## The Dealings of God with Peter.

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(B.T. Vol. N8, [14 episodes]. This paper begins the second of a course of lectures on "The Dealings of God with Peter," the first lecture unfortunately being lost, or not taken down. — [Ed. B.T.])

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**Matthew 14:22-33.**

My object, as you know, is not to enter into all the particulars that might claim our attention and our interest in such a scene as I have now read, but the Lord's dealings with Peter — the special teaching of God's Spirit in that which concerned His servant on this occasion. Now, on a previous one, the Lord had manifested His gracious power in a kindred scene — not, it is true, in a storm, but in the very neighbourhood of the shore, after a fruitless night of labour where they had toiled much and caught nothing. And the Lord had then shown not only His absolute power on behalf of His own people, but His perfect knowledge. For it was not merely that there was a shoal of fishes caught, but there was the direction of the Lord. There was the telling them to cast on the right of the boat; and it was found therefore, as Jesus had said, and as the apostle (he who was about to be an apostle) now learned, "at Thy word." It was against all appearances, in the face of an experience which would have made him utterly doubt the possibility of such a thing; but it was the Lord, and it was the Lord honouring His word — the Lord who showed boundless resources, and that these resources were not only at His command, but according to His word to His own people. And this, accordingly, was the starting-point of Peter as a fisher of men.

Here we have another scene, not by the shore, but on the lake, which was now a scene of boisterous wind, and, as it is said, "the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves; for the wind was contrary." It is a picture of what the world is for the servants of the Lord in His absence. He was on high on the mountain. He was there in prayer — just what He is doing now. He is in the presence of God interceding; and, meanwhile, His servants are here, and all is against them — all outward circumstances — for there is one who is in power allowed for a season, and his uniform effort is to oppose and thwart the servants of the Lord. Hence, therefore, they, being exposed on the lake, were an object against which Satan raged. "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." The very thing which if believed in is the spring of the deepest comfort, when it is merely a question of sight, even if it were Jesus, is turned into an occasion of fear! So little can we trust ourselves, so infinitely are we indebted to God and His word. I say that the word revealing Jesus is a totally different thing from our own thoughts, our own sight, even if it were so. So we know it was when the Lord was here below; not perhaps terror as on this occasion, but certainly indifference, stupid wonder sometimes, at the miracles that He wrought, but always only one feeling of the heart after another. There was no divine link. The only spring of divine association is the word of God.

Well here there was nothing of the kind. They "saw him walking on the sea," and "were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them." Here was His word. "Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer, it is I, be not afraid."

This draws out Peter, who showed what, alas he often showed — he showed confidence in his own feelings about the Lord. He was right, of course, as to the Lord; utterly wrong in acting upon his own thoughts and feelings. So now, when the Lord had brought out this comfort, nothing seemed to him a more simple thing — with that fervour and readiness that was his character — to act upon it. So he says, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water."

Now there, I need not tell you, it was what man never ought to venture — a going before the Lord. All blessing and power in acting where the Lord leads, but what a thing, after all, for man to wish to lead the Lord! It was really this which Peter, through his haste, was doing. "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." The Lord acts, however, upon His word. He would test him. It was needful for Peter. And it is exactly what the Lord is doing now with us. It was what He did with Israel in the wilderness, but then He shows what is in the heart. It is not merely a question of evil, but there may be that which seems ever so good, for what could be better than to go out to Jesus? Yes, but there is all the difference whether it is the Lord, who, from His own heart, bids me come, or the Lord who acts upon my own impetuosity, and who puts me to the test, if it is my own thought, my own haste. It was so, certainly, with Peter, and this, accordingly,. was what Peter had to learn — the blessedness of waiting, the danger of dictating, of drawing even upon the Lord according. to his own thoughts. So the Lord answers him "Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water to go to Jesus"; for undoubtedly that word "Come" for the moment filled his heart. It was faith. It was faith to act upon the word of the Lord, but inasmuch as it was not only faith, it was mingled. It was Peter's word, and not simply the Lord's word. "If it be thou." Was that simple faith? "Lord, if it be thou." Assuredly not.

With the faith, the unmingled faith, that God gives a soul, there is no such thing as "If it be thou." There was clearly, therefore, the mingling of Peter's own mind, Peter's own thoughts. A question was involved in the very way in which he speaks to the Lord: "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee upon the water." Was it His will? He had not thought of that. It was Peter's will; but, nevertheless, there was reality in Peter, and this is exactly what we find on the occasion. It is a mingled scene; it flowed out of a mingled source.

And this is one thing that we have often to learn, beloved friends, of one another. It is the commonest thing possible, especially in the younger days of every Christian. And it is precisely where we have to take care of our thoughts and our theories. There may be reality of faith, but there may be much more than faith, too, and it is wisdom never to disown faith. But, on the other hand, it is wisdom also to discern that there is something besides faith.

So in this very case. There is faith in so far that Peter does go at the word of the Lord, and does, therefore, walk on the water. There would have been no such thing if there had not been faith; but still, I repeat, it was not unmingled. There was enough of Peter himself to enfeeble his walk on the water, and this shows itself quickly, for when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid, and, beginning to sink, he cried, saying, "Lord, save me."

Now there at once an unskilled soul, in dealing with another, would say, "There is no faith there whatever. There you see he is sinking. He is crying, 'Lord, save me.' He never knew that he was saved. He never had faith." It does not follow by any means, but it was quite evident that there was this trouble in the heart of Peter, and, accordingly, the Lord dealt with what was simply of Peter, while at the same time He stood faithful to His own word, for He had bid him come, and He would not revoke it. He does not change, but inasmuch as Peter had been too forward, and his own will was concerned in it, the Lord would judge the will, but He would strengthen the faith. And so He acts in the perfecting of His own grace. For He allows Peter to learn the folly of being before the Lord. He allows him to prove that even His own word, "Come," was not enough unless there was faith in it. Peter could say in his First Epistle, "Kept by the power of God." Yes, but "through faith." And supposing there was something besides faith at work — feeling, desire — for, no doubt, Peter thought that nobody else in the boat could go out but himself; well then, I say, there was something to judge, and this was in the very fulness of the love of the Lord Jesus to Peter. For Peter would have to do with others as a fisher of men, and if Peter had walked bravely on the water, and there had been no sinking, do you think that Peter would ever have known the weight of his own word, "kept by the power of God"? Certainly not.

This then was an incomparably valuable lesson, a lesson that he learned from the Lord personally, but a lesson that was only better known when the Lord was no longer there in person, when the Lord was away. Indeed, it was particularly for that time, for the whole scene in its force rather refers to the absence of Jesus. No doubt there is a linking on of the present with that which will he by and by, and I suppose that the end of the chapter shows most clearly that view. Taking the scene as a picture of what is coming, no doubt it does show us our Lord when He rejoins those from whom He has been separated; when He comes back again, and not only joins Peter on the sea, but joins the others in the ship. There will he a coming to the "desired haven." There will be the return of the Lord. There will be the blessedness that will follow His return. "And when the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that — were diseased, and besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment, and as many as touched were made perfectly whole." No doubt there will be this, not merely in a little testimony as then, but in power when the Lord returns in His kingdom, and He will be welcomed in the very place from which, on the contrary, He had been rejected. For it was at this very spot that there had been the desire expressed, and expressed strongly too, that He would depart from their coasts. It is the return of the Lord, then, which finishes this part of the chapter.

The eighteenth chapter takes up another line of truth, but it brings us, as far as a figure can, to the return of the Lord by and by. Only we have evidently a very great advance in the position of Peter. When Peter left the ship we have what, as nearly as possible, shows the place of a Christian; what ought to be the pathway, indeed, of the church as a whole. That is an abandonment of every prop of nature, and the going out to Jesus where nothing but divine power could keep him. But I repeat that is only through faith. Now that is the grand lesson, that it is not even Jesus only, but it is through faith. And where therefore Peter allowed other things to occupy his mind, when he saw the wind boisterous, that was not faith. "When he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me." Certainly that is not the triumph of a Christian man. A Christian man is characterised always by this, "receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." A man who does not maintain with simplicity and with constancy the happy enjoyment of the salvation of his soul, so far gives up the principle of a Christian man. Of course I do not the least mean that there are not very true Christians who have been bewildered and perplexed and misled as to the salvation of their souls. I am very far from saying that they are not Christians if they have not that constant enjoyment, but I do say they are off the ground of Christianity. I do say they have never known it, or that they have let it slip as Peter did here. And the source is the very same thing, for people have tried to have the joy of salvation by thinking of salvation. They never will, never! It is by Christ before them, by Christ as one that we are entitled to look upon and rest in and enjoy. And indeed this characterises, as we find afterwards, in this very Gospel, not merely Christ as an object now, but Christ as an object of hope by and by. "They went forth to meet the bridegroom." That is what we are called to, that is, from the very beginning, and that is what God now has brought back again. We go forth to meet Him. We do not belong to an association. We do not belong to a society, and nothing on earth, no person, no thing upon earth, has a right to us. Jesus only. Consequently therefore if He says, "Come," we go, and if this fills the heart it does not matter whether there are the waters or not. And it makes not the slightest difference that the waters are boisterous, for I need not repeat the remark, familiar to many, that the waters might have been as smooth as glass, but they would have been just as difficult to walk upon. It is not, therefore, in the least a question of smooth or rough, but of Jesus; and of Jesus (I repeat) as one that the heart was occupied with — Jesus again, as I have said, as one. that is coming back, for we have that too. It is not merely as one now, but as one that is coming, and coming to receive us into His own glory, into His own joy.

Here then we have this most weighty lesson impressed upon the soul of Peter — that even in the presence of Jesus, where the circumstances of trial and of danger, instead of the word of Christ, filled his mind; his heart was utterly powerless, and he was in far more imminent danger than those that were in the boat. No doubt he despised them! They did not dare to go out to meet Jesus! But where was Peter now? Hence you see he was, after all, comparing himself. He was looking at these things, and looking at himself upon the water; he had forgotten Jesus really, and therefore in this agony he cries out, "Lord, save me," and the grace of the Lord at once meets him. "And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith." Ah, there was faith then, but it was little faith, and this little faith now became manifest. He thought he was a man of great faith. Now here was exactly the lesson that Peter had to learn. "O thou of little faith." It was himself. It was not Thomas. I do not say that Thomas' faith was not very little, but still, it was not Thomas, it was not John, it was no other, it was Peter. He never thought of it. On the contrary, he was quite sure that he was a man of great faith, and now he has this most wholesome lesson. How humble he would be! How tender with others! He would remember that there was One who had searched the heart and the reins, who had said, "O thou of little faith." And I have not the slightest doubt that the very fact that the Lord pronounced, "O thou of little faith," was the means of his growth in faith. For the thing that hinders us, brethren, at least one great source at any rate, is our conceit of ourselves. We do not think we need to grow; we forget that. We forget our lowliness, and I would speak now, spiritually too, for that was the point. It was not little in any circumstances that belonged to Simon Barjona. It was the little faith of *Peter.*And so the Lord shows also that which characterises little faith — doubt. There is not a word in the Bible to create a doubt, not one. The Spirit of God never put a doubt into the heart of man. Doubt is of Satan, or of man himself under Satan, if you please, never of the Spirit of God. There is everything to search, everything to humble, to exercise, but to exercise *faith;*because, beloved friends, what is the root of doubting? Depreciating Christ. Do you think the Holy Ghost ever depreciates the grace of Christ towards even the man of little faith? Here you have the contrary. To whom did Christ manifest His grace more? To the man of little faith most of all. "Wherefore didst thou doubt? — They come into the ship, the wind ceases, they arrive on the other side, and, as I have already pointed out, with that result of blessing in the very place of His rejection.

Well, this is the first great lesson that followed the public call of Peter. I shall now take you to another and different scene in the end of the sixth of John, where the Lord had brought out Himself, and Himself, too, in a very wondrous way — as the bread of life come down from heaven in contrast with the king that man would have liked to make Him; for they thought He was just the one for them, a king that would provide bread for his people; and so they caught at it at once.

They might have quoted scripture for it. For had not scripture declared that Messiah would feed His people with bread? Yes, and it would have been such an excellent thing for them — bread without working for it! and so they thought that this was the king that would do for them. They therefore sought to make the Lord a king, and the Lord therefore goes away from them, because, although He was born King of the Jews, and although He was proclaimed King of the Jews a little after, and although it was impossible for him to deny and not confess that truth, let it be who it might — Pontius Pilate even, that asked, without the least concern as to the reality of the answer — nevertheless, the Lord showed that He knew from the very beginning that He was come, not to reign, but to die; to reign, no doubt, by and by, for there is no truth of Christ but what will be verified. There is no seed but what will really produce fruit, even though it fall to the ground and die first; but still in that very way it is so. It all must go through death and resurrection.

And so the Lord Jesus shows here that it is not first bread, but first suffering. Hence therefore He expounds a grand truth of His person, and what He had come to do, in contrast with Jewish thoughts — that it was not to reign as they expected, although His was the title and He was really the King of that people. But then His own would not have Him — "his own received him not." His own received Him not, because they were sinners, and after all it was impossible that He could reign over a realm of sin and of sinners. Thus one can see the perfect suitability of it that so it should be, but nevertheless God allowed it to come out as a matter of human responsibility. They would not have Him, not that He would not have them, but that they would not have Him, and it turns out after all that there was a moral unsuitability — total unsuitability — between such a king and such a people.

Well then, what does the Lord lay down? He was come to be a servant, and consequently He comes down. He comes down from heaven, He becomes a man, He is incarnate. But that is not all. When they stumbled at that, He says, "I am come to die," and He puts this too in the very strongest way, for He says that it is not only that He must be accepted as thus coming down from heaven, and becoming a man to serve, but further — that except they ate His flesh and drank His blood they had no life in them; and yet further, that whosoever did eat His flesh and drink His blood had eternal life, and He would raise him up at the last day. Clearly not that which men have been talking about of late — a question about sacrament or mass or anything of that kind. It is Himself, beloved friends; it is Himself; but then it is Himself dying! And there, indeed, is the great delusion of men — using something that is a mere sign of Christ to do the work of Christ Himself — an idol made out of an institution of the Lord, and consequently it becomes a "saving sacrament," call it what you please.

