is to be used to catch men, he must learn, in a divine way, man's true condition. If he is to teach others that "all flesh is as grass," he must learn the application of this great truth to his own heart.

Thus it is in every case. Look at Saul of Tarsus. What mean those three days of blindness, during which he neither did eat nor drink? May we not confidently affirm that they were serious days, perhaps the most serious in the entire history of that remarkable man? They were, doubtless, days in the which he was led down to the most profound depths of his moral being, the deepest roots of his history, his nature, his character, his conduct, his religion. He was led to see that his whole life had been a terrible mistake, an awful lie; that his very career as a religious man had been one of mad rebellion against the Christ of God. All this, we may feel assured, passed in solemn and soul-subduing review before the

soul of this deeply, because divinely, convicted man. His repentance was no superficial work; it was deep and thorough; it left its impress upon the whole of his after course, character, and ministry. He, too, like Simon, was brought to the end of himself, and there he found an Object that not only met his deepest need, but also perfectly satisfied all the cravings and aspirations of his renewed being.

Now, we must confess we delight in contemplating a spiritual work of this kind. It is truly refreshing to dwell upon conversions of this type. We greatly fear that in much of the work of our time there is a sad lack of depth and spiritual power, and, as a consequence, a lack of stability in the Christian character, of depth and permanency in the Christian course. It may be that those of us who are engaged in the work of evangelisation are feeble and shallow in the divine life ourselves, that we are not near enough to Christ to understand how to deal with souls; that we do not know how to present the truth from God's side of it; that we are more desirous of showing out how the sinners need is met, than how the glory of God is secured and maintained. We do not, perhaps, sufficiently press the claims of truth and holiness upon the consciences of our hearers. There is a want of fullness in the presentation of the truth of God, too much harping upon one string; there is a barrenness and dreary monotony in the preaching, arising from lack of abiding near the fountain head, and drinking into our own souls from the inexhaustible springs of grace and truth in the Person and work of Christ. Perhaps, too, we are more occupied with ourselves and our preaching than with Christ and His glory; more anxious to be able to parade the results of our work, than to be a sweet savour of Christ to Godward.

We cannot but feel the weight and seriousness of these considerations for all who take part in the work of the gospel. We certainly do need to be more in the presence of God in reference to our service, for we cannot, by any possibility, hide from ourselves the fact, in reference to the preaching of this our day, that the fruit is small in quantity, and poor in quality. We desire to bless God for any display of His grace and power in souls; though we are by no means able to accredit as genuine much that is boastfully paraded in the way of conversion. What we long for is a deep, genuine unmistakable work of the Holy Ghost; a work which will prove itself, beyond all contradiction, by its permanent results in the life and character. It is one thing to reckon up and publish a number of cases of conversion, and quite another to see these cases made good in actual fact. The Holy Ghost can, and does tell us at times in the page of inspiration the number of souls converted. He tells us of three thousand on one occasion. He can do so, because He knows perfectly all about it. He can read the heart. He can distinguish between the spurious and the genuine. But when men undertake to count up and publish the number of their converts, we must receive their statement with considerable reserve and caution.

Not that we would be suspicious. God forbid; yea, we would earnestly cultivate a hopeful temper of soul. Still, we cannot but feel that it is better, in every case, to let the work speak for itself. All that is really divine is sure to be found, even though it be after many days; whereas, on the other hand, there is immense danger, both for the workman and his work, in an eager and hasty reckoning up and publishing of results.

But we must return to the lake of Gennesaret, and dwell for a moment on the lovely grace that shines forth in our Lord's dealing with Simon Peter. The work of conviction was deep and real. There could be no mistaking it. The arrow had entered the heart, and gone right to its very centre. Peter felt and owned that he was a man full of sin. He felt he had no right to be near such an one as Jesus; and yet we may truly say he would not for worlds have been anywhere else. He was perfectly sincere in saying, "Depart from me," though we cannot but believe he had an inward conviction that the blessed One would do nothing of the kind. And if he had, he was right. Jesus could never depart from a poor broken-hearted sinner — no, never. It was His richest, deepest, joy to pour the healing balm of His love and grace into a wounded soul. It was His delight to heal the broken heart. He was anointed for that

work, and it was His meat and His drink to do it, blessed forever be His holy name!

"And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men." Here was the divine response to the cry of a contrite heart. The wound was deep, but the grace was deeper still. The soothing hand of a Saviour-God applied the precious balm. Simon was not only convicted, but converted. He saw himself to be a man full of sin, but he saw the Saviour full of grace; nor was it possible that his sin could be beyond the reach of that grace. Oh, no, there is grace in the heart of Jesus, as there is power in His blood, to meet the very chief of sinners. "Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook *all* and followed Him."

This was real work. It was a *bona fide* case, as to which there could be no question; a case of conviction, conversion, and consecration.

Part 3

We closed our last paper with these suggestive words, "*They forsook all and followed Him*" — words expressive, at once, of thorough separation from the things of time and of nature, and of wholehearted consecration to Christ and His interests.

Both these we see in Simon Peter. There was a deep and blessed work wrought in his soul at the lake of Gennesaret. He was given to see himself, in the light of the divine presence, where alone self can be really seen and judged. We have no reason to suppose that, viewed from a human standpoint, Simon was worse than his neighbours. On the contrary, it is more than probable, that so far as his outward life was concerned, it was more blameless than that of many around him. He was not, like the great apostle of the Gentiles, arrested at the very height of a mad career of rebellion against Christ and His cause. He is introduced to us, by the inspired historian, in the pursuit of his quiet and honest calling as a fisherman.

But then Scripture expressly informs us that, "There is no difference, for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3). And it repeats this statement, in chap. 10 of the same Epistle, basing it upon another footing, "There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him."

See that you really understand this most important doctrine. It is not that there are not broad lines of distinction, in a moral and social point of view, between men. Most assuredly there are such. There is, for example, a vast difference between the wretched drunkard who comes home, or is carried home, night after night, worse than a beast, to his poor broken-hearted wife and squalid, starving children, and a sober, industrious man, who realises his responsibility as a husband and a father, and seeks to fulfil the duties attaching to such relationships.

Now, we judge it would be a very great mistake indeed to ignore such a distinction as this. We believe that God, in His moral government of the world, recognises it. Contrast, for a moment, the drunkard's home with that of the sober man. Yea, contrast their whole career, their social position, their course and character. Who can fail to recognize the amazing difference between the two? There is a certain way of presenting what is called, "the no-difference doctrine" which, to say the least of it, is far from judicious. It does not allow the margin which, as we believe, Scripture suggests, wherein to insert great social and moral distinctions between men and men — distinctions which only blindness itself can refuse to see. If we look at the present government of God, we cannot but see that there is a very serious difference indeed between one man and another. Men reap as they sow. The drunken spendthrift reaps as he sows; and the sober, industrious, honest man reaps as he sows. The enactments of God's moral government are such as to render it impossible for men to escape, even in this life, the

consequences of their ways.

Nor is this all. Not only does God's present government take cognisance of the conduct of men, causing them to reap, even here, the due reward of their deeds, but when Scripture opens to our view, as it does in manifold places, the awful judgement to come, it speaks of "books being opened." It tells us that men "shall be judged *every man according to their works.*" In short, we have close and accurate discrimination, and not a promiscuous muddling of men and things.

And further, be it remembered, that the Word of God speaks of degrees of punishment. It speaks of "few stripes" and "many stripes." It uses such words as "more tolerable" for one than another.

What mean such words, if there be not varied grounds of judgement, varied characters of responsibility, varied measures of guilt, varied degrees of punishment? Men may reason; but "the Judge of all the earth will do right." It is of no possible use for people to argue and discuss. Every man will be judged and punished according to his deeds. This is the teaching of Holy Scripture; and it would be much better and safer and wiser for men to submit to it than to reason against it, for they may rest fully assured of it that the judgement-seat of Christ will make very short work of their reasonings. Impenitent sinners will be judged and punished according to their works: and, although men may affect to believe that it is inconsistent with the idea of a God of love that any of His creatures should be condemned to endure eternal punishment in hell, still sin must be punished; and those who reason against its punishment have only a one-sided view of God's nature and character. They have invented a god of their own who will connive at sin. But it will not do. The God of the Bible, *the God whom we see at the cross*, the God of Christianity will beyond all question, execute judgement upon all who reject His Son; that judgement will be according to every man's works; and the result of that judgement will, inevitably, be "The lake that burneth with fire and brimstone," forever and forever.

We deem it of the utmost importance to press on all whom it may concern the line of truth on which we have been dwelling. It leaves wholly untouched the real truth of the no-difference doctrine; but, at the same time, it qualifies and adjusts the mode of presenting the truth. It is always well to avoid an ultra one-sided way of stating things. It damages truth and stumbles souls. It perplexes the anxious, and gives a plea to the caviller. The full truth of God should always be unfolded, and thus all will be right. Truth puts men and things in their right places, and maintains a holy moral balance which is absolutely priceless.

Is it then asserted that there is a difference? Not as regards the question of righteousness before God. On this ground there is not a shadow of difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Looked at in the light of that glory, all human distinctions vanish. All are lost, guilty and condemned. From the very lowest strata of society — its deepest dregs, up to the loftiest heights of moral refinement, men are seen, in the light of the divine glory, to be utterly and hopelessly lost. They all stand on one common ground, are all involved in the one common ruin. And not only so, but those who plume themselves on their morality, refinement, orthodoxy, and religiousness, are further from the kingdom of God than the vilest of the sons and daughters of men, as our Lord said to the chief priests and elders, "Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you" (Matt. 21).