No, there is but one Saviour, and this is what He really came for, and this was worthy of God and of His Son — to be the Saviour first. He will reign by and by, but He would save men from sin; for what would be the good of the kingdom first, and then men turned into hell afterwards? No, He would save them from sin first. He would save them from hell, and then reign; and so He will, and this is the way. Accordingly then, He substitutes Himself, coming down and dying for sinners in this world, giving His life, as He says, *for the world.*It was not merely a question of the Jews, but He gives this life for the world. He substitutes this for the earthly expectation of Israel that He was to reign over them now. Not so; this was His real work, and He closes it all by His going up to heaven as the Son of man.

And it is a singular thing that these are the two things that a Jew cannot endure. He does not believe either in God's coming down, or in man's going up; he denies both. It is precisely what tests all the thoughts and feelings of a Jew, and I expect that it will test Christendom too very shortly, because they are rapidly falling into the same pit of unbelief that Israel has fallen into already, and they will very soon, to their own eternal ruin, give up as a public profession, through Christendom, either that God came down to the earth, or that man has gone up to heaven. That will be the apostasy when it comes. But this chapter is full of it, and the effect of bringing this out was that from that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him. Is it not so? "*Many of his disciples*." It was not merely the multitudes, but many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him. And what had the Lord done, and what had He said? He had brought out His incomparable grace. He had brought out an infinitely deeper truth than if He had brought in the kingdom and given them to sit one on the right hand and the other on the left, if it had been possible to give the best place to every soul in the kingdom, which, of course, could not be. If it had been possible, I repeat, for every man of them to have the best place, what was that compared to His coming down and dying for sinners, giving eternal life, and raising them up at the last day? Nevertheless, it was such a shock to all their expectations that many of His disciples, from that time, went back and walled no more with Him.

"Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?" And who answered? Simon Peter. And now, you see, he that was of little faith had become, I may say, of great faith. The lesson was learnt, and he showed it, for when the question came the answer — the ready answer of his soul — was, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" He does not now say "*I*." He does not now say, "Lord, *if* it be Thou." "Lord, to whom shall we go?" There is no "if" now. "Thou hast the words of eternal life." No hesitation in his soul. Ah, there is faith. There is not little faith now. There is no mingling of doubt now. There is no question before Peter now, and what is more remarkable too, there is no such thing as that egotism that mingled with the former case, but he says, "We believe and are sure." He puts them all with himself, "We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."

I am sorry on such an occasion as this, beloved friends, to bring in a little word that must correct our English Version. You must carefully remember that the English Version, after all, is not the word of God in the fullest sense, or strictest sense, of the word. That is, you must always leave room for an occasional spot or speck where man's carelessness has a little obscured the fulness of the truth. Now, if you look at any careful, any exact, presentation of the true text and translation of the N.T. you will find it to be this, "That thou art the Christ, *the Holy One of God*." "The Holy One of God" are the true words, as I believe, in this particular place. I do not think, therefore, it is the same thing exactly as we have in [Matt. 16](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matt.+16&t=DBY). It is a different confession of our Lord Jesus, and I will endeavour to show the great beauty and appropriateness of that which Peter says here; for mark, beloved friends, there is no anxiety now. There is no such thing as, "Lord, save me"; no such thing now. Now he is filled with Christ. He has not a thought of himself or anything else, and this is the true way in which souls enter into perfect peace with the Lord.

And again, if there is any one thing that is terrible to a sinner it is the holiness of God — and the holiness of God where it is brought fairly by faith before the soul — where it measures the believer, because the believer alone truly feels what is in those words, "The Holy One of God." I grant you, it is not only believers. What will help to make it a little more distinct is this. We have others that say, "The Holy One of God." It was the confession, if I can call it so — it was the expression at any rate — of the demoniacal man, the demoniac that first met the Lord when He began *His*public ministry. This ministry of our Lord was, as you know, first entered upon at Nazareth, where, according to His wont, He entered into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and there was given Him the book of Esaias the prophet, in which was the scripture that showed that He was the One according to prophecy that was to bring in the acceptable year of the Lord; and He shows therefore, the exceeding grace of God. It was no question now of judgment, no mingling of the two that man so much likes, but that it was to he unmixed grace.

But then there is another thing. Satan has got power here. Therefore there follows in Luke, when he gives the ministry of the Lord, His confronting the man with the unclean spirit in the synagogue at Capernaum on the sabbath day also. It was to be brought evidently before man — the power of Satan in this world, the power of Satan in man and over man. And then we have in the fourth of Luke (I may just refer to it for a moment in order to compare it) the demon crying out with a loud voice, "Let us alone." Mark it well. "Let us." It is a very solemn thing how a spirit, whether it *is*an evil spirit or the Spirit of God, identifies himself with the man in whom he dwells, just as he who has the Holy Ghost has Him adapting Himself in grace to the man. So, though it be His own guidance, it is, nevertheless, the man's guidance. Although it he He that works, all that is good and sweet in the man, it is the man's work. It is what the man does after all. All the fruits of the Spirit are not *merely*the fruits of the Spirit, but they belong to the man. They characterise the man, so much so that we are ourselves said to be "in the Spirit." As the apostle says, "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." That is, He characterises us so completely that it is no longer the flesh but the Spirit, if the Spirit dwell in us. Well, just so here. The man says, "Let us alone; what have we to do with thee." It is not, "What have I," merely; "What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us?" That is what they felt. That was the dismal fear that was produced. And mark how Jesus is addressed. "I know thee, who thou art, the Holy One of God." Nothing more awful to contemplate, nothing that so brings their utter and everlasting doom before them, for they at least believe — and with what effect? The demons believe and tremble.

Now that is not at all the intention with a soul that is born of God. Faith is not intended to make us tremble, but to make us happy; to make us at perfect peace, because if I see Jesus by faith I have Him as my life. I could not have Him by faith without His being my life also, and I could not have Him as my life without having His righteousness now. I speak, of course, supposing now the work done: that is, the Christian has all that he sees in Christ. Everything that is in Christ is in his favour. What He is as the Son of God, what He is as the Son of man; everything is in his favour. He could not do without one single thing that he knows to be in the Son of God. If He were not the Son of God it would not be eternal life; and if He were not a man it would not be righteousness. But you see the whole thing then — all that Christ is in His person and work — all descends in blessing upon the head of a believer. In his case, therefore, we find the very reverse. "We believe and are sure." Was there any trembling there? No, when Peter was not occupied with Jesus, as we saw, when he looked at the danger, the circumstances in which he was, he was full of anxiety; he was afraid. But not so now, and yet, beloved friends, he confesses Christ in the very same terms in which we find this man, the demon, does; but in this latter case it was awful alarm. It was the pangs of coming judgment that filled the soul, "Art thou come to destroy us?" You see, the power of Satan was to drag down the man into his terror, just as the Holy Ghost would lift up man into His sense of what grace is now in the Lord Jesus Christ. So Jesus rebukes the demon, turns out the demon, and the man is settled in peace and deliverance. But in Peter's case we have the very same thing — the Holy One of God confessed — and yet instead of an anxiety it is the very thing that fills the heart with joy.

If we had only the sense of our Lord Jesus as the gracious One, there would still be something lacking for our souls; if we had no thought but "the day is coming when I shall see Him as the Holy One. What will it be then?" Nay, but I know that I cannot separate it. It is the holy One just as much as the gracious One now. He is the one that never admitted — always refused — evil of any kind; and that is my comfort, that it is the one who loves me best, the one that sees me through and through, the one that caused others, it may be, to doubt; at any rate, they do doubt, because there were such words of grace as never were heard before, for the Lord had never given utterance to words so full of grace as in this very discourse at Capernaum, because of which His disciples — many of them — left Him. But Peter, as now showing the simplicity and growth of faith, instead of trembling, instead of being enfeebled, instead of his going along with those that had departed, on the contrary, confesses Him that He is the Holy One of God at the very time that he says, "We believe and are sure." There was no flinching, there was no hiding, there was no danger that that Holy One would detect for which he would cast them out from His presence. The very reverse. Peter had said, even before, "Thou hast the words of eternal life."

Now this then is the next thing that I believe the Spirit of God would have us to see in His dealings with Peter. That is, that now, when he has Christ Himself before him, and Christ Himself in the very character that fills the demon with the sense of coming destruction, Peter stands before Him without a doubt. There is nothing so awful as divine holiness where there is sin, and sin without grace to meet it; but here the very contrary. The Lord had been bringing out all His grace, and for that very reason Peter stands in the presence of all His holiness, and he stands there with not a doubt upon his soul. He stands there confessing Him, and confessing Him with words of unusual strength.

Further too, there is a grace that takes in others, for instead of merely confessing himself, he joins others in the confession of the very same truth. Indeed, Peter knew that he had not Christ for himself; that if he had Christ, the others had also. The Lord, it is true, at that very time cautions him. The Lord brings in the solemn thought that he may have gone a little too far there. "Jesus answered, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for he it was that should betray him."

The Lord therefore does show not merely that there was eternal life for those that believed, but that Peter did not know that one of the twelve was no believer at all. But as far as the strength of Peter's words went, it was all right and all true; that is to say, that those that believe have this blessed portion in Him, and that, even as for His being the Holy One of God, so far from its being a question, or an anxiety, on the contrary, it is coupled here with the strongest and fullest confession of faith that Peter had made up to that moment.

Now we will go to what I may call a kindred confession, but not the same, and we must return to the sixteenth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew for it. It was a time when unbelief was coming out, only here it is not the disciples; it is not that circle only that is judged; but the chapter shows us unbelief everywhere until we come to the disciples; and the Lord Himself put the question, "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? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist, some Elias, and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets. That is, there was the usual answer of men, the uncertainty of human opinion. "He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?" because the very uncertainty of men brings out the faith of God's elect, and therefore there is no time at all that is not turned of God for good to the believer. When things are bright and happy, how happy for the believer! When things are most dark, how happy for the believer! Of course, not the darkness of the time, but the preciousness of having Christ in the darkest time. I say then that it matters not what the time of uncertainty may be. If the soul is simple, it is always well. And so here. "Whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

The Gospel of Mark also gives this confession, but there it is merely "the Christ." He does not say a word about His being the Son of the living God, and this helps much to show the force of its connection, because where He is only confessed to he "the Christ" there is not a word said about building the church; not a word. But where he adds to "the Christ" that He was the Son of the living God," the Lord answers, "Blessed art thou." Peter could bear now to be personally and peculiarly blest. He had shown that by the grace of God he had risen above occupation with himself, and drawing attention to himself. And it is precisely when one is thus delivered from self, as far as it goes, that the Lord can put particular honour. Not otherwise. "Thou art the Christ," says he; and the Lord's answer is, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." Could Peter have borne that on the night on which he sank in the water? No, not at all. But Peter was no longer "thou of little faith." Now the Lord could tell him that this was the very special revelation that the Father had made to him. He could bear it. But He adds, "And I also say unto thee." It is not only that the Father had revealed that, but the Lord adds His revelation also to Peter. For it is not, "I say also," but "I also say." Indeed, that is the true, real force of the verse. My Father hath revealed it, "and I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church."

What was that? It was Christ confessed, not merely as the Christ, but as the Son of the living God, so that where the Son of the living God is not brought out there is no building up of the church. Where the Son of the living God is confessed, He says, "Upon this rock I will build my church." And so indeed it is. Christ was the One in whom the promises were to be accomplished. "The Son of the living God" is the one who is proved to be so by resurrection of the dead. I do not deny that by that very same resurrection the promises are secured, but this I do say, that what proved Him to be the Son of God, even before the promises are accomplished, was this personal glory that broke through the last stronghold of Satan — death — nay, that which was God's judgment upon man, upon the first man. Now there is another man, but He is much more than a man. Man simply and as such could not conquer Satan. There was always one who was more, although He was to become a man. The seed of the woman no doubt should bruise the serpent's head, but then that seed of the woman was to be the Son of God. All scripture will show it, but there never had been in any scripture a confession, on the whole, so full as this very one that Peter had pronounced. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

It was a great epoch spiritually in Peter's soul, for the Lord knows how to bring out and how to own what His own grace produces. It was the fitting time. He had said this word, and it was a word of which the Son of God Himself took most especial notice. He does not say, "Oh, it is only the Father." Yes, but it was His Father that had done it through Peter's lips, and the Son therefore owns this as a most weighty thing — that before the resurrection, before the death, there was the confession of that power in the presence of the Son of God that would break through death, and so, accordingly, lay a groundwork for another thing that does not belong to this creation at all — not merely an individual blest — not merely that. Individuals had been blest before, but there was to be a divine building, there was to be a new thing formed upon earth, founded upon death overcome, founded upon resurrection-power that had broken through all that Satan could do — yea, even God's judgment; deliverance (mark it well), deliverance from the judgment of God in this world. Now that is the church. The church is that body which owes its existence to this glorious person and fact that the Son of God, in order to the giving the church a being, has broken through the power of Satan in death, and the consequence is that the church is intended to live in this constant confession of victory — victory over death and judgment, and victory only through that one person, the Son of the living God.

Well, "upon this rock," says He, "I will build my church," and nothing can be more solemn than that. The very thing in this world that Satan has forged, and which takes its stand upon this verse more than any other, is of all things most distant from it. For there is no one thing, as you well know, no one body under the sun bearing the name of Christ, that has so completely denied this very truth as that dreadful imposture, that spurious woman and most corrupt that makes the earth drunk with the wine of her cup, and that has stained herself with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. No doubt, because they have found that it answers their purpose; no doubt blinded by Satan's power, they have given up this truth, and they make the thing a question of merchandise, a question of masses and money, of priests and ordinances, and after all no salvation, no victory over death or judgment, but the very contrary, the constant sound of wailing and lamentation, and everything that would betoken fear and anxiety and question, to keep souls in thraldom and bondage, if peradventure there may be a little more money. Nothing can be more thoroughly opposed to the truth of God than that very body that has attempted to take its stand upon this very verse. I mention it as a singular instance, though, indeed, the same thing is true of all scripture. You will find that whenever men boastfully take their stand upon anything, without Christ there is nothing that more completely opposes them, and nothing that they more completely mistake, than the very scripture which they misuse for their own purpose. And hence you will always find, it you have to do with those who are not led by the Spirit of God, that the scriptures that they adduce are the very best answers to their pretensions. Take the scripture that they misuse and you will find that it is the most powerful engine against themselves. And so here with popery which I have just been referring to.

There are other scriptures, but this is the grand point for our own souls. Peter takes his stand upon this, and a remarkable thing, too, is the manner in which Peter brings out the church. Although he does not call it the church in his own epistle, what he speaks of there more nearly answers to this than, perhaps, to what you will find in any other part of the New Testament. When the Lord says, "Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," it is clear that although it be not the body as such, upon the other hand it is not that which man builds. It is what Christ builds, and there is that peculiarity of it, because when in scripture Christianity is presented under the figure of a house or a building you get, as a usual thing, what may be corrupted; you get what does not necessarily suppose life. But that is not the case with what the Lord calls "My church." Nor is it the case with what Peter describes in his epistle, "To whom coming as unto a living stone, ye also as living stones." He does not suppose a dead stone to come. He was evidently filled with this truth that the Lord gave his soul upon that very day, "Upon this rock will I build my church"; for it is evident that what Christ builds always must come to its fulfilment according to the purpose of God. "Upon this rock," then he says, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," so that although it be the building, it is only the building viewed as built divinely. It is not the responsible thing that man is occupied with, and where man's weakness comes in by building on the foundation what is not worthy and not suitable.

Here it is very different. "And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." So He did. Peter opened it on the day of Pentecost to the Jews, and afterwards to Cornelius the Gentile. It is the same thing. "And whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall he bound in heaven, and whatever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Peter had this place, though not exclusively. As we find in the eighteenth chapter, the disciples bind and loose. I do not say the *apostles,*but the*disciples*. But the disciples had not got the keys of the kingdom of heaven. No, nor the other apostles either; not at all. You remember that it is not the key of heaven. There is no more profound mistake than to confound "the kingdom of heaven" with "heaven." The kingdom of heaven is the rule of heaven over the earth, and therefore there may be all kinds of mistakes and all kinds of things that are not according to God. We must not confound the kingdom of heaven, therefore, with Christ's church. The kingdom of heaven is what He governs. The kingdom of heaven, therefore, is the scene of profession, and consequently there may be all sorts of things there that are far from Christ; tares as well as wheat. And so Peter, I say, opened that kingdom on the day of Pentecost. But the other part was not exclusively Peter's, though Peter has it put here in a personal form.

Then Christ charged His disciples that they should tell no man that He was the Christ. That was no question now. There was no question of His being Christ; He was going to die.

**Matt. 17:1-8, 24-21.**

No man, after such a blessing as the Lord had just pronounced upon Peter, ever received a sterner rebuke. "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona," so soon to be followed by, "Get thee behind me, Satan." So serious the place of a Christian — of a believer at least! so true the One who watches over us in love! Whilst there is the fullest value even for that which nothing but His own grace had given, and the deepest encouragement, yet how stern and unsparing is the Lord in letting Peter see what his thoughts, what his feelings, were; what Peter's heart was thinking about! And what was it that had drawn it our? Peter had owned the glory of His person. It was of God, God's teaching, without question, and the Saviour owned it at once; but that very Peter would turn Him away from the cross! Should that be? "Get thee behind me, Satan." The Lord Jesus came to die, and to die, too, in all the depths of it. For as to all the externals of the cross, they were indeed — deep as they were — but the outward form of that which only God could estimate. They greatly err who look only to what man was the instrument of in the cross of Christ — most true, most real as it was. But here the Lord was particularly looking at the cross as rejection; yet the path of that rejection led straight into the glory in which He was coming by and by. And the Lord accordingly, in the beginning of the seventeenth chapter, would give a view of the glory, and amongst others, to the very disciple that would have stopped His way into, as Peter thought, a suffering that was unworthy, but in truth that which was the foundation of His glory. For we are not here to look at His glory as Son of God; there was no foundation for that, it was its own foundation. That was truly divine, essentially divine. But here it was conferred glory. It is the kingdom; it is what God has given. As it is said in another place, "Wherefore God hath highly exalted him," so, by and by, He will be exalted in the kingdom; and the Lord would give a view of it that it might be not only a prophetical testimony, but, as the apostle Peter says, and he is the one that does say it, "We have the prophetic word more confirmed," that is, we have what was said by the prophets shown out in a reality. It might be only one that passed away; but still to have the sight of all the great elements of the kingdom brought before them in this life was an immense support to faith, an immense cheer, especially to one who must have felt deeply the rebuke that His Master passed upon him.

So "after six days, Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them; and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter." And this you know is the particular object that I have before me now — the dealings of the Lord with His servant, as manifesting His own grace and truth (no doubt bringing out the need of it on our part, bringing out weakness, wretchedness, pettiness, vanity, pride — the carnal mind in so many forms, but) the grace and truth of One that had unfeignedly met every failure of His servant; One therefore that would encourage our hearts and instruct us and strengthen us against the very same things in which he had broken down. Do we think we need it not? We are upon the very verge of similar failures. There is nothing that so surely brings a fall as the unbelief that does not believe it possible.

"Then answered Peter and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here." And was not this then, a pious thought and sentiment? "If thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." It was a disciple's way of magnifying his Master, but there is only one that is trustworthy — God's way. It is not enough to have God's end; we must learn God's way. Now there was exactly where Peter's haste betrayed his weakness, and where we are apt to fall precisely in the same way. "Let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." He evidently thought it was no small honour for his Master — a man — though the Son of God. But he thought it no small honour for his Master to be on common ground with Moses and Elias, the head of the law, and, we may say, the chief of the prophets. Doubtless He was the Messiah. But were they not glorified? At once, "while he yet spake, behold a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud." For this was no ordinary cloud — not a dark one, which is an ordinary one — but a bright one: it was the cloud of Jehovah's presence. "A voice out of the cloud said, This is my beloved Son." It is not merely a question of the kingdom. The kingdom alone would always leave the soul, as the law would, with thoughts altogether short of what is due to Christ. If I look at the law, I think of duty, and I see the Lord merely as a fulfiller of duty. If I think of the kingdom, I see glory, but a glory that others share along with Him. But the Father would not permit it. He breaks the silence from above, and says, "This is my *beloved Son*in whom I am well pleased."

Now, it is not merely that the Father was thus maintaining the glory of the Lord Jesus at the very time when one who ought, most of all, to be exalting Him was really depreciating Him — most unintentionally, because there is no putting of the Lord with any other that would give Him His just place. The very thought of placing any, however excellent, on a level with the Lord Jesus is reprehensible. Certainly Moses and Elijah were most incomparable among (I will not say the sons of men, but) the children of God. Elijah that had gone up to heaven in a chariot of fire! Moses whom Jehovah had buried, about whose body even the archangel had fought with the devil! Certainly, the man that had been with God without food for forty days and nights, and the man that had closed his career on earth thus to be in heaven, these were men to speak of, if of any. But this very thing brings out the supreme glory of the Son; and this I will say, beloved friends, that a more instructive principle there cannot be. You will find, if you search, that almost all failure, both in doctrine and in conduct, is attributable to this — low thoughts of Christ. I do not mean now thoughts that are evil, thoughts that are untrue, but I mean that the power of faith is always the taking in and subjecting our souls to the glory of the Son of God. This is the faith that overcomes the world. It is not merely that He is the Christ, that He is the King of the coming kingdom. Perfectly true; but He is the Son, and if the kingdom brings in the heirs of the kingdom, and those that enjoy the kingdom, the Son brings in God, and God as He, the Son, knows Him, and as the Father knows the Son; and there is none that comprehends the Son but the Father. And it is remarkable He does not say, "To whomsoever the *Father*will reveal," but, "Neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal." The Father does not reveal all He sees in the Son. And I am persuaded that the reason is this — that there is a depth in the very fact of the Son of God having taken manhood that transcends all possible knowledge, except of God the Father; that there is therefore a depth in it, and a secret, too, that He will not have broken. And there is where the prying mind of man loses itself. He desires to know that secret, and, consequently, unable to loose the knot, he cuts it in some violent method of his own mind — the source of all heresy. But I was not speaking of it merely in reference to heresy, but also as to the appreciation of Him day by day; for what a strength it is where His glory is before our eyes, and where each question that arises just exercises our hearts in answer to the Lord — Himself the answer to all difficulties — the Son of God

Well now, that was where Peter failed. He thought to exalt and enhance the glory of Christ, but he was altogether beneath God's thoughts. "This is my beloved Son"; and how did He show it? He says, "In whom I am well pleased." It is not merely He. Peter was thinking of his being so pleased with the Son that he would like Him to be with such wondrous men as Moses and Elias. It is, "In whom I am well pleased"; and why so? Why so? just because He is His beloved Son; that is, it has not any connection with Peter at all, but with God Himself in this relationship out of all time, that is, infinite as God Himself is. "Hear ye him."

And there comes in another point, beloved brethren, that I wish to trace, and that is that this is really what was about to be unfolded in the New Testament. What is the New Testament? The New Testament is the evolution — if I may say so — of this little word, "Hear ye him." It is God unfolding the glory of the Son to us. All that He was, as revealed in the Gospels, the Epistles, or whatever part of the New Testament it may be, is precisely this very thing that was summed up in these few words, "Hear ye him." That is, whatever might be the blessedness of Moses and Elias, of the law and the prophets, they have their place, but their best place was to bear witness of Him. And now it was not merely a *witness*of Him. It was Himself; He was come. And one, therefore, who had an adequate sense of the glory of the Son of God would not care to be listening to the servants about Him, now that he had an opportunity of hearing Himself. "Hear ye *him*." Accordingly, "when the disciples heard it they fell on their faces and were sore afraid; and Jesus came and touched them and said, Arise, be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes they saw no man, save Jesus only." There it is, that the Father leaves, as it were, the disciples in the presence of Jesus only; and the greatest possible honour, and also the proof of the value of Moses and Elias was this, that they bring out the superior glory of the Son of God; they make way for it. They are finger-posts to direct to Him, but then there is no greater mistake than to be occupied with what merely directed to Him; it is Himself. The New Testament, then, is the revelation of that which the Father has to tell us of the Son — not all that He knows, but all that which is for His own glory in making known His Son to us.

The foot of the mountain showed a very different thing. There was the power of Satan, and such a power of Satan that baffled the disciples. We have this accordingly brought out very clearly in the man that they presented to the Lord. "I brought him to thy disciples," said the poor father, "and they could not cure him." And the Lord utters words of unusual severity. "O faithless and perverse generation! how long shall I suffer you?"

My object is not to dwell upon any of these intervening portions. I just touch them as I pass along, but still it is most serious to observe this as we pass — the inability, and I do not know anything more characteristic of our weakness, and that more shows its character at this present moment than the same thing — the inability, not of Christ, but of the disciples, to avail themselves of Christ for what came before them. And why was it? What was connected with them then? Unjudged power of nature, confidence in self. "This kind cometh not out but by prayer and fasting." "Prayer and fasting" is evidently used as expressive of the nothingness of man, but the nothingness of man that expects God and counts upon God. "How long," said the Lord, "shall I suffer you, or be with you? How long shall I be with you?" Unbelief, and particularly in the disciples, is of all things the greatest pain to Christ. We often think of the unbelief of the world. There is another question nearer home. What do we think of our own faith? What have we to say about it; our power of bringing in Christ to solve every difficulty? I do not know a more distressing thing at the present moment than the mass of unsolved difficulties everywhere; and the very persons that make the difficulties most are the Lord's own disciples. It is not merely evil. There is always power superior to evil, but when the disciples themselves fail to look to Christ, and have objects of their own that complicate the bringing in of Christ to meet the difficulty — oh, how sorrowful! The Lord gives it as a reason for leaving the world. There is but one comfort that I know, and that is that this is to us, or may be to us, so much the greater token that the Lord must soon undertake all Himself, because there is so little power to bring Him in. And if that be comfort in the thought of Christ, what a condemnation of our little self-judgment, and consequently of our oftener making difficulties than solving them!

Well the Lord is now seen in another point of view, but also Peter is seen too; and indeed, it is Peter who gives occasion for the. Lord to show Himself in a new way, and in a new dealing with His servant. "And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute-money came to Peter and said, Doth not your Master pay tribute?" Now here again he was jealous for his Master. He was jealous for his Master when he thought it would be an excellent thing, and a most suitable, to make three tabernacles — tabernacles for Moses and Elias as well as for Him — a tabernacle for Him along with them. And so now he, as it were, said to the collector of tribute that his Master was much too good a Jew not to pay tribute. He said "Yes." What does the Lord do? Before he says a word about it, the Lord lets Peter know that it was all known to Him. How little he had thought of that. How little the Godhead of Jesus had penetrated the soul even of the man that said, "Son of the living God." How little he knew of his own confession! That is often the case. It is humbling if we think of ourselves, but at the same time it is a ground of encouragement and patience with other people. You must not expect people to know, though it is often a very startling thing how little we enter into the patience of our Master, and we are surprised that persons should so little understand, for instance, the very place where they are, the very worship into which they are brought, the very truth that they are supposed to live for. But here I find the same thing. Here I find that it is all full of it; but the fact is that we are not conscious ourselves that it is precisely in the same way that we break down, not perhaps in the same particular, but in the same principle. And you will observe that it is a very different thing to judge another's trial where we are not ourselves tried at the same time. Wait till we are. We shall see how far we know how to bring Christ in ourselves. I do not say it to make light of such a thing. it is a very grievous thing, but it really is the grand secret: that is, the readiness to answer from self instead of from Christ, instead of from God's side of Christ. We look at our side. Peter was jealous lest his Master should be thought not to pay the tribute. The Lord shows him He knew it all; He was God.