This is very humbling to human pride and pretension. It is a doctrine to which none will ever submit until they see themselves as Simon Peter saw himself in the immediate presence of God. All who have ever been there will fully understand those self-condemning words, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." These were accents flowing from the depths of a truly penitent and contrite soul. There is what we may venture to call a lovely inconsistency in them. Simon had no such thought

as that Jesus would depart from him. He had, we may feel assured, an instinctive sense that that blessed One who had spoken such words to him, and shown such grace, could not turn away from a poor broken-hearted sinner. And he judged rightly. Jesus had not come down from Heaven to turn His back upon any one who needed Him. "He came to seek and to save that which is lost." "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." "Him that cometh unto Me, I will *in no wise* cast out." A Saviour-God had come down into this world, not, surely, to turn away from a lost sinner, but to save him and bless him, and make him a blessing. "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men."

Such was the grace that shone upon the soul of Simon Peter. It removed his guilt, hushed his fears, and filled him with joy and peace in believing. Thus it is in every case. Divine pardon follows human confession — follows it with marvellous rapidity. "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord: and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." God delights to pardon. It is the joy of His loving heart to cancel our guilt, and fill our souls with His own blessed peace, and to make us the messengers of His grace to others.

Not that we are called in the same way, or to the same work, as our apostle; but surely we are called to follow the Lord, and cleave to Him, with purpose of heart. This is the blessed privilege and sacred duty of every saved soul on the face of the earth; we are imperatively called upon to break with the world, and follow Christ.

It is not a question of abandoning our proper calling in life, as in Simon's case. Few indeed and far between are the cases in which such a course of action is fitting. Many, alas! have assayed to do this, and have entirely broken down, simply because they were not called of God *to* it, or sustained of God *in* it. We are convinced that, as a rule, it is better for every man to work with his hands or his brains at some bread-winning calling, and preach and teach as well, if gifted to do so. There are exceptions, no doubt, to the rule. There are some who are so manifestly called, fitted, used, and sustained of God, that there can be no possible mistake as to their course. Their hands are so full of work, their every moment so engrossed with ministry in speaking or writing, teaching publicly and from house to house, that it would be a simple impossibility for them to take up what is termed a secular calling — though we like not the phrase. All such have to go on with God, looking only to Him, and He will infallibly maintain them unto the end.

Still, admitting, as we are bound to do fully, the exceptions to the rule, we are nevertheless convinced that, as a rule, it is better in every way for men to be able to preach and teach without being chargeable to any. It gives moral weight, and it furnishes a fine testimony against the wretched hirelingism of Christendom so demoralising to souls, and so damaging, in every way, to the cause of Christ.

But Christian reader, we have to distinguish between abandoning our lawful calling and breaking with the world. The former may be quite wrong; the latter is our bounden duty. We are called to rise up, in the spirit of the mind and in the firm purpose of the heart, out of all merely worldly influences, to break every worldly link, and lay aside every weight, in order to follow our blessed Lord and Master. We are to be absolutely and completely for Him in this world, as He is for us in the presence of God. When this is really the case with us, it matters not whether we are sweeping a crossing or evangelising a continent. All is done to Him. This is the one grand point. If Christ has His due place in our hearts, all will be right. If He has not, nothing will be right. If there is any undercurrent in the soul, any secondary object, any worldly motive, any selfish aim or end, there can be no progress. *We must make Christ and His cause our absorbing object.*

Part 4

The more deeply we ponder the history of professing Christians, whether as furnished by the pen of inspiration, or as coming within the range of personal observation, the more fully we must see the vast importance of a complete break with the world, at the outset. If there be not this, it is vain to look for inward peace, or outward progress. There may be a measure of clearness as to the doctrines of grace, the plan of salvation, as it is called, justification by faith, and the like. But unless there is the thorough judgement of self, and the complete surrender of this present evil world, peace and progress must be out of the question. How can there be peace where *self*, in some one or other of its thousand shapes, is fostered? And how can there be progress where the heart is hankering after the world, halting between two opinions, and vacillating between Christ and present things? Impossible. As well might a racer expect to get on in the race while still lingering about the starting post, and encumbering himself with heavy weights.

Is it then, that peace is to be found by denying self and giving up the world? Most certainly not. But neither can peace ever be found while self is indulged and the world retained. True peace is found *only* in Christ — peace of conscience in His finished work — peace of heart in His blessed Person. All this is clear enough. But how comes it to pass that hundreds of people who know, or profess to know, these things have no settled peace, and never seem to take a single step in advance? You meet them, week after week, month after month, year after year, and there they are in the same position, in the same state, and with the same old story, chronic cases of self-occupation, stereotyped world-borderers, "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." They seem to delight in hearing the gospel clearly preached, and truth fully unfolded. In fact, they cannot endure anything else. But, for all that, they are never clear, bright, or happy. How can they be? They are halting between two opinions; they have never broken with the world; they have never surrendered a whole heart to Christ.

Here, we are persuaded, lies the real secret of the whole matter as regards that class of persons now before us. "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." A man who tries to keep one eye on the world, and the other on Christ, will be found to have no eye for Christ, but both eyes for the world. It must be so: Christ must be all or nothing; and hence it is the very height of absurdity to talk of peace or progress where Christ is not the absorbing object of the soul. Where He is, there will never be any lack of settled peace; and there will be progress. The Holy Ghost is jealous for the glory of Christ, and He can never minister comfort, consolation, or strength to a heart divided between Him and the world. It could not be. He is grieved by such unfaithfulness; and instead of being the minister of comfort, He must be the stern reprover of indulged selfishness, worldliness, and vacillation.

Let us look at the case of our apostle. How refreshing it is to contemplate his thoroughgoing style! His starting was of the right sort. "He forsook all and followed Christ." There was no halting here, at all events; no vacillating between Christ and present things. Boats, nets, fish, natural ties, all are unhesitatingly and unreservedly surrendered, not as a matter of cold duty or legal service, but as the grand and necessary result of having seen the glory and heard the voice of the Son of God.

Thus it was with Simon Peter, at the opening of his remarkable career. All was clear and unequivocal, whole-hearted and decided, so far as the starting was concerned; and we must bear this in mind, as we pursue his after history. No doubt, we shall find mistakes and stumblings, failure, ignorance, and sin; but, underneath, and in spite of all this, we shall find a heart true to Jesus — a heart divinely taught to appreciate the Christ of God.

This is a grand point. Blunders may well be borne with, when the heart beats true to Christ. Some one has remarked that, "The blunderers do all the work." If this be so, the reason is that those

blunderers have real affection for their Lord; and that is precisely what we all want. A man may make a great many mistakes, but if he can say when challenged by his Lord, "Thou knowest that I love Thee," he is sure to come right in the end; and not only so, but, even in the very midst of his mistakes, our hearts are much more drawn to him than to the cold, correct, sleek professor, who thinks of himself, and seeks to make the best of both worlds.

Simon Peter was a true lover of Christ. He had a divinely given sense of His preciousness, of the glory of His Person, and the heavenly character of His mission. All this comes out, with much force and freshness, in his varied confessions of Christ, even before the day of Pentecost. We shall glance at one or two of these, not with any view to chronological order, but simply to illustrate and prove the lovely devotedness of this true-hearted servant of Christ.

Let us turn to Matt. 16, "When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked His disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" Weighty question! Upon the answer to this question hangs the whole moral condition and future destiny of every human being under the sun. All really depends upon the heart's estimate of Christ. This it is, which like a great moral indicator, reveals a man's true state, character, bent and object, in all things. It is not merely a question of his outward life, or of his profession of faith. The former may be blameless, and the latter orthodox; but, if underneath all this blameless morality and orthodox profession, there be not one true pulsation of the heart for Christ, no divinely wrought sense of what, and who, and whence He is, then verily all the morality and the orthodoxy are but the trappings with which a guilty, hell-deserving sinner adorns himself in the eyes of his fellows, or with which he deceives himself as to the awful eternity which lies before him. "What think ye of Christ?" is the all-deciding question; for God the Holy Ghost has emphatically declared that, "If any man" — no matter who or what he be — "love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha" (1 Cor. 16: 22).

How awful is this! And how remarkable to find it at the close of such an Epistle as the first to the Corinthians! How forcibly it declares to all who will only bend their ears to listen, that love to Christ is the basis of all sound doctrine, the motive spring of all true morality! If that blessed One be not enthroned at the very centre of the heart's affections, an orthodox creed is an empty delusion; and an unblemished reputation is but dust cast in a man's eyes to prevent him seeing his true condition in the sight of God. The Christians at Corinth had fallen into many doctrinal errors and moral evils, all needing rebuke and correction; but when the inspiring Spirit pronounces His awful anathema, it is levelled, not at the introducers of any one special error, or moral pravity, but at "any man who loves not the Lord Jesus Christ."

This is peculiarly solemn at all times; but specially so for the day in which our lot is cast, when the Person and glory of Christ are so little thought of or cared for. A man may actually blaspheme Christ, deny His deity or His eternal Sonship, and yet be received into professing Christian circles, and allowed to preside at so-called religious meetings. Surely all this must be dreadful in the sight of God, whose purpose it is "that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father"; and that every knee should bow, and every tongue confess to Jesus as Lord of all. God is jealous for the honour of His Son; and the man that neglects, rejects, and blasphemes that blessed One will yet have to learn and own the eternal justice of that most solemn decree, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha."