"Jesus prevented," or "anticipated him" — that is the meaning, for of course this is in old English — "saying, What thinkest thou, Simon: of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? Of their own children or of strangers? Peter saith unto him, Of strangers." What an answer! Was the Lord a stranger? — for this is the temple tribute. Who was the Master of the temple? Was Jesus a stranger to him? "Of *strangers*" the kings of the earth take tribute. Of whom therefore does Jehovah take, it? "Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free." Not the Son. No, He does not say the Son. He says what is infinitely better, at the very time when there had just been this overwhelming conviction on the mount. Peter in his zeal for his Master was after all depriving Him of His just title, forgetting His divine glory. How slowly we learn the lesson! "Then are the children free." For this, beloved friends, is really what Christianity means, and what the Lord was to bring out still more clearly before long — that the grace that sent down the Son of God did not merely send down one to be a propitiation, or even to be life, but that we too might acquire a new relationship according to His — that we might know the place of the children of God. "Then are the children free." He does not merely, therefore, claim it for Himself. He did not need. But He asserts it for these that are His. How astonishing to Peter! He had forgotten it; he had no thought of it. Yet was he born of God, and he was slowly learning what it meant; about to learn it far more blessedly soon when the hindrances should be taken away by the grace of Christ, and  the place of deliverance was about to dawn upon his heart.

"Notwithstanding," said He, "lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast a hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money." The last place in the world to find, except for God! And that is the very thing He showed — that it was One who had the power of God as well as the knowledge of God; that it was One who was very God, although He was here a man upon the earth. Let Peter's soul be filled with this. How his heart would turn back to it another day I know it far better when he looked back upon it, when he read it as the word of God, than when it was merely passing then before his eyes! There is no greater mistake than to suppose that if we had been living in the time of our Lord we should have understood our Lord's words better than now. The very reverse. The written word in this, as in other respects, has a higher place than the spoken word. just as the written word has a mightier testimony, so also the written word has a permanent place of correcting our thoughts, of deepening even what is true as well as correcting what is mistaken, and the Spirit of God is pre-eminently with it. Hence,, therefore, I do not hesitate to say that, far from being worse off, we are better. Peter himself was better off when Peter was not merely regarding the words he had listened to, but when he read them as inspired of God for his use and ours.

Well here, then, I say, we have lust the very same thing: that is, we have human thoughts of Christ corrected by divine, and at the same time in the doing of this a marvellous outburst of the divine glory that shone upon Peter's soul more fully than had ever been the case before,. We have had, then, the kingdom. Here we have what much more belongs to Christian relationship — the children.

The chapter that follows, as the one before, shows us the church, the one founded and the other in its practical operation. I do not say the body, but I do say Christ's church. He says, "On this rock I will build my church." But I only refer to it to show how all these three things are brought here together, and are quite distinct. The church is as distinct from the kingdom as both are from Christianity and salvation. Christian relationship is involved in this very scene. "Then are the children free" — the place of association with Christ in a common relationship before God; always remembering that, while He has brought us by grace into it, He has that relationship in His own eternal right, and that He is not merely one that is born of God, and He is never said to be so. We are. He consequently is never called a child of God. He is called Son. We are called sons, too, but we are called children of God in a sense in which it is never said of Christ. John's great point, I may observe, is that we are children of God. Properly speaking John never calls us sons of God. There are one or two places in the epistles or in the gospels where our version makes us out to be the sons of God in John's writing, but it is a mistake. Our translators did not understand the difference. They thought one word as good as another. They were mistaken; there was a very great difference. A man might be adopted as a son without being a child in the family. We are not only adopted sons, we are children of the family. We are born of God; and here you see, as connected with this, the Lord Jesus shows us this place of sharing His own exemption. But then look at the grace in it. He that had this divine power said, "Notwithstanding, lest we should offend." And there is one great point of our weakness. We do not know how to carry our privileges. We learn, for instance, about a church, we learn about grace, we learn to talk about both; but I would ask this — have we, and do we, carry with us, especially in the time of trial and grave action, the spirit that becomes those that are brought into such a place?

And more particularly now, when it is not only the church unfolded, but the church recovered, when we had basely forgotten it, when we had shared the sin of Christendom in going after all the institutions that they were pleased to make out here below — things fashioned according to the will of man for man's own purposes, if not for man's own glory. God has graciously recovered it, but have we not used it to adorn ourselves; and have we not used it oftentimes with a hard spirit towards those that have not had one hundredth part of the advantages that we possess. Is that grace? I do not believe it, and I am persuaded, therefore, that there ought to be a lowlier tone while holding fast the depth of grace that the Lord has shown to us, but a deeper sense of our own shortcomings, for the Lord surely judges us according to what know, and not according to the ignorance of others. And do not we feel, beloved brethren, that there are many children of God at this moment that walk more faithfully and more humbly, according to their little light, than we do according to our much greater light? And ought we not to be humble? I am sure we ought.

Well, here now was one in whom there was no question of failure at all, but there was failure in Peter, and he would show Peter, too, that the very fullest consciousness of glory, the very fullest consciousness of nearness to God, goes along with a consideration of others, and of other's ignorance, too. They did not know the glory of the Son. They saw that He was a man; that He was a Jew. Well, the Lord did not stop to argue it, or to prove it with them. It is grace giving the knowledge of it to those that have faith; and now Peter was in the secret of it, and Peter was given to know that be, too, had a little of it, for the Lord was not making it known for His own glory. He had it from everlasting to everlasting; but now He was letting Peter know a little of it, and at once He shows the grace in which this glory acts here below in the midst of an unbelieving world. "Lest we should offend them, give them all they claim." The Lord did not come to assert His glory, or to claim the obeisance of those that had not faith, but to teach those that had faith to walk in the power of His own grace as those who behold His glory. This then will suffice for the seventeenth chapter.

On the eighteenth I need not dwell, though there is just one point of importance that may claim a moment. "Then came Peter to him" (ver. 21), "and said, How oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Seven times?" He thought a great deal of that, but Jesus enlarges the sphere infinitely. "Jesus said to him, I say not seven times, but seventy times seven." Here you see it was not merely grace with unbelievers who do not see his glory, but with a failing brother — the very thing in which we are apt ourselves to fail, because how often one hears, "Well, if he were not a brother one could understand better." But this is a brother, and a very offending one too. What is the measure? What is the limit of grace? "Till seven times?" Until seventy times seven. It has no limit.

In the nineteenth and twentieth — the connection of the two — the Lord throughout is vindicating the relationship of nature. By "nature" I mean the relationship which God has established here below. The Lord had suffered men to derange it somewhat. It was not true, as they said, that Moses commanded a bill of divorce. It was constantly used when a poor unhappy Jew wanted to be rid of his wife. "Moses suffered this," He said, "because of the hardness of your hearts." That is, the law was a state of things where man was on suffrance. It was not perfection; it was not the image of the mind of God at all. Christ is. Man was made after it, and soon failed. Christ really is the image of the invisible God, and Christ alone. And Christ, accordingly, brings out God's glory in these things, and He shows how it was at the beginning. God did not make a man and two women, but "male and female created he them." It was evident, therefore, from the very formation of man what God's mind was. And so another thing. He takes up the case of little children, slighted constantly by rabbis. They did not like the trouble of them, but the Lord paid special attention to them. I do not know anything that brings out the tender grace of the Lord more than this. He laid His hands upon them, and rebuked the disciples because of their spirit about them. And, further, He appreciated a fine character — the young man — even the man that did not follow Him, but liked his possessions too well. Yet the Lord looked upon him, as we are told in Mark, and loved him.

Well now, I say there we find nature in various forms, and the Lord's feelings about it; but the whole point of the chapter is something superior to nature. It is not, therefore, that a Christian ought to speak slightingly of anything that is of God even in the creation. There is no reason for it — no ground whatever. You constantly find that when men are on a ground of rivalry they abuse one another; but if you are brought into an entirely different and higher ground altogether it is no question of finding fault — you are completely out of the scene. Well, that is the place into which the Christian is brought now. It is not lowering the relationships of nature, or speaking unbecomingly of anything of the kind; but you are brought into a new place altogether. So the Lord shows at the close of the chapter. He said, therefore, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven, which astonished these disciples who had regarded riches as a great sign of God's favour. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." But then, He explains, when they ask, "Who can then be saved?" because they thought that a rich man had far less temptation than a poor one. A poor man might be covetous, a poor one might forget God in the extremity of need. They thought a rich man would not have such temptations. No doubt it was a very poor and low view. "Who then can be saved? But Jesus said unto them, With man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

This then is the real truth of salvation, as it is, I may say, of everything Christian; for if it is not of God it is not Christian. The whole thing is founded upon what is not of nature what is divine, what is heavenly; and that comes out far more in the epistles than even here. But the Lord brings it out as far as they could bear it themselves. "Then answered Peter, and said unto them, Behold, we have forsaken all and followed thee; and what shall we have? And Jesus said unto them, Verity I say unto you, that ye that have followed me in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit on the throne": that is, it is not following in the regeneration, but it is "in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." The regeneration means that new state of things that shall be brought in at the coming of Christ. The washing of regeneration now is in view of that state; that is, it is really a new condition, only not now brought in. It is only testimony; it is the washing; it is the word of God, and that which belongs to the word of God connected with it that supposes a new state of things; but it will be only displayed then. Well, when that new state shall come — "When the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." That is, you have the Lord fully acknowledging all fidelity. No man has ever done anything for the Lord for which the Lord will not — if I may say so — pay him back the capital with the best interest. "Surely every one that hath forsaken house, or lands, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake." He does not here say, "For the gospel's sake"; but it is so in Mark where it is wanted. There He brings the most comforting thing. He says that, instead of the gospel being a lower thing, it really is bound up with Himself. Here He says, "For my name's sake," and there He says, "For the gospel's sake." It is of all importance to bring in what Mark does — the word; but here it is the Christ, it is Himself. It is the Son of man, the rejected Christ; for that is the point of it. Those that follow Him in the day of His rejection will be with Him the sharers of His glory in the day of His power; "in the regeneration when he shall sit on the throne of his glory." They shall receive a hundred-fold and shall inherit everlasting life.

Do we believe it, beloved brethren? I do not say that when our souls are fairly brought in contact with it we do not bow; but what I mean by believing is this: have we it as a living truth before our souls every day? No man, then, that has lost for Christ's name sake but shall receive a hundredfold and shall inherit everlasting life.

"But many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first." There is a solemn word. "But many that are first shall be last"; and I will tell you who particularly: these who think much of their losses and talk much about them. They are the very men that get weary of this trial, and the reason is plain. If they were filled with Christ they would not be talking about what they have done, and what they have lost; and I say that such persons, though they may not have been first, shall be last. But, thank God, He will always fill up. "The last shall be first." A serious thing for both sides — blessed in one, but very humbling in the other.

But then the Lord adds another, because that would not give the full truth, and there is nothing more remarkable, beloved friends, than this in the word of God — the care to keep us from being one-sided. There is hardly a more common, or a more serious, danger, and I shall be so if I am occupied with that which clearly Peter was. "Behold," he says, "we have forsaken all and followed thee. What shall we have therefore?" It was clear that Christ was not all to him at that moment. He was thinking about himself. But the Lord brings in another word. "For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers in his vineyard." And then we find him hiring at different hours of the day, on which we need not particularly dwell now. "And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour they received every man a penny," or what we should call a shilling, if I may so say. That as, it was at that time a sort of day's wages. That is, what was supposed to be necessary, and what was given for a day's work of this kind. "When the first came they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it they murmured against the goodman of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong; didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way; I will give unto this last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?"

There is the secret. It is not merely a question, therefore, of righteousness in God. God is righteous, and He is not unrighteous to forget the work of faith and labour of love, but He always reserves the sovereignty of grace. He claims to be good, for He is good, and He knows therefore where to show this goodness; and further He will ask no man's leave to show it. He will show it because He is God. If He is God He is good, and so He condemns these men. They were found out — the covetousness of their hearts. They were thankful to get their day's wages for their day's work, but the covetousness was stirred by men that had only laboured for an hour. And why so? Because they could not enter into God's title to be good — not merely to be righteous. The Lord stands to His righteousness as a question with them, but the Lord stands to His goodness as a question of whom He pleases. So He says, "Is thine eye evil, because I am good." "So the last shall be first." You see its reference now. It is not the first last. There was man's breaking down, and man's breaking down because he was a little presuming; but here is grace triumphant. "So the last shall be first, and the first last; for many be called but few chosen. "

Thus it is that the Lord meets what was in Peter's heart, first bringing out the righteous ways of God, the full remembrance of everything, let it be soever small, that has been done for His name's sake, even to a hundredfold repayment. But God never renounces His own title to sovereign grace. We have these two things — the one as a reward for labour; the other sovereign grace that will show the goodness of God where He pleases, when He pleases, and how He pleases. And may our hearts delight that so it should be, for He that delights in goodness will have his own heart formed accordingly. He that rises not above the reward will find that he has made but a losing bargain for his own soul. I do not speak merely of the future, but I do say that it is to take the very least and lowest way of God in His dealings. No doubt God acts always worthily of Himself, only our wisdom is to enter into the deepening views that the Lord, and the Lord alone, could give at that time. Afterwards God forms others according to Christ, and we have it wonderfully in His blessed apostle Paul, and in Peter too, but I do not enlarge now.

May the Lord bless these lessons of His own grace, and His own truth, for Christ's sake.