How momentous, therefore, the question put by our Lord Christ to His disciples, "Whom do *men* say that I, the Son of man, am?" Alas, "men" knew nothing, cared nothing about Him. They knew neither who He was, what He was, nor whence He was. "Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some,

Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets." In a word, there was endless speculation, because there was utter indifference and thorough heartlessness. The human heart has not so much as a single true thought about Christ, not one atom of affection for Him. Such is the awful condition of the very best of men until renewed by divine grace. They know not, they love not, they care not for the Son of God — the Beloved of the Father's heart — the Man on the throne of Heaven's majesty. Such is their moral condition, and hence their every thought, word, and act is contrary to God. They have not a single feeling in common with God, for the most distinct of all reasons, that the One who is everything to Him is nothing to them. Christ is God's standard, and every one and everything must be measured by Him. The heart that does not love Christ has not a single pulsation in unison with the heart of God; and the life that does not spring from love to Christ however blameless, respectable, or splendid in the eyes of men, is a worthless, objectless, misspent life in the judgement of God.

But how truly delightful to turn from all the heartlessness and indifference of "men" and harken to the testimony of one who was taught of God to know and own who the Son of man was! "Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Here was the true answer. There was no vain speculation here, no uncertainty, no may be this, or may be that. It was divine testimony flowing from divinely given knowledge. It was not yea and nay, but yea and amen to the glory of God. We may rest fully assured that these glowing words of Simon Peter went up, like fragrant incense, to the throne of God, and refreshed the heart of the One who sat there. There is nothing in all the world so precious to God as a heart that, in any measure, appreciates Christ. Let us never forget this!

"And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter; and upon this Rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Here we have the very first direct allusion to the Church, or assembly of Christ; and the reader will note that our Lord speaks of it as yet future. He says, "I *will* build My church." He was the Rock, the divine foundation; but ere a single stone could be built on Him, He must die.

This is a grand cardinal truth of Christianity — a truth which our apostle had yet to learn, notwithstanding his brilliant and beautiful confession. Simon Peter was not yet prepared for the profound mystery of the cross. He loved Christ, and he had been taught of God to own Him in a very full and blessed manner; but he had yet much to learn ere he could take in the soul-subduing truth that this blessed Son of the living God must die, ere even he, as a living stone, could be built upon Him. "From that time forth began Jesus to show unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day."

Here the solemn truth begins to break through the clouds. But Simon Peter is not prepared for it. It withered up all his Jewish hopes and earthly expectations. What! The Son of the living God must die! How could it be? The glorious Messiah be nailed to a cross! "Then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying, Be it far from Thee, (or pity Thyself) Lord, this shall not be unto Thee."

Such is man! Such was even Simon Peter! He would fain turn the blessed Lord away from the cross! He would, in his ignorance, frustrate the eternal counsels of God, and play into the hands of the devil! Poor Peter! What a rock he would be for the Church to be built upon! "The Lord turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind Me, Satan, thou art an offence unto Me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."

Withering words? Who would have thought that "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona," should so

speedily be followed by, "Get thee behind Me, Satan"?

Part 5

We must still linger a little over the deeply interesting and instructive scene in the sixteenth chapter of Matthew. It brings before us two great subjects, namely, "the Church," and "the kingdom of Heaven." These things must never be confounded. As to the first, it is only to be found in the New Testament. Indeed, as has often been remarked, verse 18 of our chapter contains the very first direct allusion in the volume of God to the subject of the Church, or assembly, of Christ.

This, though familiar to many of our readers, may present a difficulty to others. Many Christians and Christian teachers strongly maintain that the doctrine of the Church is distinctly unfolded in Old Testament Scripture. They consider that the saints of the Old Testament belonged to the Church; in fact, that there is no difference whatever; all form one body; all stand on one common ground; and that to represent the Lord's people in New Testament times as in a higher position, or endowed with higher privileges than Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is a delusion. It seems strange to such to assert that Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Moses did not belong to the Church — were not members of the body of Christ — were not endowed with the selfsame privileges as believers now. Trained from their earliest days to believe that all God's people, from the beginning to the end of time, stand on the same ground, and form one common body, they find it impossible to admit of any difference. It seems to them presumption on the part of Christians to assert that they are in any respect different from God's beloved people of old — those blessed worthies of whom we read in Hebrews 11, who lived a life of faith and personal devotedness, and who are now in Heaven with their Lord.

But the all-important question is, "What saith the Scripture?" It can be of no possible use to set up our own thoughts, our own reasonings, our own conclusions, in opposition to the Word of God. It is a very easy matter for men to reason, with great apparent force, point, and cleverness, about the absurdity and presumption of the notion that Christians are in a better and higher place, and more privileged, than God's people of old.

But this is not the proper way in which to approach this great subject. It is not a question of the difference *personally* between the Lord's people at different periods. Were it so, where should we find, amongst the ranks of Christian professors, any one to compare with an Abraham, a Joseph, a Moses, or a Daniel? Were it a question of simple faith, where could we find in the entire history of the Church a finer example than the father of the faithful? Were it a question of personal holiness, where could we find a brighter illustration than Joseph? For intimacy with God, and acquaintance with His ways and mind, who could go beyond Moses? For unswerving devotedness to God and His truth, could we find a brighter example than the man who went down into the lions' den rather than not pray toward Jerusalem?

However, let it be distinctly understood that it is not by any means a personal question, or a comparison of people, but of dispensational position. If this be clearly seen, it will, we doubt not, remove out of the way a great deal of the difficulty which many pious people seem to feel in reference to the truth of the Church.

But above and beyond all this stands the question, What does Scripture teach on the subject? If any one had spoken to Abraham about being a member of the body of Christ, would he have understood it? Could that honoured and beloved saint of God have had the most remote idea of being linked by an indwelling Spirit to a living Head in Heaven? Utterly impossible. How could he be a member of a body which had no existence? And how could there be a body without a Head? And when do we first hear of the Head? When the Man Christ Jesus, having passed through death and the grave,

ascended into the heavens, and took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Then, and not until then, did the Holy Ghost come down to form the body, and link it by His presence to the glorified Head above.

This, however, is rather anticipating a line of argument which is yet to come before us. Let us here put another question to the reader. If any one had spoken to Moses about a body composed of Jews and Gentiles — a body whose constituent parts had been drawn from among the seed of Abraham and the cursed race of the Canaanites — what would he have said? May we not safely assert that his whole moral being would have shrunk with horror from the thought? What! Jews and Canaanites — the seed of Abraham and uncircumcised Gentiles — united in one body? Impossible for the lawgiver to take in such an idea. The fact is, if there was one feature which more strongly than another marked the Jewish economy, it was the rigid separation by divine appointment of Jew and Gentile. "Ye know," says Simon Peter, "how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or to come unto one of another nation."

Such was the order of things under the Mosaic economy. It would have been a flagrant transgression on the part of a Jew to climb over that middle wall of partition which separated him from all the nations around; and hence the thought of a union between Jew and Gentile could not possibly have entered into any human mind; and the more faithful a man was to the existing order of things under the law, the more opposed he must have been to any such thought.

Now, in the face of all this, how can any one seek to maintain that the truth of the Church was known in Old Testament times, and that there is no difference whatever between the position of a Christian and that of an Old Testament believer? The fact is that even Simon Peter himself found it extremely difficult to take in the idea of admitting the Gentiles into the kingdom of Heaven. Though he was entrusted with the keys of that kingdom, he was very reluctant indeed to use them for the admission of the Gentiles. He had to be expressly taught by a heavenly vision, ere he was prepared to fulfil the commission with which he was charged by his Lord in Matthew 16.

No, reader, it is of no possible use to stand against the plain testimony of Scripture. The truth of the Church was not — could not — be known in Old Testament times. It was, as the inspired apostle tells us, "hid in God" — hid in His eternal counsels — "not made known to the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit,* that the Gentiles should be *fellow-heirs* and of *the same body*, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph. 3).

{*The "prophets," in this passage, are those of the New Testament. This is evident from the expression, "*Now revealed*," He could not speak of a thing being "now revealed" to men who had been dead for hundreds of years Besides, had the apostle meant Old Testament prophets, the order would assuredly have been "Prophets and apostles." We have a similar expression in Eph. 2: 20 "Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets." He does not say, "prophets and apostles." The truth is that the apostles and prophets formed the first layer of the foundation of the Church of which Jesus Christ is the chief Corner-stone, and this is an additional proof that the Church had no existence save in the secret counsels of God until our Lord Christ. having accomplished the work of redemption, ascended into the heavens, and sent down the Holy Ghost to baptize believers — Jews and Gentiles — into one body. The reader may also refer with real profit and interest to Rom. 16: 25, 26: Now to Him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and he preaching of Jesus Christ, according to *the revelation of the he mystery which was kept secret since the world began but now is made manifest*, and by the scriptures of the prophets [literally, by the prophetic writings, that is, of the New Testament] according to the commandment of the everlasting God. made known to all nations for the obedience of

faith."}

We can only reach the great mystery of the Church by walking over the broken-down middle wall of partition. "Wherefore remembers that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by *the blood of Christ*. For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, the law of commandments in ordinances, for to make in Himself of twain one new man, making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby; and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph. 2: 11-18).

Thus, from all that has passed before us, the reader will, we trust, fully see why it is that our Lord in His word to Simon Peter speaks of the Church as a future thing. "Upon this rock *I will build My Church*." He does not say, "I have been," or, "I am, building My Church." Nothing of the kind. It could not be. It was still "hid in God." The Messiah had to be cut off and have nothing — nothing, for the present, as regards Israel and the earth. He must be rejected, crucified, and slain, in order to lay the foundation of the Church. It was utterly impossible that a single stone could be laid in this new, this wondrous building until "the chief Corner-stone" had passed through death and taken His place in the Heavens. It was not in incarnation, but in resurrection, that our Lord Christ became Head of a body.

Now our apostle was not in the least prepared for this. He did not understand one jot or tittle of it. That Messiah should set up a kingdom in power and glory — that He should restore Israel to their destined pre-eminence in the earth — all this he could understand and appreciate — he was looking for it. But a suffering Messiah — a rejected and crucified Christ — of this he could not hear just then. "Be it far from Thee, Lord; this shall not be unto Thee." These were the words which drew forth that withering rebuke with which we closed our last paper, "Get thee behind Me, Satan; thou art an offence unto Me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."

We may gather the gravity of his error from the severity of the rebuke. Peter had much to learn, much to go through, ere he could grasp the great truth which His Lord was putting before him. But he did grasp it, by the grace of God, and confess it, and teach it with power. He was led to see not only that Christ was the Son of the living God, but that He was a rejected Stone, disallowed of men, but chosen of God and precious; and that all who through grace come to Him must share His rejection on earth as well as His acceptance in Heaven. They are perfectly identified with Him.

Part 6

At the close of John 6 we have a very clear and beautiful confession of Christ from the lips of our apostle — a confession rendered all the more touching and forcible by the circumstances under which it was delivered.

Our blessed Lord, in His teachings in the synagogue at Capernaum, had unfolded truth which puts the poor human heart to the test, and withers up all the pretensions of man in a very remarkable manner. We cannot here attempt to enter upon the subject of our Lord's discourse, but the effect of it is thus recorded: "From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him." They were not prepared for the reception of such heavenly doctrine. They were offended by it, and they turned their backs upon that blessed One who alone was worthy of all the affections of the heart, and of the homage and devotion of the whole moral being. "*They went back, and walked no more with Him.*"

Now we are not told what became of these deserters, or whether they were saved or not. No such question is raised. We are simply told that they abandoned Christ, and ceased to be any longer publicly identified with His name and His cause. How many, alas! have since followed their sad example! It is one thing to profess to be the disciples of Christ, and another thing altogether to stand with firm purpose of heart on the ground of public testimony for His name, in thorough identification with a rejected Lord. It is one thing for people to flock to Christ because of the benefits which He bestows, and it is quite another to cleave to Him in the face of the world's scorn and contempt. The application of the doctrine of the cross very speedily thins the ranks of professors. In the chapter before us we see at one moment multitudes thronging enthusiastically around the Man who could so marvellously supply their need, and the next moment abandoning Him, when His teaching offended their pride.

Thus it has been, thus it is, and thus it will be until that day in the which the despised Stranger of Nazareth shall reign from pole to pole, and from the river to the ends of the earth. We are ready enough to avail ourselves of the benefits and blessings which *a loving Saviour* can bestow upon us, but when it becomes a question of following *a rejected Lord* along that rough and lonely path which He has trodden for us in this sinful world, we are disposed, like those of old, to go back, and walk no more with Him.

This is very sad and very humiliating. It proves how little we know of His heart, or of what that heart desires from us. Jesus longs for fellowship. He does not want patronage. It does not meet the desire of His heart to be followed, or admired, or gazed at, because of what He can do or give. He delights in a heart taught of God to appreciate His Person, for this glorifies and gratifies the Father. He retired from the gaze of an excited and tumultuous throng who would fain make Him a king, because they had eaten of the loaves and were filled; but He could turn, with touching earnestness, to the little band of followers who still remained, and challenge their hearts with the question, "Will ye also go away?"

How deeply affecting! How it must have touched the hearts of all, save that one who had no heart for aught but money — who was "a thief" and "a devil"! Alas! a moment was approaching when all were to forsake Him and fly — when He was to be left absolutely *alone*, forsaken of men, forsaken of God — utterly and awfully deserted.

But that moment was yet future; and it is peculiarly refreshing to harken to the fine confession of our beloved apostle, in reply to the deeply affecting inquiry of his Lord. "Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."

Well indeed might he say, "To whom shall we go?" There was not another throughout the wide universe of God to whom the heart could turn. He alone could meet their every need, satisfy their every right desire, fill up every chamber of the heart. Simon Peter felt this, and hence, with all his mistakes, his failures, and his infirmities, his loving and devoted heart turned with earnest affection to his beloved Lord. He would not abandon Him, though little able to rise to the height of His heavenly teaching. There was a link binding him to Jesus Christ which nothing could snap. "Lord, to whom shall we go?" — whither shall we betake ourselves? — on whom could we reckon beside? True, there may be trial and difficulty in the path of true discipleship. It may prove a rough and a lonely path. The heart may be tried and tested in every possible way. There may be deep and varied sorrow — deep waters, dark shadows; but in the face of all we can say, "To whom shall we go?"

And mark the singular fullness of Peter's confession. "Thou *hast* the words of eternal life;" and then, "Thou *art* that Christ, the Son of the living God." We have the two things, namely, what He *has*,

and what He *is*. Blessed be His name, Christ has all we can possibly want for time and eternity. Words of eternal life flow from His lips into our hearts. He causes those who follow Him to "inherit substance." He bestows upon them "durable riches and righteousness." We may truly say that, in comparison of what Christ has to give, all the riches, honours, dignities, and pleasures of this world are but dross. They all pass away as the vapours of the morning, and leave only an aching void behind. Nothing that this world has to offer can possibly satisfy the cravings of the human soul. "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." And not only so — it must be given up. If one had all the wealth of Solomon, it lasts but a moment in comparison with that boundless eternity which lies before every one of us. When death approaches, all the riches of the universe could not purchase one moment's respite. The last great enemy gives no quarter. He ruthlessly snaps the link that connects man with all that his poor heart prizes and loves upon earth, and hurries him away into eternity.

And what then? Yes, this is the question. Who can answer it? Who can attempt to picture the future of a soul that passes into eternity without God, without Christ, without hope? Who can describe the horrors of one who, all in a moment, opens his eyes to the fact — the tremendous fact — that he is lost, lost forever — hopelessly, eternally, lost? It is positively too dreadful to dwell upon it. And yet it must be looked at; and if the reader is still of the world, still unconverted, careless, thoughtless, unbelieving, we would earnestly entreat of him now, just now, to give his earnest attention to the weighty and all-important question of his soul's salvation - a question, in comparison with which all other questions dwindle into utter insignificance. "What shall it profit a man, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" It is, beyond all question, the most egregious folly that any one can be guilty of to put off the grand business of his soul's salvation. And if any one inquire what he has to do in this business, the answer is *Nothing* — "nothing, either great or small." Jesus has the words of eternal life. He it is who says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, *hath* everlasting life, and shall not come into judgement, but is *passed* from death unto life."

Here is the hinge on which the whole matter shoves. Harken to the words of Christ. Believe in Him that sent His blessed Son. Put your trust in God, and you shall be saved; you shall have eternal life, and never come into judgement.

Nor is this all. Simon Peter, in his lovely confession, does not confine himself to what Christ has to give, precious and blessed as that is, but he also speaks of what He is. "Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." This is full of deepest interest for the heart. Christ not only gives us eternal life, but He also becomes the object of our heart's affections — our satisfying portion, our unfailing resource, our infallible Guide and Counsellor, our constant reference, in all our need, in all our pressure, in all our sorrows and difficulties. We need never go to any one else for succour, sympathy, or guidance. We have all we want in Him. He is the eternal delight of the heart of God, and He may well be the delight of our hearts here and hereafter, now and forever.

Part 7

The close of Matt. 14 presents a scene in the life of our apostle on which we may dwell with profit for a few moments. It furnishes a very fine illustration of his own touching inquiry, "Lord, to whom shall we go?"

Our Lord having fed the multitude, and sent His disciples across the sea, retired into a mountain, to be alone in prayer. In this we have a striking foreshadowing of the present time. Jesus has gone on high. Israel is for the present set aside, but not forgotten. Days of trouble will come — rough seas and stormy skies will fall to the lot of the remnant; but their Messiah will return, and deliver them out of all

their troubles. He will bring them to their desired haven, and all will be peace and joy for the Israel of God.

All this is fully unfolded on the page of prophecy, and is of the deepest interest to every lover of God and His Word; but for the present we can merely dwell upon the inspired record concerning Simon Peter, and seek to learn the lesson which that record so forcibly teaches. "And straightway Jesus constrained His disciples to get into a ship, and to go before Him unto the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into a mountain apart to pray; and when the evening was come, He was there alone. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves, for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered Him, and said, Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water. And He said! Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

This brief passage presents to our view in a very forcible way some of the leading features of Simon Peter's character. his zeal, his energy, his real devotedness of heart, no one can for a moment call in question; but these very qualities — beautiful as they surely are — led him not infrequently into a position of such prominence as to render his weak points all the more conspicuous. A man of less zeal, less energy, would have remained on board the ship, and thus avoided Peter's failure and breakdown. Perhaps, too, men of cooler temperament would condemn as unwarrantable rashness Peter's act in leaving the ship, or pronounce it a piece of forwardness which justly deserved a humiliating rebuff.