**John 13:1-11.**

What I hope to present to you tonight I may characterise in two or three words, the instruction and the warning. Here we have the instruction — the most weighty, practically, that the Lord had as yet set before Simon Peter. Undoubtedly there was that which was needed previously. His personal glory had been dawning more and more upon his heart. Correction, too, there had been before now, but here it is more the positive instruction that a saint wants as such upon the earth, and Simon Peter gave occasion for the Lord's bringing it out just because he was so ready to give his opinion. Now, our opinions are always wrong. We never rightly can give an opinion, especially when we think to Whom, as in this case, we are giving it. Giving an opinion to Christ! Yet it was really that. No doubt it flowed out of a human sense of what seemed to him the incongruity of the Lord's stooping down to wash his feet; but the truth is that it was always a question of the Lord's stooping down. That was no new thing. That was just what characterised all His work here below. His appearance in the world, His coming here, His presence, His whole action — what was it? It was the service of love. No doubt it was here being brought out in a very distinct and evident manner. The service of love is always in action. It is not always so manifest; and it was the manifesting of it to Peter. Little did he know that he needed it, but the Lord brought this all out — the depth of the need, and also the character of the need, for there is exceeding instruction in these few words of our Lord Jesus. But then we must have it settled in our souls as the first great lesson that comes out in this instruction of the Lord, and that is, that all our blessing flows from distrusting our thoughts, our words, our notions of what is suitable to Christ. All our blessing, I may say, is in appropriating Christ's words. There is spirit, and there life; and what we are just learning now is to value them principally, to have perfect confidence in them, and to judge, therefore, all that rises from ourselves, all that comes from another, by this only standard.

Well, it is introduced in a way that is exceedingly striking. We see at once that it shows that it is the character of what belonged to the whole ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ in this world. "Before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And supper" — not "being ended," for it was not begun. We must remember that this is not the thought. I daresay some of you are familiar already with it, but it is well to state it now, for no doubt there are a great many here that have never thought about it or its importance. It is really, ''Supper time being come." That is the true force of the word. Their feet were not washed after supper, but before it. Any one can see that upon the very face of it. It was always the custom, and the Lord did not depart from that. The only thing that was so singular on our Lord's part was not that the feet were washed, but that He was the washer. That, indeed, was singular — that it should be He. If He had been only the master and they the disciples, it would have been different; but we learn who He was Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God and went to God" — Himself the Holy One, as holy when He went back from a world of sin as when He came into it from God.

And this was just exactly what filled His heart — the last resort of the devil, the last depth into which man's heart could be drawn by, sin, being before His eyes. "The devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him." There was what Satan was goading on the hapless man to do. But here was what filled Christ at that very time. "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them to the end." He was going, but He was going in the same unspotted holiness that belonged to His nature as divine, and which was suitable to the One to whom the Father gave all things; for we have both His intrinsic glory and His conferred. "He riseth from supper and laid aside his garments, and took a towel and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin." For you must remember that what is referred to here is the washing of water by the word, and only this. Washing by blood is a most important truth, but it is not here. It is supposed at the end of the chapter — at least the work is supposed on which the washing with blood is founded. But in the early part of the chapter there is no allusion to any washing whatever but the washing of water.

Now I dare say that it may, perhaps, have not occurred to all, because we have been too apt to think that there is just a distinction between being washed with blood at the beginning and being washed with water afterwards, but that is only part of the truth, for the fact is we are born of water just as much as we are washed with water. When we are first brought to God we are born of water and of the Spirit, and this is alluded to as the groundwork of what the Lord was doing now. Of course, it was not a question for the disciples to be born of water. They were already clean, is the Lord tells them, but not all. There was one that was not born of water; the very one of whom Satan, therefore, took advantage, and the more so because he was so near Christ. For there is nothing that so precipitates man's destruction, who has not got life from God, as being near Christ; for when one ventures into the presence of Christ not to receive life, but to prosecute one's own will, one's own plans, one only becomes the prey of Satan, and in the form too of direct antagonism to the Son of God. That was the case with Judas Iscariot. He had no such intention, but the truth is — man is never master. The very time that man seeks to be his own master is when he is most of all a slave of Satan. It is simply a question of whether God is master of me, or Satan is, but I am never master, never, nor intended to be. Contrary this is, of course, to all truth before a man is converted, but still more that which one's soul abhors when one is converted; because, if I am converted, what is it to do? It is to serve the living and true God. It is to be a servant, no doubt, to be a child, to be a son, but only the better to serve. There is no such service as the service of the child. Here we have it in all its perfection in our Lord Jesus Christ; and so now, out of this intimacy of love and this height of glory, He takes the basin and begins to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded.

Well, Simon Peter was astonished, but why? Simon Peter, will you never learn? Will you never learn to be quiet? Will you never learn to distrust yourself? Now is not that one of the great things, beloved friends, that we have got to learn? Is it not a thing in which we have constantly to challenge ourselves, because this is the very thing in which we have been so often wrong? Yes, just because we so little know what it is to walk in the consciousness of the presence of God. We are in the presence of God; we are brought there; we are walking in the light; but it does not follow that we are consciously there. And there is just the very difference, and there is where spiritual power depends upon it, because levity in the thought of our being brought into the presence of God to me is much worse than the case of the poor Christian who does not know that he is brought into the presence of God. For a man to take up the idea that to be brought into God's presence and to be walking in the light is just a mere sound, a mere privilege, a mere thing about which to say, "How near I am, and how blest I am!" — what a wretched state! No, it is meant to exercise the soul before God. It is meant to he a thing to recall us to what we are doing, what we are saying, nay, what we think, what we feel, because God necessarily notices all, and God will have us to take notice of all. It is the effect of the light of God consciously felt that we take up for the Lord, in desire for His glory what passes within us.

Was this so with Peter? He had no thought of it. No doubt he is much more excusable than we, because he had no such knowledge, and, as yet, no one had. The fact is that it is redemption that brings to God in the way of which I have been speaking, and it is the Holy Ghost given since redemption that gives us the consciousness of it. "At that time ye shall know," as the Lord says, "that I am in the Father, and ye in me, and I in you." And so it is as to this consciously walking in the light of which I have been speaking.

So Peter, then, turns to the Lord with this word, "Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" It did seem such an inversion of all that Peter thought natural. To be sure it is. It is super- natural, and we should get that settled, beloved friends, in our souls; that we are brought into what is supernatural every day, that it is not merely for a little moment on the Lord's day morning, if even then it is realised, but that we are brought into this atmosphere habitually, and that we are intended to be acting upon it when others, perhaps, only know that it is a Christian man acting righteously. But it is not that. A Christian man will not act righteously by merely intending to act righteously. A Christian man only acts according to God when he is acting upon His holy principles. Now it is not merely a question, therefore, of righteousness; it is a question of Christ. A Jew was bound to act righteously, but we — we have Christ, and, more than that, we have the Holy Ghost, now that Christ his died and risen, to give us the consciousness of this association with Him. But Peter did not know this, only it was certainly a forgetfulness. I am bound always to assume that whatever the Lord does, whatever the Lord says, is the only right thing, the only thing that is worthy of Himself, and there was where Peter was wrong. It was not a mere question of intelligence, but surely there ought to have been this, just as in ourselves who are still more inexcusable if we fail. But even Peter ought to have started with this. I do not say it proudly, and God forbid that we should speak disrespectfully of Peter, because you must remember that we are just as much called upon to have respectful feelings and language about the dead as the living. I have not the smallest sympathy with persons that talk slightingly of those that the Lord has put honour upon, No matter where or who they are.

Well now Peter ought to have said, "If the Lord stoops down to wash my feet, it must be because His love is concerned, His glory is concerned, the will of His God and Father is concerned, and, more than that, it is needful for me"; because all our wants only give occasion to bring out the Lord's grace and to manifest His glory, and who, then, would wish to be without that? It is not, therefore, a question of whether it suits me. I am sure I need it, but it is not a question of whether it suits me, but whether it suits Him, "dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered, and said to him, What I do, thou knowest not now." Peter had not learned his lesson. The Lord was instructing him. "What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." But still he is dull, and he is guilty of what is even worse now, for he could not wait. There is where we fail most of all as Christians — that impatience, that haste, and yet, beloved friends, it is not for want of God's telling us. "He that believeth shall not make haste." This is not merely a New Testament truth, but an old one that ought to have been very familiar to Peter. It was familiar enough in the scripture, but it was not familiar to his soul. He did not apply it to himself. He forgot it where he ought most to have it; where it was Christ That had him in His presence. He therefore says, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." Rash man! Christ — Christ bend down to wash his feet! And Peter says to Christ, "Thou shalt never wash my feet"! Did not the Lord know better? Why should Peter hinder? Did Peter know? Clearly not. The Lord had just told him, "Thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." As a humble man he surely ought to have bowed.

But that is where we fail too, and I do not believe that we judge sufficiently our failure to take in the light of the word of God. For God speaks to us, speaks to us every day it is to be supposed and we read His word, and what is that but that He is speaking to us in His word, and are we not brought sometimes to this very thing? No doubt it is so, without out uttering words, for we would not say that we find any fault in the word of God, but still, we constantly show our want of reverence for the word by turning away from that which we do not enjoy, instead of looking up and remembering that what we do not know now we shall know hereafter. The Lord is teaching, and the very portions too that we turn from sometimes in our stupidity and want of deference to the Lord — want of confidence and thorough faith in the value of every word He has written — may be the very thing I most want in conflict with Satan. Certainly, it was what Peter wanted, and wanted very soon, as we shall see. He says, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I wash the(, not thou hast no part with me." At once he turns round, and from having wished that his feet should not be touched by our Lord, should not be washed by Him, Peter now says, in a kind of despair at what he had said, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." But the Lord puts everything in its place in the next few words. "He that is washed" — and He changes the word. This washing is not exactly the same thing as washing his feet. "He that is bathed" (as it is familiarly known), "He that is bathed" (washed all over — the whole person). Now that is when we are born of water and the Spirit: that is the mighty work of God. But when we are converted it is not merely that we receive Christ, or rest upon His blood — that is perfectly true — but the word of God enters our souls and deals with us as altogether unclean before God, and consequently there is a new life, that is given that judges the old.

Now that is the bathing that is referred to here. The old man is dead. It is not merely dealing with a particular sin, but it is the whole life of sin; more, it is the whole state of sin. The man is born again. He has got a new life, and this is so true that the old one he is in due time taught to regard not as himself at all. That *was* himself, but now, "*Not I*, but Christ." He is born — born afresh, and this so completely that he is entitled to treat the other as a thing only to be dealt with, to be mortified, indeed, to treat himself as dead to it; for you see this word that enters is a quickening word. It is Christ Himself, and not merely Christ's blood. It is Christ Himself judging whatever is of Adam, whatever is of man. It is Christ Himself therefore giving a life that is according to God; that can appreciate, that can understand, God; that can feel according to God. Consequently, it is the root of all that is according to God, on which the Holy Ghost acts afterwards in the Christian; that new nature which is begotten of God.

This then is what the Lord refers to here, "He that is washed." But then He goes farther, "Needeth not save to wash his feet," and whether it be the bathing of the person, or the washing of the feet, you must remember carefully, and it never was of greater moment than now to remember it, that it is water and not blood. The blood is most true and absolutely necessary, for "this is he that came by water and blood, not by water only, but by water and blood." The two are most true, but here you have only the bathing on first being brought to God, and next the application of water afterwards by the word to deal with whatever impurity there may be acquired in our walking through the world.

Hence this is what our Lord was insisting upon with Peter. Peter took the ground that, because he was of God, he did not need to have his feet washed by Christ. Christ, on the contrary, insisted that unless He washed him — washed his feet, that is, even as a believer, as a disciple, as one that had new life, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." I refer not to the original washing, but to that which is done day by day in our passage through this world; that is, it is not merely a question of life, but of having a portion with Christ. It is not merely a question of having it by and by, but of having it now. He was going on high, and there is one of the wonders of Christianity: it gives the believer a present part with Christ. No doubt that is just the token and loving pledge of an eternal part with Christ; but I do not think that it is merely the eternal that is referred to here. Rather it is the letting us in now, and the making good now of what is eternal in its own character and consequence. And that again is another truth that characterises Christianity very much, more largely than this particular part of it — that is, that we are even now, according to its own nature, associated with Christ before God. He has gone there, but He would not go there till our sins could be forgiven by virtue of His blood.

But more than this, He would secure our having a present enjoyment, a present fellowship and communion with Himself where He is gone into the presence of God. And I do not believe that we ever have the proper measure for our walking, the standard of what we are to cultivate, unless we enter into this, that it is not merely a cleansing for our heart — the Jewish people will have that by and by in the millennium, and will have such a cleansing as will suit them as God's people on the earth; but that is not what characterises the Christian — it is the practical cleansing, to have communion with Him where He is gone, suitably to God and His presence while we are here on the earth. That is the meaning of the washing of the feet, and the object of it. "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." It is not exactly "a part in me," for that he had. Life is, as far as that goes, a part in Christ; but the Lord will give us more than that. In virtue of our having life, or along with it at any rate, He will also give us this proof of His own perfect love and desire. For there is nothing that shows the perfection of love more than this — the One that loves us entering the highest and most glorious place that is conceivable, and fitting us for present association with that place. where He is gone; and this is what Christ would give us the sense of while we are passing through this world. No wonder Peter could not understand it then. His fault was impatience, not his want of intelligence, but his want of confidence in the Lord and of waiting to learn.

[John 13:1-11](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+13.1-11&t=DBY)

This then is the great instruction that the Lord was giving His servant at this time. "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit," every whit; and that cleanness every whit, I repeat, is not merely the effect of being washed with blood. Washed with blood meets what our sins are; what we want as having sinned before God*— before*God. But it does not meet all that we want as giving us communion with God, and there is where the word comes in, and the importance of the word, and of the Holy Ghost's applying the word. Because God will bring us to a common mind with Himself, and a common hatred with Himself of the evil that characterises ourselves. God will give us a settled sense of it so that we hate it according to His own hatred of it, and that we, too, consequently, have an entrance into the good into which Christ has gone, because that was the effect of it. It is all founded upon the going in there where there is no evil, and we are brought into association — in short, have a part with Him now — by this very cleansing which deals with every impurity that is contracted every day.