All this may be so; but we are free to confess that the zeal, energy and devoted self-considering spirit which, in order to avoid the shame and humiliation of a defeat, refuses to take a bold and decided step for Christ. True it is that Peter in the interesting scene now before us completely broke down. But why did he? Was it because he left the ship? No; but because he ceased to look in simple faith to Jesus. Here lay the root of his failure. Had he only kept his eye on the Master, he could have walked on the water though ever so rough. Faith can walk on rough water as easily as on smooth. Nature cannot walk on either. It is not a question of the state of the water, but the state of the heart. Circumstances have nothing to do with faith, except, indeed, that when difficult and trying, they develop its power and brightness. There was no reason whatever, in the judgement of faith, why Peter should have failed in his walk on the water. Faith looks not at the things that are seen and temporal, but at the things which are unseen and eternal. It endures as seeing Him who is invisible. "Faith is the evidence of things *not seen*." It lifts the heart above the winds and waves of this rough world, and keeps it in perfect peace, to the praise of Him who is the Giver of faith, as of "every good and perfect gift."

But our beloved apostle utterly failed in faith on the occasion now before us. He, as we, alas! so often do, took his eye off the Lord and fixed it on his surroundings, and as a consequence he immediately began to sink. It must ever be so. We cannot get on for a single moment save as we have the living God as a covering for our eyes. The grand motto for the life of faith is, "Looking off unto Jesus." It is this alone which enables us to "run the race set before us," be the way rough or smooth. When Peter came down out of the ship, it was either Christ or drowning. He might well say at such a moment, "Lord, to whom shall I go?" Whither could he turn? When on board the ship, he had its timbers between him and death, but when on the water he had nothing but Jesus.

And was not He enough? Yes, verily, if only Peter could have trusted Him. This is the point. All things are possible to him that believeth. Storms are hushed into a perfect calm, rough seas become like glass, lofty mountains are levelled, when faith brings the power of God to bear. The greater the difficulties, the brighter the triumphs of faith. It is in the furnace that the real preciousness of faith is displayed. Faith has to do with God, and not with men or things. If we cease to lean on God, we have nothing but a wild, watery waste — a perfect chaos — around us, where nature's resources must hopelessly fail.

All this was proved by Simon Peter when he came down out of the ship to walk on the water; and every child of God and every servant of Christ must prove it in his measure, for Peter's history is full of great practical lessons for us all. If we want to walk above the circumstances of the scene through which we are passing — if we would rise superior to its influences — if we would be able to give an answer, clear, distinct, and decided, to the scepticism, the rationalism and infidelity of the day in which we live — then, assuredly, we must keep the eye of faith firmly fixed on "the Author and Perfecter of faith." It is not by logical skill or intellectual power we shall ever meet the arguments of the infidel, but by an abiding sense, a living and soul-satisfying apprehension, of the all-sufficiency of Christ — Himself - His work — His Word — to meet our every need, our every exigency.

But it may be the reader feels disposed to condemn Peter for leaving the ship. He may think there was no need for his taking such a step. Why not abide with his brethren on board the vessel? Was it not possible to be quite as devoted to Christ in the ship as on the water? And, further, did not the sequel prove that it would have been far better, and safer, and wiser, for Peter to remain where he was, than to venture forth on a course which he was not able to pursue?

To all this we reply that our apostle was evidently governed by an earnest desire to be nearer to his Lord. And this was right. He saw Jesus walking on the water, and he longed to be with Him. And, further, he had the direct authority of his Lord for leaving the ship. We fully and freely grant that without this it would have been a fatal mistake to leave his position; but the moment that word "Come" fell on his ear he had a divine warrant for going forth upon the water — yea, to have remained would have been to miss great blessing.

Thus it is in every case. We must have authority before we can act in anything. Without this, the greater our zeal, energy, and apparent devotedness, the more fatal will be our mistake, and the more mischief we shall do to ourselves, to others, and to the cause of Christ. It is of the very last possible importance in every case, but especially where there is a measure of zeal, earnestness, and energy, that there should be sober subjection to the authority of the Word. If there be not this, there is no calculating the amount of mischief which may be done. If our devotedness flow not in the channel of simple obedience, if it rush over the embankments formed by the Word of God, the consequences must be most disastrous.

But there is another thing which stands next in importance to the authority of the *divine Word*, and that is the abiding realization of the *divine presence*. These two things must never be separated if we want to walk on the water. We may be quite clear and settled in our own minds, having distinct authority for any given line of action; but if we have not with equal distinctness the sense of the Lord's presence with us — if our eyes are not continually on the living God — we shall most assuredly break down.

This is very serious, and demands the gravest consideration of the Christian reader. It was precisely here that Peter failed. He did not fail in obedience, but in realized dependence. He acted on the word of Jesus in leaving the ship, but he failed to lean on the arm of Jesus in walking on the water;

hence his terror and confusion. Mere authority is not enough; we want power. To act without authority is wrong. To act without power is impossible. The authority for starting is the Word. The power to proceed is the divine presence. The combination of the two must ever yield a successful career. It matters not in the smallest degree what the difficulties are if we have the stable authority of Holy Scripture for our course, and the blessed support of the presence of God in pursuing it. When God speaks, we must obey; but in order to do so, we must lean on His arm. "Have not I commanded you?" "Lo, I am with you.

Here are the two things so absolutely essential to every child of God and every servant of Christ. Without these, we can do nothing; with them, we can do all things. If we have not a "Thus saith the Lord," or "It is written we cannot enter upon a path of devotedness, and if we have not His realized presence, we cannot pursue it. It is quite possible to be right in setting out, and yet to fail in going on.

It was so in the case of Simon Peter, and it has been so in the case of thousands since. It is one thing to make a good start, and another thing to make good progress. It is one thing to leave the ship, and another thing to walk on the water. Peter did the former but he failed in the latter. This beloved servant of Christ broke down in his course; but where did he find himself? In the arms of a loving Saviour. "Lord, save me!" How touching! How deeply affecting! He casts himself upon a well-known love — a love which was yet to meet him in far more humiliating circumstances. Nor was he disappointed. Ah, no! Blessed be God, no poor failing creature can ever appeal to that love in vain. "And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Exquisite grace! If Peter failed to reach his Lord, his Lord did not fail to reach him. If Peter failed in faith, Jesus could not fail in grace. Impossible. The grace of our Lord Jesus is exceeding abundant. He takes occasion from our very failures to display His rich and precious love. Oh, how blessed to have to do with such a tender, patient, loving Lord! Who would not trust Him and praise Him, love Him and serve Him?

Part 8

We have now to follow our beloved apostle into the darkest and most humbling scene in his entire history — a scene which we could hardly understand or account for if we did not know something of the infinite depths of divine grace on the one hand, and, on the other hand, of the terrible depths into which even a saint of God or an apostle of Christ is capable of plunging if not kept by divine power.

It seems very wonderful to find on the page of inspiration the record of the fall of such an eminent servant of Christ as Simon Peter. We, in our wisdom, would judge it best to draw the curtain of silence over such an event. Not so the Holy Ghost. He has seen fit to tell us plainly of the errors, and failures, and sins, of such men as Abraham, Moses, David, Peter, and Paul, in order that we may learn holy records from such records — lessons of human frailty, lessons of divine grace, lessons full of solemn warning, and yet of most precious consolation and encouragement. We learn what we are, and we learn what God is. We learn that we cannot trust ourselves for a single moment; for, if not kept by grace, there is no depth of sin into which we are not capable of falling; but we learn to trust the eternal stability of that grace which has dealt with the erring ones and sinning ones of other days, and to lean with ever-growing confidence on the One who is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

Not one of the four evangelists omits the fall of Peter. Let us open at Matt. 26; "And when they had sung a hymn they went out into the mount of Olives. Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of Me this night: for it is written, I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered

and said unto Him, Though all shall be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended."

In these few words Peter lets out the real root of the whole matter. That root was self-confidence — alas! alas! no uncommon root amongst us. We do not in the least question Peter's sincerity. We feel perfectly sure he meant all he said; and, further, that he had not the most remote idea of what he was about to do. He was ignorant of himself, and we generally find that ignorance and self confidence go together. Self-knowledge destroys self-confidence. The more fully self is known, the more it must be distrusted. If Peter had known himself, known his tendencies and capabilities, he never would have uttered the words which we have just penned. But so full was he of self-confidence, that when his Lord told him expressly what he was about to do, he replied, "Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee."

This is peculiarly solemn. It is full of instruction for us all. We are all so ignorant of our own hearts that we deem ourselves incapable of falling into certain gross sins. But we should, every one of us, bear in mind that if not kept each moment by the grace of God, we are capable of anything. We have materials in us for any amount or character of evil; and whenever we hear any one saying, "Well, I certainly am a poor, failing, stumbling creature, but I am not capable of doing the like of that," we may feel assured he does not know his own heart; and not only so, but he is in imminent danger of falling into some grievous sin. It is well to walk humbly before our God, distrusting self, and leaning on Him. This is the true secret of moral safety at all times. Had Peter realized this, it would have saved him his terrible downfall.

But Peter was self-confident, and, as a consequence, he failed to watch and pray. This was another stage in his downward journey. Had he only felt his utter weakness, he would have sought for strength divine. He would have cast himself on God for grace to help in time of need. Look at the blessed Master! He, though God over all, blessed forever, yet being a Man, having taken the place of the creature, and fully entering into His position, was agonising in prayer while Peter was fast asleep. Yes, Peter slept in the garden of Gethsemane while his Lord was passing through the deepest anguish He had yet tasted, though deeper still lay before Him. "Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And He took with Him Peter and the sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith He unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here, and watch with Me. And He went a little further, and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt. And He cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and *saith unto Peter*, What! could ye not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

What tender grace! What readiness to make allowance! What moral elevation! And yet He felt the sad want of sympathy, the cold indifference to His sore agony. "I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none." How much is involved in these words! He looked for comforters. That perfect human heart craved sympathy; but, alas! there was none for Him. Even Peter, who declared himself ready to die with Him, fell asleep in view of the agonies of Gethsemane.