Now this has, as I might almost say, dropped out of Christendom (I dare say there are some here that know a little of what is commonly taught), for I really could not tell, and I have tread not a little on these subjects, but I really could not tell of any person, or of any work, that has ever set forward this most important truth. In short, the great mass of God's children at the present day are just where Peter was then; that is, they have not the sense to see, they have not the sense, by the Spirit of God, to see the greatness of the love of Christ in giving them a portion with Himself where He is now. They have no thought of it. Consequently, you find that they are very little fitted for it by and by. This, on the contrary, falls in completely with what we find in the Epistles; that is we are "made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." But supposing there comes in something that is inconsistent. Well there is the washing of the feet. There is the dealing with whatever is practically inconsistent with it, and bringing our souls back, restoring us to communion, that is, that there should not be an inconsistency between our standing in Christ and our practical walk here below; nay, nor our thoughts or feelings, because there is power. Quite granted that our hearts naturally are a fountain of all evil; but then there is such a thing as the heart being purified by faith. There is such a thing as the Spirit of God filling the inner man with the thoughts of Christ, and it is in this way. It is not by changing the evil, it is not by removing the evil yet — that will be at the coming of Christ; but it is by giving power to the good. It is by strengthening the new man, and feeding and filling the new man with God's grace, God's truth, with Christ, in short, practically. It is all this that fills, and, consequently, strengthens the new man.

And so it is that one is divided, as the apostle says, into "spirit, soul, and body" — constituting the whole man. It is not, I repeat, the extinction of evil, or the disappearance of it, but it is judged. Our old man is crucified with Christ, and a person knows the force of another word of the apostle Paul — that is, if Christ be in you, what then? Why, he tells us that in that case — in the eighth of Romans — there is this treating ourselves as "dead because of sin," and "alive because of righteousness." The Spirit is alive, you see, as he says; that is, the body is dead because of sin, and I am entitled to treat it as a mere instrument. If I allow the body to be active, and to have its way, it is always self, because then it guides me, then it takes possession of me, carries me off with itself, so, to speak, and that is just what one is not to do if Christ be in you. "If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin." If I do not act upon my being dead with Christ, but allow it activity as a living thing, then it works its own way and serves sin, because that is not changed. And, on the other hand, if I do treat it thus as dead, the Spirit is life. It is not only that I have got life in Christ, but the Spirit is life. The Holy Ghost acts in practical power, and He is life because of righteousness, and it is only thus that there is this practical working either in the having done with sin or of the righteousness of God below.

Well here, then, we have this great instruction from our Lord Jesus. At the end of the chapter we touch upon what I shall a little unfold from another scripture — the warning. The Lord introduces it after He has brought out His own death. When Judas is gone, the Lord has the whole scene before Him. "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him." It is not merely the *Father,*but*God*, and God, as such, being glorified always supposes sin judged. It brings, therefore, the death of Christ in the judgment of sin — the solemn judgment of sin — before us. "If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him," which He did by setting Him at His own right hand directly after His death and resurrection when He ascended to heaven. Instead of waiting for the kingdom and bringing in the Jew, He glorified Him straightway. All this, you see, is essentially connected with what is peculiar to Christianity. And then He tells them, "Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me; and, as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go ye cannot come, so now I say to you. A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

Peter again, too, quick to speak to the Lord, says, "Whither goest thou?" Jesus answers him, "Whither I go thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards." How gracious! How gracious to tell him of his incapacity before His death, and of that following which will he a most sure consequence, brought by the gracious power of God and made true to his soul. "Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake." It was not that he was insincere. I doubt whether there ever was a sincerer soul than Simon Peter. And it is not in our insincerity, it is not there that our folly lies, but the very contrary, because we trust self in some shape or another. "Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow till thou hast denied me thrice."

I will turn, then, to a further warning — a truth that the Lord presents to us of very great moment — that we may have it fully before us. In the 22nd chapter of Luke, and the 31st verse, "And the Lord said, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for thee." You observe the change. "Satan hath desired to have *you*." It was not merely Simon, although he addresses Simon, but he desired to have them all. "But I have prayed for *thee*." Why "for *thee*"? Why not merely "for you"? Because Satan was making a dead set at Simon, and what gave Satan the opportunity was this — Simon's self-confidence. Confidence in what, beloved friends? In his natural character? Not at all; no, but in his love for the Lord. If his confidence had been in the Lord's love to him it would have been a very different matter. Had that been actively — been distinctly — before his soul, he would have weighed the Lord's warning; but he really was so sure that he loved the Lord so much, that, no matter what the trial was, he could go through it. He did not believe the others could. We may be tolerably good judges of others, beloved friends; we are very bad judges of ourselves. Cannot we see that in Simon? Can we see it in *ourselves*? "I have prayed for *thee*," said He who had all truth and whose love was going out, and most of all, for the man that was most dishonouring Him. Why so? Was dishonour a light thing? No, but His love was great and most real. And by whom and for whom is love most brought out? Where there is most need — the deepest need. "I have prayed for thee."

And mark, Simon Peter heard it from His own lips before he went astray. If he had not, we have no right to say that he would have been restored as he was. We know that he was restored, but God uses means, and one of the great means of restorative power for our souls is the love that we knew before we went astray. There is nothing that gives the heart more of rebound back to the Lord, and of horror at ourselves, than the very fact that the Lord told us so fully, so distinctly, before we went astray. "I have prayed for thee." Do you think that Peter forgot that — "I have prayed for thee"? — because it would not have done if He had said, "I have prayed for you." That is all true about you generally, but it is "*thee*" — "I have prayed for *thee*." No, he never forgot it. He never forgot it in the hour of his need. I do not say in the hour of his wanting it; I do not say in the moment of his sin; but I do say that, when the horror of the sin filled his soul with despair, these words would be, and no doubt were, brought up by God's Spirit before his soul. "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." Neither did it. His faithfulness did, but not his *faith.*We have no reason to believe, beloved friends, that he wavered as to the Person, or that he wavered about Christ's great love to him, but — Peter was occupied with man. This we shall see another evening, for I am only going to speak of the warning tonight.

"That thy faith fail not," then, is the word; "and when thou art converted," that is, turned back again to the Lord. It is the very same word that is used about one's first turn, only Scripture does not limit it to that. The word "converted" is very much, in our common language, applied to the first turning to God, but we must remember that in Scripture it has a larger force, and means the turning again, even if one has gone astray, and that is exactly the meaning of it here. This is, therefore, what we commonly term restoration of soul, rather than conversion, but it is the very same word which applies to both. "When thou art turned to me" (if you please, or any word that would express that, just to vary it from our common usage) "strengthen thy brethren."

The very fact of his being an object of such grace, and that power which drew him back again, would give confidence not only to him, but to them. He would be an instrument suited to the Lord, so little is it true that God does not restore a man — that you are not to trust a man who has once broken down. Why here is the most honoured of God. We must not suppose, beloved friends, that saints are like horses. If a horse once falls he breaks his knees, no doubt. But is it possible that I have such a poor conception of divine grace as to think that? I dare say the figure has been very often used just in the opposite way. One would have thought that these words of our blessed Lord would have arrested the lips that said so. Not so; not so. Peter not only broke down then, but he broke down in another sense as seriously, for he failed as completely about the Gentiles after he had had a special commission to open the door to the Gentiles. He failed as completely about that as he failed here about Christ; but, for all that, there was no person — unless it be the apostle Paul himself — that was more used of God in strengthening his brethren. I think it a serious thing to weaken the spring of confidence in a soul that has slipped aside. I do not say that in order to weaken the gravity of slipping aside; but I do say that we must be zealous for the grace of God, and we must be faithful to the word of God; and we must take care that we do not, therefore, enfeeble a manifest truth of God that comes out as, for instance, in this very case. "When thou art converted" — or, restored — "strengthen thy brethren. "

Now that is pre-eminently what we find in the Epistles of Peter — all through them both, I should say. Of course, they are not confined to that, neither does it refer to what he wrought, but it is a general reference to the character of his ministry. It was not only a confirming ministry; it was not only one that converted souls, but, as far as his brethren were concerned, it was one calculated eminently to strengthen, and this most clearly from the way in which God had taught him the grace of the Lord Jesus. No doubt it is a better thing to be strong in the grace of the Lord Jesus, so as not to slip aside; but the next best thing is that we have so profited by a slip, if we have been careless and unwatchful, that we have drunk more deeply into the grace of God than we ever did before. And surely, out of that, we are able to strengthen one another. So it was here. "He said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison and to death. And he said, I tell thee, Peter" (for here we resume from where I left off in John) "the cock shall not crow this day before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me. And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now he that hath a purse let him take it, and likewise his scrip." It was no longer to be miraculous power, or miraculous opening the door of any one for them. There was no longer to be that. There had been that in their previous testimony. I do not believe that sending them in this new form of testimony was lower ground. There was less of wonder about it, but I do not believe, beloved friends, that the walk of faith is less because it is not clothed with miraculous power.

Why, look at the Corinthians. There were plenty of miracles there. Were they spiritual? Far from it. It is, therefore, a complete delusion to suppose that miracles of themselves show spirituality. I should say, on the contrary, it requires a great deal of grace to carry the power of miracle, so to speak — a great deal of grace — and that is precisely what I should gather from it, and I have no doubt that it is one of the reasons why the Lord did not continue miracles long — because the state of the church would not bear it. He, at the same time, did show that even in that state, a bad state in a particular quarter did not hinder miracle; but certainly it in no way implied spiritual power in the use of miracle. It was, therefore, a very good reason why, and I have no doubt there were moral reasons which God, of course, could alone adequately judge of, why He withheld them longer. But, however that may be, now they were to be cast upon God's caring for His people in more ordinary ways. It was to be no longer a going in the name of the great King, and the disciples armed with power in every possible way as the vouchers of the King's presence — the Messiah's presence. They had had that. "But now," He says, "he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip; and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one." But to guard against any thought of this being meant in a mere literal way — to show that it was meant only as the sign of the ordinary safeguards and means of daily life — this comes out. "And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough."

Now that very thing shows that He did not mean it literally, because two swords would be a very poor provision for eleven disciples — that is quite evident. If it had been eleven swords one could understand, but the fact of the Lord saying that two swords are enough shows at once that it was quite a mistake to interpret it in the mere literal sense; and we see that those who took it literally made a very bad use of it in a little while, and Peter is the very man.

But that is not what I am going to draw your attention to now, but this — that when the Lord leads them out to the mount of Olives, and the disciples follow Him, when He was at the place He said unto them, "Pray that ye enter not into temptation." This is a very serious thing. It is just as true as another word that we might not be able to put along with it, and that is, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation." No, it is blessed to fall into temptation, but it is never blessed to enter into temptation. There is all the difference between entering into temptation and enduring temptation. And there was exactly what Peter had to learn most bitterly — to enter into temptation. Now the man that endures temptation is the man that prays before the temptation comes. He does not enter into it. When it comes he is blest; he endures. Peter did not. Peter entered; that is to say, that the entrance into temptation shows that there is a want of sense of danger — a want of sense that I need God, that I need God now. No doubt there is. But if the Lord tells me that temptation is at hand, and I do not pray, it is evident that I am not depending upon God; and so, instead of falling into temptation, the temptation, on the contrary, if I may say so, falls upon me, and, more than that, I enter into it instead of enduring it. The endurance of temptation is when the person suffers, and suffers because he does not yield. The entrance into temptation is when he does yield because he does not pray; because he is not in dependence upon God, for there was exactly what was now coming out. "Pray that ye enter not into temptation." He did not pray, and he did enter into temptation.

How different was it with the Lord And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down and prayed, saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will but thine be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him." Now there was the Saviour — "And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly" — the only one that it might have seemed temptation could not affect, temptation could not ensnare. And so it was most true: there was nothing that was assailable by temptation inwardly, nothing whatever; but, for that very reason, He knew what it was to suffer being tempted. Peter did not. Peter, on the contrary, gratified himself, as we shall see, when I come to show his fall; but that must remain for another night. I am only going to speak of the warning, as well as the instruction — the instruction that was so soon before, the warning that so soon followed. I shall show that the fall just as quickly followed, and the restoration in due time. But in the Lord's case there was the depth of entrance — not into the temptation. He did not enter into temptation, but the Lord weighed it all, felt it all. The Lord had all the bitterness, all the sense of it, but a thing outside. And how? Because He took the gravity of it. He felt the reality of it in His own spirit before God. He always did, no matter whether it was a question of a temptation that was presented to Him by the adversary. And He had gone through that before. There had been temptation in the pleasant form. There was the temptation to seek that which God had not given, and the Lord refused. But now there was temptation in a totally different form — the endurance of what was most painful. And what was anything that could befall Peter compared with that which was before the Lord? For it is the greatest mistake to suppose that it was merely death. It was such a death as He alone could know, and the Lord therefore does go through the whole scene in spirit with God.

"And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was at it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow." But this was not the sorrow of grace: this was really selfish sorrow. They were sorrowing at what they were going to lose; at all this distress that was coming on. It was not the true sorrow of grace that felt the seriousness of the moment, and that took warning from the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. "He found them sleeping for sorrow, and said unto them, Why sleep ye? Rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. And while he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before."

Now it is not my intention tonight to go farther than that which I have now presented to you; but I believe that we have here the very thing that resulted in the speedy fall of Peter. We shall see the character of that — the way in which grace met and surmounted it, and restored this beloved one to God, and that will close the discourses that I am about to give upon this subject.

**Luke 22:50-62.**

I have chosen the account that is given in the Gospel of Luke rather than that of Matthew or Mark, because the Spirit of God presents it very particularly in its moral links. In John, on which I shall dwell afterwards, all turns upon the person of the Lord Jesus, and we shall find, I think, this difference, when we come to look at it. But *here*the human heart is opened more; *there*the glory of the One who was making Himself known. Now the results of what we have already had before us begin to appear. The temptation has come, and Peter enters into it. We always do enter, where we are not found in prayer before. the temptation. Then we are surprised. The Lord, on the contrary, had been in prayer, and he only makes the difficulty and the trial, when it came, an opportunity of manifesting the grace of God. Hence, therefore, when one of the persons that came to take the Lord — one of the servants of the high priest — presented himself, he became an object for one of the disciples. This was Peter. His very love for the Lord — his indignation — broke forth. It is not that the others were not just as ready to fall as Peter, for that is the solemn thing that appears. Our very love for His person, our very fervour of spirit, instead of being a preservative power, where there is not self-judgment, exposes one to go farther astray. Here it was, first of all, in the shape of violence. "He smote the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear." Thus the Lord's warning fell entirely powerless upon Peter; and in such a state of mind — and that is the importance of it — one perverts the word of God.