Such is man — yea, the very best of men! Self-confident, when he ought to be self-distrusting — sleeping, when he ought to be watching; and, we may add, fighting, when he ought to be submitting. "Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus." How incongruous, how utterly out of place, was a sword in company with the meek and lowly Sufferer! "Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the

sheath: the cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" Peter was entirely out of the current of his Master's spirit. He had not a thought in common with Him in reference to His path of suffering. He would fain defend Him with carnal weapons, forgetting that His kingdom was not of this world.

All this is peculiarly solemn. To find a dear and honoured servant of Christ failing so grievously is surely sufficient to teach us to walk very softly. But, alas! we have not yet reached the lowest point in Peter's downward course. Having used his sword in defence of his Master, we next find him "following afar off." "Then took they Jesus, and led Him, and brought Him to the high priest's house. And *Peter followed afar off*. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, *Peter sat down among them*."

What company for an apostle of Christ! "Can a man touch pitch, and not be defiled by it? Can one walk on burning coals, and his feet not be burned?" It is terribly dangerous for the Christian to sit down among the enemies of Christ. The very fact of his doing so proves that decline has set in, and made serious progress. In Peter's case the stages of decline are strongly marked. First, boasting in his own strength; secondly, sleeping when he ought to have been praying; thirdly, drawing his sword when he ought to have been meekly bowing his head; fourthly, following afar off; fifthly, making himself comfortable in the midst of the open enemies of Christ.

Then comes the last sad scene in this terrible drama. "And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest; and when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. But he denied, saying, *I know not, neither understand I, what thou sayest*. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew. And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them. *And he denied it again*. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them, for thou art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth thereto. But *he began to curse and to swear, I know not this man of whom ye speak*. And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice thou shalt deny Me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept" (Mark 14: 66-72).

Luke adds a most touching clause: "*And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter*. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly."

How deeply affecting is all this! Only think of a saint of God, and an apostle of Christ, cursing and swearing that he did not know his Lord! Does the reader feel disposed to question the fact that Peter was, spite of all this, a genuine saint of God? Some do question it, but their questioning is a gross mistake. They find it hard to conceive such a thing as a true child of God falling so terribly. It is because they have not yet thoroughly learnt what flesh is. Peter was as really a saint of God in the palace of the high priest as he was on the mount of transfiguration. But he had to learn himself, and that, too, by as humiliating and painful a process as any soul could well be called to pass through. Doubtless, if any one had told Peter, a few days before, that he would ere long curse and swear that he did not know his Lord, he would have shrunk with horror from the thought. He might have said, like one of old, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" Yet so it was. We know not what we may do until we are in the circumstances. The great thing for us all is to walk humbly with our God day by day, deeply sensible of our own utter weakness, and clinging to Him who is able to keep us from falling. We are safe only in the shelter of His presence. Left to ourselves, we are capable of anything, as our apostle found to his deep sorrow.

But the Lord was watching over His poor erring servant. He never lost sight of him for a single moment, He had His eye upon the whole process. The devil would have smashed the vessel in hopeless fragments if he could. But he could not. He was but an instrument in the divine hand to do a work for Peter which Peter had failed to do for himself. "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted (or restored), strengthen thy brethren."

Here we are permitted to see the root of the matter. Peter needed to be sifted, and Satan was employed to do the work — just as in the case of Job, and the man in 1 Cor. 5. It seems very wonderful, very mysterious, very solemn, that Satan should be so used. Yet so it is. God uses him "for the destruction of the flesh." He cannot touch the spirit. That is eternally safe. But it is terrible work to get into Satan's sieve. Peter found it so, and so did Job, and so did that erring Corinthian.

But oh, the *grace* of those words! "I have prayed for thee" — not that he might not fall, but, having fallen, that his faith might not fail, his confidence might not give way. Nothing can surpass the grace that shines out here. The blessed One knew all that was to happen — the shameful denial — the cursing and swearing; and yet, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not" — that thy confidence in the eternal stability of My grace may not give way.

Perfectly marvellous! And then, the *power* of that look! "The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter." It was this that broke Peter's heart, and drew forth a flood of bitter, penitential tears.

Part 9

We are now called to consider the intensely interesting subject of Simon Peter's restoration, in which we shall find some points of the utmost practical importance. If in his fall we learn the frailty and folly of man, in his restoration we learn the grace, wisdom, and faithfulness of our Lord Jesus Christ. The fall was, indeed, deep, terrible, and humiliating. The restoration was complete and marvellous. We may rest assured that Simon Peter will never forget either the one or the other; nay, he will remember them with wonder, love, and praise, throughout the countless ages of eternity. The grace that shines in Peter's restoration is the same which is displayed in his conversion. Let us glance at some of the salient points. It can be but the merest glance, as our space is limited. And first let us look at

the procuring cause.

This we have given us with peculiar force by the pen of the inspired evangelist Luke. "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat." If Satan had been suffered to have his way, poor Simon would have been hopelessly ruined. But no; he was merely employed as an instrument, as he had been in Job's case, to do a needed work, and, when that work was done, he had to retire. He dare go one hair's breadth beyond his appointed sphere. It is well to remember this. Satan is but a creature — crafty, wily, powerful, no doubt, but a creature who can only go as far as he is permitted by God. Had Peter walked softly, had he humbly and earnestly looked for divine help, had he been judging himself in secret, there would have been no need of Satan's sifting. Thanks be to God, Satan has no power whatever with a soul that walks humbly with God. There is perfect shelter, perfect safety, in the divine presence; and there is not an arrow in the enemy's quiver that can reach one who leans in simple confidence upon the arm of the living God. Here our apostle failed, and hence he had to pass through a very severe process indeed, in order that he might learn himself. But, oh, the power and preciousness of those words, "*I have prayed for thee!*" Here assuredly lay the secret — here was the procuring cause of Simon's restoration. The prayer of Jesus sustained the soul of His erring servant in that terrible hour when the enemy would fain have crushed him to powder. What could Satan do in opposition to the all-powerful intercession of Christ? Nothing. That wonderful

prayer was the ground of Peter's safety, when, to human view, all seemed hopelessly gone.

And for what did our Lord pray? Was it that Peter might not commit the awful sin of denying Him? Was it that he might not curse and swear? Clearly no. What then? I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not."

Can aught exceed the grace that shines here? That gracious, loving, faithful Lord, in view of Peter's terrible sin — knowing all he was about to do, all the sad forgetfulness — could actually plead for him that, spite of all, his confidence might not give way — that he might not lose the sense of the eternal stability of that grace which had taken him up from the depth of his ruin and guilt.

Matchless grace! Nothing can surpass it in brightness and blessedness. Had it not been for this prayer, Peter's confidence must have given way. He never could have survived the awful struggle through which his soul passed when thinking of his dreadful sin. When he came to himself, when he reflected upon the whole scene, his expressions of devotedness, "Though all should deny Thee, yet will I never deny Thee" — "Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee" — "I am ready to go with Thee to prison and to death" — to think of all these words, and yet that he should deny his beloved Lord with cursing and swearing, was overpowering.

It is a dreadful moment in the soul's history when one wakes up to the consciousness of having committed sin — sin against light, knowledge, and privilege — sin against divine grace and goodness. Satan is sure to be specially busy at such a crisis. He casts in the most terrible suggestions — raises all manner of questions — fills the heart with legal reasonings, doubts, and fears — causes the soul to totter on the foundation.

But, thanks and praise to our God, the enemy cannot prevail. "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further." The all-prevailing intercession of our divine Advocate sustains the faith so sorely tried, carries the soul through the deep and dark waters, restores the broken link of communion, heals the spiritual wounds, lifts up the fallen one, brings back the wanderer, and fills the heart with praise and thanksgiving. "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not; and when thou art restored, strengthen thy brethren." Here we have set before us in the most touching way *the procuring cause* of Simon Peter's restoration. We shall now look for a moment at

the producing means.

For this, too, we are indebted to the evangelist Luke. Indeed it is through him the inspiring Spirit has given us so much of what is exquisitely human — so much of what goes straight to our very hearts, in subduing power — so much of God coming out in loveliest human form.

We have already noticed Peter's gradual descent — his sad progress, from one stage to another, in moral distance and culpable decline — forgetting to watch and pray — following afar off — warming himself at the enemy's fire — the cowardly denial — the cursing and swearing. All this was down! down! down! shamefully and awfully down. But when the erring, straying, sinning one had reached the very lowest point, then comes out, with heavenly lustre, the grace that shines in the procuring cause and the producing means of his restoration. The former we have in Christ's *prayer*; the latter in Christ's *look*. "The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the Word of the Lord, how He had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly."

Yes, here it is; "The Lord *looked*" "Peter remembered" — Peter wept — "wept bitterly." What a look! What a remembrance! What a weeping! What human heart can conceive, what tongue express, what pen portray, all that is wrapped up in that one look? We can well believe that it went right home to

the very centre of Peter's soul. He will never forget that marvellous look, so full of mighty moral power — so penetrating — so melting — so soul-subduing.

"Peter went out, and wept bitterly." This was the turning point. Up to this all was darkly downward. Here divine light breaks in upon the deep moral gloom. Christ's most precious prayer is having its answer, His powerful look is doing its work. The fountain of the heart is broken up, and penitential tears flow copiously forth, demonstrating the depth, reality, and intensity of the work within.