I do not doubt myself that Peter thought the sword was in his hand for the purpose. Had not the Lord spoken about taking a sword? And so, you will find, we are as dependent upon God for the use of His word. We cannot do without it. just as much as we need the word, so do we need the Spirit of God; but this is never given unless there be that dependence upon Him that goes forth in prayer, and, I repeat, in prayer not at the moment. Indeed, the moment was come for action or suffering. To Peter it was a question of action: to the Lord it was suffering. The Lord bows. It was no question now of any action, except, indeed, of repairing the mischief that Peter had done. This the Lord always does; and so He touched the servant's ear and healed him. And this is a statement admirably finding its place in the very Gospel from which I have read, because Luke shows us the heart of man, or even of a saint, that is searched and found wanting where there has not been self-emptiness, where there has been self-confidence; and undoubtedly this was the case. And further, too, I am not in the least denying spiritual feeling and affection. They were sleeping for sorrow, but why? Why sleeping? The sorrow was all well, but why sleeping for sorrow? They ought to have been praying in sympathy with our Lord. They ought to have been in fellowship with Him. Not so; they found a sort of resource and relief in going to sleep when the Lord was calling them to watch, if it was only for the one hour. But there was no watching at all, any more than prayer: they went to sleep.

Now, when the Lord goes forth, in the calmness of one who had gone through the trial with God before the trial came, He is perfect calmness. Yet we know what was before Him. We know how He had felt it. There was the One that had been in the agony. There was the One that had been sweating, as it were, great drops of blood. Not a trace of it now. He had gone through with God. Satan now was to go through with Peter. Satan had carried completely away in the case of Judas. I do not mean that he was to carry Peter away as he had done Judas, but certainly it was to sift. As the Lord Himself said, Satan desired to have him that he might sift him as wheat; and this was now going on, so that Peter shows out himself. His way of showing his love for Christ was by taking a sword to cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. Poor Peter! Not an atom of fellowship with the mind of God at that moment, nor, indeed, at any moment, as far as the Lord Jesus was concerned. It was entirely out of the current of the thoughts of God, and yet we cannot doubt that he might have found a sort of reason for it, as I have said, in a misuse of the very word of the Lord.

And this is a solemn lesson to us that the word of God itself will never guide a person aright until the spring of self is broken; until a person has judged himself before God, and is found, above all, with the loins girt with truth before he takes up the sword. When it is taken up afterward it is the sword of the Spirit, and not a material one to cut off an enemy's ear.

Now here, then, we see the difference, first of all, but there was a far more solemn one afterwards; for they go a little farther. When the elders and captains and the rest take the Lord, and lead and bring Him into the high priest's house, Peter follows. We are told in the Gospel of John that he was not alone. Nay, John tells us; and it is beautiful that it should be so. How lovely are these traces of grace! He had seen the One that was full of grace and truth. What was the effect of it? A spirit of grace in himself. But it is John that tells the story of his own folly, his own selfishness, his own worldliness, for John went there rather in the capacity of a friend of the high priest — an acquaintance at any rate — than as a follower of the Lord Jesus. That does not come before us here; indeed, it was reserved to himself to tell it. Now, was not that like the way of God? It had been a long time. Why tell a story that was so old? Perhaps there was not a single person in the whole world that knew it then — none but John. But John lived long enough to bring this out himself in his own word.

Here, however, we have the story of Peter pursued. "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." It was a little of that same spirit that we have the Lord warning against — eating and drinking with the drunkard; that is, it was an association with the men of the world when they were set upon deepest enmity against the Lord Jesus, and with motives, in some respects, a little like themselves. I do not mean as regards the Lord, but all that was secret in his heart towards the Lord was entirely unknown. And who was the person that concealed it? Peter. He feared the world. He feared the men among whom he found himself. It was the spirit of the world. There is nothing that so destroys confession as fear of the world, and it is evident that this was the case. He had got with the world on its own ground. He wanted, no doubt, to see what was going on. I do not say that there were not deeper and better things at the bottom of his heart, but he did it in concealment. He was off the ground of faith. Here was another fruit of his not watching even one hour — of his failure in prayer when the Lord called him to pray.

And so the trial came — a new kind of trial, not now of patience; but here the question was, Would he confess? The occasion soon came. "A certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him and said, This man was also with him." Now there was nothing violent; there was no strong language; but it was too much for Peter. It was — what? beloved friends. Association with Christ? He was ashamed of his Master. Oh, what a solemn thing! It was not that he did not love his Master, but he feared even this servant-maid. So mighty is the spirit of the world when we are off the ground of faith, and when we have failed in prayer before the temptation comes.

So he denied, saying, "Woman, I know him not." It was not only a failure in confession: it was a lie! I know there are many Christians who think that a believer never can tell a lie. I pity them! One's feeling always is, You are going to fail in that which you think impossible. You are going to fall into a lie yourself, and just because you do not believe it possible. Woman, I know him not." Nor was this all. And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. And about the space of one hour" — for God did not permit all to come in a few moments. No, He will have it made most plain. He would have the awful consequence of neglecting the word of the Lord in prayer. He would have a total humiliation of His servant; and so it was, for now it is bitter aggravation that, although, of course, conscience must have been at work, he must have known perfectly the sin against his Master, and the lie, as a mere question of morality. "And about the space of one hour after, another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilaean. And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest."

Oh, beloved friends, what are we apart from Christ? The worth of every Christian is just the measure in which he has Christ, practically, as his life. I am not now speaking of a person being brought to heaven by blood. No doubt the two things go together; but I do say that all that is precious in a saint of God — all that one can speak of as giving pleasure and satisfaction — is that which gives pleasure and satisfaction to God. And we must remember this. It is no question of character cannot trust flesh. Character you may count upon in a man of the world, but never trust it in a Christian. God will not allow character to reap the praise. God will not sustain a person according to his character. Who would have expected this from Peter? Peter may never have been guilty of anything of the kind in his life, even about the common transactions of the world, or about other persons. It is quite evident, from what we see of him in his ordinary ways, that Peter was in no way a man of deceitful character. If one looks at Rebecca, one is not surprised that the sister of Laban should be full of her plans and tricks and ways. And one is not surprised, again, that Jacob should savour of the family character. One sees that there were ways that were unworthy, bearing a most suspicious resemblance to his mother. Well, there, I say, it is his natural character; but not so with Peter; and I think that these two things are of great importance; that is, that natural character has a great deal to do where it is a question of the enemy, but natural character is a very small thing with the Spirit of God.

Now, there is an immense comfort in this, because, supposing I know that my natural character fails in this way or that, there is a ground to take care; there is a ground where I have got peculiarly to watch it. On the other hand, there is the greatest comfort in knowing that, whatever may be one's failure, what Christ has formed is not merely a question of developing one's character, or patching up what is wrong. It is the forming what is entirely new. It is the new man that the Spirit of God is occupied in bringing out, and in exercising according to the will and word of God. And, hence, therefore, whatever might have been one's defects, whatever might be the horrible evil of one's nature — I am speaking now of that which one may painfully know in one's natural character — it has nothing at all to do with the Spirit of God. He is above it. He is sovereign. He forms what is utterly wanting, and makes a person remarkable for the very opposite of what he is naturally; so that, you see, one gets t double advantage in this way — all the comfort of what grace can do on the one hand, and all the profit of the humiliation of what we feel ourselves to be, and what exposes us to the enemy.

Well, then, there is another thing, and that is that, when a man is a Christian, one never can tell what Satan will try, where one is unwatchful — to drag one down in the last thing that could be expected. There you cannot predict, but this you may, safely predict — that Satan will throw a person down in the very thing in which he thinks it impossible. There never was a man that had greater confidence that day than Peter — that it was impossible for him to deny his Master. His Master had told him that he was to do it, and solemnly warned him. He did not believe Him; therefore, he fell. And, not believing Him, he did not pray — *there* was another thing, and the outer failure is always the manifestation of the inward one. Everything that is blessed in the Christian is the fruit of prayer with God in secret. I am speaking now not, of course, of how souls are brought to God: I am speaking of the way in which God manifests the traits of grace in those that are His. Hence the all-importance of the word of God and prayer. In these very particulars Peter had broken down.

But mark, now, the beginning of his restoration. We have seen his fall. I have now a happier task — to trace the ways of grace in restoring the soul of Peter.

"The Lord turned and looked upon Peter; and Peter remembered the word of the Lord"; for it is always the point of failure that is taken up, and the first part of Peter's failure was that he slighted the word of the Lord. He really did not believe Him about himself and about his danger, although he did believe in Him as to His own glory, and had given various proofs of his faith in Him, but he did not believe in Him practically, that is, as to his own peril at that moment. Now he realised what a fool he had been. Now he realised, in a little measure — for it was not anything like complete — how profound the sin and shame that he had put upon the Lord Jesus. "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." It was repentance, but it was only the beginning of repentance; for repentance., beloved brethren, does not merely mean sorrow, however genuine, for one's sin. Repentance, in a Christian particularly, goes a great deal more deeply into the matter, and we shall find that the Lord, in his very love to Peter, would have it deep. He meant it to be a work never to be forgotten. He meant the fruit of this to appear by His own grace. He meant other souls to be blest; for what cannot grace do? Out of the eater, as we know, comes forth meat, and out of the strong sweetness. That is, grace is always sovereign, always free. Hence the Lord delights at just the very last moment when we could expect it. But what you expect is not grace. Grace is always above any inference that can be drawn, except, indeed this — if I have learned what God is, I have learned, it may be, to infer that God must always act worthily of Himself.

Well, I do not call that, of course, mere reason. Reasoning is the other way. The reasoning of man is from himself — it may be to God — and hence it is always wrong. The true way of reasoning is from God to man, and not from man to God. Well, this is just exactly where we fail; but, grace being in God, one ought to start from this, as a believer — that God will always prove that He is never overcome with evil. Why, He calls us not to be. He says, "Be ye not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good." That is what He does Himself. That is what He is always doing as the God of all grace. And so now the Lord looks out of this spirit of grace. I quite admit that there is nothing which judges sin so severely as grace. There is nothing which produces such deep shame before God. There is nothing which makes the vilest see all his failure — his denial (for really it was that) — his denial of the Lord Jesus. What a Lord to deny! What a Saviour He was! What love was in that look, but, at the same time, what grief! And grief over whom? For Himself? Over Peter — Peter. The love of the Lord, as well as the sense, no doubt, of the sin, filled Peter's heart. There was more to be done still, but that will follow.

**John 20, 21.**

Now I turn, then, from this to the Gospel if John, where we have the further dealings of the Lord as to Peter, and the completeness of the work in the soul. We see Peter on the resurrection day — the resurrection morning. "The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him." What was the effect of this upon Peter? "Peter, therefore, went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together; and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre." But he did not first enter in. There was a need in Peter's heart which at that moment carried him farther than even the affection of John; for, although John came first to the sepulchre and stooped down, and, looking, saw the linen clothes lying, he did not go in. But "Simon Peter cometh, following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, and the napkin that was about his head not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw and believed."

Again, our souls may well admire the grace that tells such a story — not to his own credit, "for as yet," saith he, "they knew not the scripture that he must rise again from the dead." They believed the fact, but they knew not the scripture. It was not a truth to them, bound up with God's character and God's word. It was a fact. They saw that the Lord was risen, but the connection of the resurrection with God's glory and with their own deliverance did not yet cross their minds. "Then the disciples went away again unto their own home." Not so Mary. But I do not pursue her story. My subject is Peter.

Well, now, what I should draw from the story that is brought before us here, more particularly followed up by what is mentioned in the last chapter of the Gospel of Mark, is this. Peter was a true man. He knew that he had dishonoured the Lord, but the first impulse of his heart was to see the Lord. But was that all? It was the grace of the Lord's heart to see Peter. The Spirit of God was truly at work in Peter in this desire to see the Lord, even if he were alone to see the Lord. He wished to have it all out with the Lord, but the Lord wished it too, and wished it for Peter's sake; for there is nothing that would more damage a soul than an unsettled question between it and the Lord. Hence, in the Gospel of Mark we are told that the Lord said, when He gave the word to the women — or rather the angel speaking for the Lord — "Go your way, tell his disciples *and Peter*that he goeth before you into Galilee." Why Peter? Why is he the only one that is named? Because he was the one that most needed it. Love always goes out most where there is need most. "Tell his disciples *and Peter."*

What a joy to Peter's heart that it should be so, in spite of his scandalous and his repeated lying — for indeed it was most shameful. It was not simply a failure to confess; it was a denial of his Master, and this repeatedly; and remember, this was only a very short time afterwards. He experienced how infinitely the ways of the Lord are above ours. Could we have thought such a thing possible? just conceive it now. Conceive a person guilty of a flagrant act, and a public one, too, and a repeated one. How slow any of us would be to think that such a person could possibly be a believer. And this is an apostle; and did not that make it a great deal worse? Even the law always laid it down as a principle that the sin of the ruler was a more serious thing, and could not be dealt with as the sin of one of the people generally. There was always that which required a deeper purgation before God; and so the very fact of Peter's being so specially honoured would to us have been so much the greater shame and evil. But to the Lord it was an opportunity for judging it thoroughly out of fulness of His grace. He was to be a strengthener of others, and this, too, as he had not learned what it was in secret with the Lord. New he must learn by his own public sin, but where sin abounded grace did much mere abound; and, unless it be the apostle Paul, where was there such a preacher of grace as the apostle Peter?

Now turn again from this to [1 Corinthians 15](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Corinthians+15&t=DBY) — for I must just refer to that for a moment. The proofs must be taken from different parts of scripture. We know that the Lord did appear to Peter. Indeed, we need not leave the Gospels. [Luke 24](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Luke+24&t=DBY) shows the very same thing; for when the two disciples came in from Emmaus, and reported to the assembled disciples in Jerusalem that the Lord had spoken to them by the way, what are they told? "They found the eleven gathered together and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared *to Simon*. And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread." But He had appeared to Simon; and, you will mark, to Simon alone. Now I do see unspeakable grace in our Lord in that it was not only an angel that gives the comforting word, "Tell his disciples and Simon Peter," but here is the fact that the Lord met Peter alone. I am not aware that He met anybody else alone. He met two disciples. I am not speaking of Mary Magdalene, of course, when He sent the message, but as far as the eleven were concerned I am not aware of His appearing to any one of them alone except Peter. Why so? Because He felt for the heart of the disciple. He felt that there would be a burden, that there would be a cloud, and He would remove it. He had given the certainty that there was nothing between Him and Peter, so that Peter might have nothing between his heart and the Lord. That was His object, and this, too, He accomplished in this very way — he appeared to Simon.