Thus it must ever be, and thus it will ever be when the Spirit of God works in the soul. If we have sinned, we must be made to feel, to judge, and to confess our sin — to feel it deeply, judge it thoroughly, and confess it fully. It will not do merely to say, in levity, flippancy, or mere formality, "I have sinned." There must be reality, uprightness, and sincerity. God desires truth in the inward parts. There was nothing light, flippant, or formal about our beloved apostle in the hour of his fall and repentance. No, all was intensely real. It could not but be so with such a procuring cause, and such a producing means. The prayer and look of Peter's Lord displayed their precious results in Peter's restoration.

Now the reader will do well to notice that the prayer and look of our Lord Jesus Christ set forth, in a very striking and beautiful manner, the two grand aspects of Christ's present ministry as our Advocate with the Father. We have the value and prevalency of His intercession, and the power and efficacy of His Word in the hands of the Holy Ghost, that "other Advocate." Christ's *prayer* for Peter answers to His intercession for us. His *look* upon Peter answers to His Word brought home to us in the power of the Holy Ghost. When we sin — as, alas! we do in thought and deed — our blessed and adorable Advocate speaks to God on our behalf. This is the procuring cause of our repentance and restoration. But He speaks to us on God's behalf. This is the producing means.

We shall not dwell upon the great subject of the advocacy here, having recently sought to unfold it in our papers on "The All-sufficiency of Christ." We shall close this paper with a brief reference to two or three of the moral features of Peter's restoration — features which, be it well remembered, must be looked for in every case of true restoration. In the first place there is

the state of the conscience.

Now, as to the full and complete restoration of Peter's conscience after his terrible fall, we have the most unquestionable evidence afforded in his after history. Take the touching scene at the sea of Tiberias, as given in John 21.* Look at that dear, earnest, thorough man, girding his fisher's coat around him, and plunging into the sea, in order to get to the feet of his risen Lord! He waits neither for the ship nor for his companions, but in all the lovely freshness and liberty of a divinely restored conscience, he rushes to his Saviour's feet. There is no tormenting fear, no legal bondage, no doubt, darkness, or distance. His conscience is perfectly at rest. The prayer and the look — the two grand departments of the work of advocacy — had proved effectual. Peter's conscience was all right, sound, and good; and hence he could find his home in the presence of his Lord — his holy, happy home.

{*We have no record of Peter's first meeting with his Lord, after the resurrection.}

Take another striking and beautiful evidence of a restored conscience. Look at Peter in Acts 3. There he stands in the presence of assembled thousands of Jews, and boldly charges them with having "denied the Holy One and the Just" — the very thing which he himself had done though under circumstances very different. How could Peter do this? How could he have the face to speak so? Why not leave it to James or John to prefer this heavy charge? The answer is blessedly simple. Peter's conscience was so thoroughly restored, so perfectly at rest, because perfectly purged, that he could

fearlessly charge the house of Israel with the awful sin of denying the Holy One of God. Was this the fruit of moral insensibility? Nay, it was the fruit of divine restoration. Had any one of the congregation gathered in Solomon's porch undertaken to challenge our apostle as to his own shameful denial of his Lord, we can easily conceive his answer. The man who had "wept bitterly" over his sin would, we feel assured, know how to answer such a challenge. Not that his bitter weeping was the meritorious ground of his restoration; nothing of the kind, it only proved the reality of the work of repentance in his soul. Moral insensibility is one thing, and a restored conscience, resting on the blood and advocacy of Christ, is quite another.

But there is another thing involved in a true work of restoration, and that is
the state of the heart.

This is of the very utmost importance in every instance. No restoration can be considered divinely complete which does not reach the very depths of the heart. And hence, when we turn back to the scenes on the shore of the sea of Tiberias, we find the Lord dealing very closely and very powerfully with the state of Peter's heart. We cannot attempt to expatiate, much as we should like to do so, on one of the most affecting interviews in the entire volume of God. We can do little more than quote the inspired record, but that is quite enough.

It is deeply interesting to notice that there is no allusion — not the most remote — to past scenes, during that wonderful dinner, provided, cooked, and dispensed by the risen Lord! But "when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?" Here Simon is recalled by the words of his faithful Lord to his self-confident profession. He had said, "Though all shall be offended, yet will not I." Then the searching question, three times repeated, evidently calls back the threefold denial.

Peter's *heart is* touched — the moral *root* of the whole matter is reached. This was absolutely necessary in Peter's case, and it is absolutely necessary in every case. The work of restoration can never be thorough unless the roots of things are reached and judged. Mere surface work will never do. It is of no use to crop the sprouts; we must get down to the depths, the hidden springs, the moral sources, and judge them in the very light of the divine presence.

This is the true secret of all genuine restoration. Let us ponder it deeply. We may rest assured it demands our most solemn consideration. We are all too apt to rest satisfied with cropping off the sprouts that appear above the surface of our practical daily life, without getting at the roots; and the sad consequence is that the sprouts quickly appear again, to our sorrow and shame, and the dishonour of our Lord's name. The work of self-judgement must be more profound if we would really make progress. We are terribly shallow, light, and flippant. We greatly lack depth, seriousness, and moral gravity. We want more of that heart-work which was wrought in Simon the son of Jonas on the shore of the sea of Tiberias. "Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Lovest thou Me?" The knife of the divine Operator had reached the root of the moral disease, and that was enough. It was needful, but it was enough; and the grieved and self-judged Simon Peter has only to fall back upon the great fact that his Lord knew all things. "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee." It is as though he had said, "Lord, it demands the eye of Omniscience itself to discern in the heart of the poor erring one a single spark of affection for Thee."

This truly is real work. We have before us a thoroughly restored soul — restored in conscience, restored in heart. And if it be asked, "What remains?" the answer is, We see a servant

restored to his work.

Some would tell us that if a man falls, he can never recover his position; and no doubt, under *government*, we must reap as we sow. But *grace is* another thing altogether. Government drove Adam out of Eden, and never replaced him there, but grace announced the victorious Seed of the woman. Government kept Moses out of Canaan, but grace conducted him to Pisgah's top. Government sent a perpetual sword upon David's house, but grace made the son of Bathsheba the wisest and wealthiest of Israel's kings.

This distinction must never be lost sight of. To confound grace and government is to commit a very grave mistake indeed. We cannot attempt to enter upon this weighty subject here, having done so in one of our earlier volumes. But let the reader seek to understand it, and bear it ever in mind.

As to Simon Peter, we not only see him restored to the work to which he was called at the first, but to something even higher. "Feed My lambs — shepherd My sheep" — is the new commission given to the man who had denied his Lord with an oath. Is not this something beyond "catching men"? "When thou art restored, strengthen thy brethren." Can anything in the way of service be more elevated than shepherding sheep, feeding lambs, and strengthening brethren? There is nothing in all this world nearer or dearer to the heart of Christ than His sheep, His lambs, His brethren: and hence He could not have given Simon Peter a more affecting proof of His confidence than by committing to his care the dearest objects of His deep and tender love.

And then mark the closing words, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou wast *young*, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be *old*, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake He, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He saith unto him, *Follow Me.*"

What weighty words are these! Who can tell their depth, power, and significance? What a contrast between Simon, "*young*," restless, forward, blundering, boastful, self-confident; and Peter, "*old*," subdued, mellowed, passive, crucified! What a difference between a man walking whither he would, and a man following a rejected Lord along the dark and narrow pathway of the cross, home to glory!

Conclusion

We could not close this series of papers without glancing, however cursorily, at the way in which our apostle discharged his various commissions. We see him "catching men"; opening the kingdom of Heaven to the Jew and to the Gentile; and, finally, feeding and shepherding the lambs and sheep of the flock of Christ.

Elevated services these, for any poor mortal to be called to, and more especially for one who had fallen so deeply as Simon Peter. But the remarkable power with which he was enabled to fulfil his blessed service proved beyond all question the reality and completeness of his restoration. If, at the close of the Gospels, we see Peter restored in heart and conscience, in the Acts and in his Epistles we can see him restored to his work.

We cannot attempt to go into details; but a point or two must be briefly noticed. There is something uncommonly fine in Peter's address in the third chapter of Acts. We can only quote a sentence or two: "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified His Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and *denied Him* in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But *ye denied the Holy One and the Just.*"

What a splendid evidence we have here of Peter's complete restoration! It would have been

utterly impossible for him to charge his audience with having denied the Holy One if his own soul had not been fully and blessedly restored. Alas! he, too, had denied his Lord; but he had repented, and wept bitterly. He had been down in the depths of self-judgement, just where he desired to see every one of his hearers. He had been face to face with his Lord, just where he longed to see them. He had been given to taste the sweetness, the freeness, the fullness, of the pardoning love of God, to prove the divine efficacy of the atonement and the prevalency of the advocacy of Christ. He was pardoned, healed, restored; and as such he stood in their presence a living and striking monument of that grace which he was unfolding to them, and which was amply sufficient for them as it had proved for him. "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out."

Who could more distinctly and emphatically utter such precious words than the erring, restored and forgiven Peter? If any one of his audience had ventured to remind the preacher of his own history, what would he have said in reply? Doubtless he would have had little to say about himself, but much, very much, to say about that rich and precious grace which had triumphed — over all his sin and failure — much, very much, about that precious blood which had cancelled forever all his guilt, and given perfect peace to his conscience — much, very much, about that all-prevailing advocacy to which he owed his full and perfect restoration.

Peter was just the man to unfold to others those glorious themes in which he had so thoroughly learnt to find his strength, his comfort, and his joy. He had proved in no ordinary way the reality and stability of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was no mere empty theory, no mere doctrine or opinion, with him. It was all intensely real to him. His very life and salvation were bound up in it. He knew the heart of Christ in a very intimate way. He knew its infinite tenderness and compassion, its unswerving devotedness in the face of many stumbles, shortcomings, and sins; and hence he could bear the most distinct and powerful testimony to the whole house of Israel to the power of the name of Jesus, the efficacy of His blood, and the deep and infinite love of His heart. "His name, through faith in His name, hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know; yea, the faith which is by Him hath given him *this perfect soundness* in the presence of you all."

What power in these words! How refreshing is the testimony to the peerless name of Jesus! It is perfectly delightful at all times, but specially so in this infidel day in which our lot is cast — a day so marked by the determined and persistent effort of the enemy to exclude the name of Jesus from every department.

Look where you will, whether it be in the domain of science, of religion, of philanthropy, or moral reform, and you see the same sedulous and diligently pursued purpose to banish the name of Jesus. It is not said so in plain terms, but it is so nevertheless. Scientific men, the professors and lecturers in our universities, talk and write about "the forces of nature" and the facts of science in such a way as practically to exclude the Christ of God from the whole field of nature. Scripture tells us, blessed be God, that by the Son of His love "All things were created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him: and He is before all things, and *by Him all things consist*." And again, speaking of the Son, the inspiring Spirit says, "Who being the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of His person, and *upholding all things by the word of His power*; when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Col. 1, Heb. 1).

These splendid passages lead us to the divine root of the matter. They speak not of "the forces of nature," but of the glory of Christ, the power of His hand, the virtue of His Word. Infidelity would rob us of Christ, and give us, instead, "the forces of nature." We vastly prefer our own beloved Lord. We

delight to see His name bound up, indissolubly, with creation in all its vast and marvellous fields. We vastly prefer the eternal record of the Holy Ghost to all the finely-spun theories of infidel professors. We rejoice to see the name of Jesus bound up in every department of religion and philanthropy. We shrink with ever-increasing horror from every system, every club, every order, every association, that dares to shut out the glorious name of Jesus from its schemes of religion and moral reform. We do solemnly declare that the religion, the philanthropy, the moral reform, which does not make the name of Jesus its Alpha and its Omega, is the religion, the philanthropy and the moral reform of hell. This may seem strong, severe, ultra, and narrow-minded, but it is our deep and thorough conviction, and we utter it fearlessly, in the presence of all the infidelity and superstition of the day.

But we must return to our apostle's discourse, which has wakened up those glowing sentiments in the very depths of the soul.

Having charged home their terrible sin upon the consciences of his hearers, he proceeds to apply the healing, soothing balm of the gospel, in words of marvellous power and sweetness: "And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things which God before had showed by the mouth of all His prophets that Christ should suffer, *He hath so fulfilled.* " Nothing can exceed the grace of this. It recalls the words of Joseph to his troubled brethren: "It was not you that sent me hither, but God." Such is the exquisite grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, such the infinite love and goodness of our God.

"Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the time of refreshing shall come from (or by) the presence of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you; whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God had spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever He shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that every soul which will not hear that Prophet shall be destroyed from among the people. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. *Unto you first* God, having raised up His Son Jesus, *sent Him to bless you*, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."

Thus did this dear and honoured apostle, in the power of the Holy Ghost, throw wide open the kingdom of Heaven to the Jews, in pursuance of his high commission as recorded in Matthew 16. It is what we may well call a splendid testimony, from first to last. Most gladly would we linger over it; but our limited space forbids. We can only commend it to the earnest study of the reader, and pass on, for a few moments, to Acts 10 which records the opening of the kingdom to the Gentile.

We assume that the reader understands the truth in reference to the keys of the kingdom of Heaven being committed to Peter. We shall not therefore occupy his time or our own in combating the ignorant superstition which attributes to our apostle what we may rest assured he would have rejected with intense and holy horror, namely, the power to let souls into Heaven. Detestable folly! which, while it obstinately refuses Christ, who is God's only way to Heaven, will blindly build upon some poor sinful mortal like ourselves who himself was a debtor to the sovereign grace of God and the precious blood of Christ for his entrance into the Church on earth and into Heaven above.

But enough of this. All intelligent Christians understand that the apostle Peter was commissioned, by his Lord and ours, to open the kingdom of Heaven to both Jew and Gentile. To him were committed

the keys, not of the Church, nor yet of Heaven, but of "the kingdom of heaven"; and we find him using them in Acts 3 and Acts 10.

But he was by no means so alert in taking up the latter as he was in taking up the former. Prejudice — that sad hindrance then, now, and always — stood in the way. He needed to have his mind enlarged to take in the divine purpose in respect to the Gentiles. To one trained amid the influences of the Jewish system, it seemed one thing to admit Jews into the kingdom, and quite another to admit Gentiles. Our apostle had to get further instruction in the school of Christ ere his mind could take in the "no difference" doctrine. "Ye know," he said to Cornelius, "how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company or come unto one of another nation." Thus had it been in days gone by; but now all was changed. The middle wall was broken down — the barriers were swept away; "God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." He had seen, in a vessel which came from Heaven, and returned thither, *all manner* of four footed beasts," and a voice from Heaven had commanded him to slay and eat. This was something new to Simon Peter. It was a wonderful lesson he was called to learn on the housetop of Simon the tanner. He was there, for the first time, taught that "God is no respecter of persons," and that what God hath cleansed no man may call common.

All this was good and healthful for the soul of our apostle. It was well to have his heart enlarged to take in the precious thoughts of God — to see the old barriers swept away before the magnificent tide of grace flowing from the heart of God over a lost world — to learn that the question of "clean" or "unclean" was no longer to be decided by an examination of hoofs and habits (Lev. 11) — that the same precious blood of Christ which could cleanse a Jew could cleanse a Gentile also; and, moreover, that the former needed it just as much as the latter.

This, we repeat, was most valuable instruction for the heart and understanding of Simon Peter; and if the reader wants to know how far he took it in and appreciated it, he has but to turn to Acts 15 and read the apostle's own commentary upon the matter. The Church had reached a solemn crisis. Judaizing teachers had begun their terrible work. They would fain bring the Gentile converts under the law. The occasion was intensely interesting and deeply important — yea, solemnly momentous. The very foundations were at stake. If the enemy could but succeed in bringing the Gentile believers under the law, all was gone.

But, all praise to our ever-gracious God, He did not abandon His Church to the power or wiles of the adversary. When the enemy came in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord raised up a standard against him. A great meeting was convened — not in some obscure corner, but at Jerusalem, the very centre and source of all the religious influence of the moment — the very place, too, from whence the evil had emanated. God took care that the great question should not be decided at Antioch by Paul and Barnabas, but at Jerusalem itself, by the unanimous voice of the apostles, elders, and the whole Church, governed, guided and taught by God the Holy Ghost.

At this great meeting our apostle delivered himself in a style that stirs the very deepest springs of our spiritual life. Hear his words: "And when there had been much disputing" — Alas! how soon the miserable disputing began — "Peter rose up and said unto them, Men, brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost even as He did unto us, and put *no difference between us and them*, purifying their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, *why tempt ye God* to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be

saved *even as they.*"

This is uncommonly fine, indeed it is morally grand. He does not say, "They shall be saved even as we." No; but "We shall be saved even as they" — on the same ground, after the same model, in the same way. The Jew comes down from his lofty dispensational position, only too thankful to be saved, just like the poor Gentile, by the precious grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

How those words of the apostle of the circumcision must have refreshed and delighted the heart of Paul as he sat at this never-to-be-forgotten meeting! Not that Paul sought in any way the countenance, the support, or authority of man. He had received his gospel and his commission, not from Peter, but from Peter's Lord; and from Him, too, not as the Messiah on earth, but as the risen and glorified Son of God in Heaven. Still, we cannot doubt that the testimony of his beloved fellow-labourer was deeply interesting and cordially welcome to the apostle of the Gentiles. We can only say, Alas! that there should have been aught in the after-course of that fellow-labourer in the smallest degree inconsistent with his splendid testimony at the conference. Alas! that Peter's conduct at Antioch should vary so much from his words at Jerusalem. See Gal. 2.

But such is man, even the best of men, if left to himself. And the higher the man is, the more mischief he is sure to do if he makes a stumble. We shall not, however, dwell on the sad and painful scene at Antioch, between those two most excellent servants. They are both now in Heaven, in the presence of their beloved Lord, where the remembrance of past failure and sin only enhances the value of that blood which cleanseth from all sin, and of that grace which reigns, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord. The Holy Ghost has thought proper to record the fact that our apostle failed in frankness and integrity at Antioch; and further, that the blessed apostle of the Gentiles had to withstand him to the face; but we are not going to expatiate upon it. We would profit by it, as well we may, for it is full of deep instruction and solemn warning. If such a one as the apostle Peter, after all his experience, his fall and restoration, his long course of service, his intimate acquaintance with the heart of Christ, all the instruction he had received, all his gifts and knowledge, all his powerful preaching and teaching — if such a one as this could, after all, dissemble through fear of man, or to hold a place in man's esteem, what shall we say for ourselves? Simply this:

O Lamb of God, still keep me close to Thy pierced side;

Tis only there in safety and peace I can abide.

When foes and snares surround me, when lusts and fears within,

The grace that sought and found me, alone can keep me clean.

May the Lord greatly bless to our souls our meditation on the history of Simon Peter! May his life and its lessons be used of the Holy Ghost to deepen in our souls the sense of our own utter weakness and of the matchless grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.