[John 21](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+21&t=DBY).

Well, then, we find a further step in the twenty-first chapter. "Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and on this wise showed he himself. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples." Now, I do not say that the work was very deep. It was real, but there was a want of depth. "Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee." The ways of one who has a pre-eminent place, and his words too, are surely of great moment to us here. How readily saints fall in with the word of any one who takes the lead! "They went forth and entered into a ship immediately, and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore." He turns this to his own account. "But the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord" — always prompt of action — "he girt his fisher's coat unto him (for he was naked), and did cast himself into the sea. And the other disciples came in a little ship (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fishes. As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three; and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken."

Now I have no doubt that all this was a typical scene — that it was in direct connection with the wonderful effects of the work of the Lord in a day that is coming, but not yet come — that, in short, it is the picture of the millennial scene when there will be no failure whatever as far as the work of God is concerned. There will be failure in man outside, but not as far as the work of God is concerned. It will be one of the peculiar characteristics of that day. And so, you observe, for all the great catch of fish the net is not broken, It is in contrast with the picture of the work now, and with that which had been said to Peter. You may remember that, in the Gospel of Luke, there is the picture of Peter and the rest called to be fishers of men. Well no doubt they catch fish and plenty of them; but the nets are broken, whereas in that day there will be nothing of the kind; there will be no breach. The work of God will be fully accomplished, not merely grace overruling as now, not merely God doing it as far as His own secret purpose is concerned. I am speaking now of the public work in the world. Well, that will be an immense change, but there is another thing that comes before us here of more importance for my present purpose, and that is, the dealings of God still more fully pursued with Peter's soul — the restoring dealings of the Lord,

"When they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" Now that was a very searching question. It told the whole tale. "Lovest thou me more than these?" That was the root of his failing. Peter did not give the other disciples credit for being willing to go to prison and to death for Jesus' sake; but he believed himself. He was confident that he loved the Lord as nobody else did, and now the Lord turns upon Peter. He had carried the work on in his soul. He had looked upon him and sent him out to weep when he remembered the word. He had seen him alone, but now He would carry on the work at the same time that He would publicly reinstate His servant; for the very point here was that, while the work was carried on more deeply than in others, it was in presence of others, that they might know the entire restoration of communion between Peter and the Lord — nay, more than that, that they might know the confidence which the Lord reposed in Peter now. He had never done it before. He had never entrusted his sheep to Peter before. Oh, what grace! The very time when men would have said, "Never trust Peter again! A man that has so denied the Lord — he may be a saint! I hope he will get to heaven — but never you trust that man! Why, did any one ever hear of such flagrant, repeated denial?" Well now, you see the Lord does it all before them, and the first question really probed the heart, though He carries it still deeper every time. "Simon, son of Jonas," for that was the point — he trusted himself "lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." What does the Lord say? "He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time." Peter had denied Him thrice, and it is in the most pointed reference to this that He puts it the third time; yet Peter did not feel how deeply the Lord was going, for He had not alluded to his denial; but now he understands. He thought it was all settled, but the Lord would have it settled not only publicly, but divinely. And you see here was the thing that was wanting. He had judged his failure, but had he got to the cause of the failure? Had he detected the root of it? I do not believe he had. We may be very, very grieved because of our sin, and feel it deeply before God; but have we really reached what exposed us to sin? What was it in Peter? His confidence in his own loving the Lord — that he could go where nobody else could — that he loved the Lord more than any one — more than these.

Well now, you see he feels that the Lord was alluding to his threefold denial. "Peter was grieved, because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." How humiliating! Peter is reduced to cast himself upon the Lord's perfect knowledge — what the Lord Himself knew. Everybody else in the world would have said that Peter could not have loved the Lord to deny Him so, and that unless the Lord knew to the bottom of his heart he could not have given him credit for love. "Lord, thou knowest all things." Oh, beloved friends, what a comfort it is to have to do with One that knows all things, and, in consequence of knowing all, can see a love that nobody else could see — can give credit to that which all appearances might contradict; so that, instead of the Lord's perfect knowledge of all being a thing that we have need to be afraid of, it is the very thing that is in our favour where there is reality; and there was reality in Peter. It was not that there was any question of love: the failure was not there. It was not that there was not love, but that he considered that his love would preserve him in the hour of danger. It never does — nothing does but the self-judgment that comes out in prayer to God and in total distrust of self before God. It is not, therefore, the protective power of the love of Christ that keeps people. There must be that, but there is more than that wanted, and the more than that is the very last thing that a man lacks: it is to believe his own badness, to believe that he is such a poor, weak, unworthy creature; and Peter had never got a deep sense of it before. Now it is brought to him. "Lord, I admit that all the rest would say that I do not love you a bit, but you know everything to the bottom of my heart, and you know, after all, that it requires divine knowledge to know that I love Thee." Not a word now of loving more than anybody else. That was furthest from Peter's heart. You may depend that he never said it again, never thought it again. I do not mean that he did not fall in other ways, but he was thoroughly broken, at any rate, in this conceit of himself. "Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep."

Now you see there is a distinct word of the Lord, for it is not merely that the Lord was thus bringing Peter to judge the root of the evil that had exposed him to fall, but the Lord was now reposing public confidence in Peter — in His servant — for the work that He was about to open to him. He was about to have a very special charge, and I suppose that the sheep which are referred to here refer rather to the Jewish ones. It would seem so from the context and from the fact. We know that the circumcision were handed over to Peter, as the uncircumcision to Paul; and it would appear that this is what the Lord refers to here. At the present time you must remember the only sheep that were accredited were the sheep that were there. Others no doubt there were, but that does not seem to enter into the special line of this part of the Gospel of John.

However, that may not be of so much importance. The great thing I wish to press is the evidence that scripture gives us here of God, in His wonderful way, restoring our souls fully only when we have got at that which exposed us to sin, and not merely the sin itself. This is of so practical a nature that I must dwell upon it, therefore, at more than usual length. But it is not all, for the Lord, when He restores, always restores what was not taken away — gives more than was ever possessed.

Now there was one thing in which Peter had expressed his confidence — that is, to go to death or judgment or prison — anything for the Lord. Well now, the Lord takes this up. "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."

Thus then, I think, we have the unspeakable grace of our Lord Jesus Christ meeting the desire of Peter's heart. He had done wonderful things for him already, when He committed what was most precious to the man that had failed so publicly and so repeatedly; but He goes farther. Had not Peter desired to follow the Lord to prison and to death? Certainly. "Well now," says the Lord, "I will give you all the desire of your heart." And look at the Lord's way! Look at the way of grace! When he was comparatively young he failed. When there was all the fervour and impetuosity, I must add, of his natural character, he completely broke down. The Lord puts no honour upon that; rather the contrary. He must bring it to nothing. It is what flesh would glory in. "But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." And so the Lord gives him good ground for it, for He tells him, "When thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands." It was not only that he was to die, but, "This spake he signifying by what death he should glorify God." Peter was to have his wish gratified to the very fullest. Peter was to suffer like his Master. I am not referring now to the tradition. I do not know whether there is any truth in his being crucified with his head downwards. Scripture says nothing of that kind. We are told so. It is a pretty story, and that is all one can say about it. It may be true; it is more likely to be false. You never can trust the stories of men in the things of God. I have never known a true story told by men in what concerns God, and where the spirit of man reigns. There is a fatality of error of the most extraordinary kind in the old ecclesiastical historians that touch upon these matters. Why, they cannot even tell correctly what is in the Bible, still less what is not. I say, therefore, that I do not believe that these stories are to be trusted. But this is to be trusted: he is to die like his Master, at any rate. He is to be crucified, so that the Lord would not only give him then to be led away a prisoner, but to suffer upon the cross. Peter would have what he desired, and more than he desired; but he would have it in pure grace; there was no strength, He would have it given him by the Lord; nay, farther than that, to "glorify God." No longer Peter's love; no longer glorifying Peter in any way. He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

I do not know, then, beloved friends, a more touching proof of the way in which grace not only restores, but triumphs. And, remember, that is the measure for us. We are put in this wonderful place of glorifying God. Is that only for Peter? Nay, for all the redeemed. "We are bought with a price; therefore," he says, "glorify God in your body," So it was in Peter's case. It was not the cheap and easy way of thinking that it is a mere matter of feeling. It is all-important that our affections should be right, but God does give, opportunities that the feeling shall be a manifested one. God does give opportunities that the heart shall have its desire. Where we have wrong desires, it is the greatest mercy of God that He crosses them, but when we have a holy desire, though it may be taken up in a spirit of self-confidence, and comes to nought for the time, yet what is divine always survives. This is what we find here. Peter, when he was broken, therefore, in all his own power, finds the power of God strengthening him even beyond what he had thought, for I do not suppose that when Peter spoke about following the Lord to prison and to death he thought of the death of the cross. None of them could say that till the cross came. They never contemplated such a thing as their Master suffering so, although the Lord had intimated it. But it is astonishing how the disciples forgot the word of the Lord, and how little impression it made. Are you surprised at that? You ought to know it from yourselves. I ought to know it from myself, and I do know it too well — how we slur over the word of God, how we are caught continually in the midst of a chapter that we have read ever so often and never understood before — expressions, even those that we have cited, it may be, and used; and yet suddenly the light of God shines through them. Well, how is this, beloved friends? Why, it is just because there has been a hindrance in self. There has been something of our own that has been an obstruction to the Spirit of God, but God brings down the self and causes the light and grace of Christ to shine, and all is clear.

And now, beloved friends, I have desired to help you to follow to the end all the dealings of God with Peter in the Gospels. If the Lord will, perhaps there may be another opportunity of tracing him in the Acts of the Apostles, or the Epistles of Peter; but I do not hope for that just now. May the Lord bless what we have said. May He give us more simplicity to read that we may understand; for simplicity, after all, is exactly what the deepest understanding brings us to. If we are growing rightly, we are growing more simple. I am sure, beloved friends, that that is the true lesson for all our souls — to appreciate the word and to apply it, to learn how to use it, not only for others, but for our own souls.

**Acts 3 - 9.**

(The first of these Lectures on the Dealings of God with Peter in The Acts (chaps. 1, 2) was unfortunately not reported. [ED. B.T.])

We have had the remarkable discourse of the apostle which followed the gift of the Holy Ghost. There we found not merely the proof of Jesus as the Messiah, instead of being weakened by the cross, confirmed; and that rejection, and, consequently, His departure to heaven, instead of being a stumbling-block, contrariwise the fulfilment of the most distinct and weighty prophecy in the word of God. But now, in this third chapter, we have the apostle not so much explaining what was new and essential to Christianity, but showing us a remarkable dealing of God — the tender mercy that still yearns over Israel. For this fresh discourse of Peter is strictly suitable to one that was not only an apostle of the church, but an apostle of the circumcision. This the Lord indicated long before, and it becomes more and more manifest that Peter was peculiarly one in whom God was mighty towards the circumcision. He that was to manifest the power of God to the uncircumcised had not yet appeared. Hence a striking miracle wrought by Peter and John his companion, and wrought, too, in the temple itself, gave an opportunity for the apostle to open out an appeal to Israel; and it is strictly so.

There is nothing now in this chapter about the gift of the Holy Ghost; there is nothing at all about their being baptised when they took the place of confessors of Christ; but he explains to them with great care that it was by no power or wisdom of theirs that the great deed was done. It was God putting power upon the Man whom they had despised and the nation abhorred. Solemn circumstances! A terrible fact to face! The Jews, the people of God, and the God of Israel, were totally opposed; and they were opposed not merely about something in their own moral ways; they were opposed about the One that God had raised up — raised up and sent to bless them. How awful, therefore, must their guilt be, that it was not merely failure. Even those that are most faithful fall, but here it was a blank and distinct rebellion against God, and rebellion against God when He had raised up the Messiah. Hence, the very object of it was to arrest the conscience of the Jew, but in doing so there is a most characteristic appeal of the apostle Peter which I cannot but say a little upon in passing.

He charges them with denying the holy and the just. What, Peter? Had not Peter denied the holy One and the just? The very thing he had done himself! Now, of two things one must be true. Either Peter was a man extremely insensible and dull in the matter of his own sin; or, on the contrary, God had so completely purged away that sin that Peter could speak as calmly and as triumphantly as if he had never been guilty of it. And that is exactly what God does, and I have no doubt that God was using this very thing — that God was bringing out that great truth which we know as an essential one of Christianity, but which was of peculiar moment to bring out for a Jew, because a Jew, having the law, would always be in danger of thinking that there must necessarily be some painful remembrance of what had been done against God by the law's knowledge of sin; and, accordingly, there would be, as they must have reasoned, a continual keeping up of the remembrance of delinquency, even if forgiven.

Now there is another thing that God is occupied with, and that is, not man and his sins, but Christ and the perfectness with which He has blotted them out from before God; nay, more than that, the perfectness, too, with which He has purged the conscience of the believer so that it is not hardness or insensibility for a man to speak calmly of the very sins he has been guilty of himself; but it is the triumph of faith to be able to look at them without a blush — to be able to speak of them without a blush — to be able to declaim against, and to charge upon the conscience of others, without the smallest wincing, the very thing which had been once his own shame, once his own sin, and that publicly before all, and that not very long before.

Now that is the fact as to Peter. You know very well that his ardour and, I must add, self-confidence had encouraged him to follow the Lord when He was apprehended, and to find his way among the servants, public and private, of the high priest; and there it was, when they detected by his language, if by nothing else, that he was a Galilean too, and charged him with being one of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth, that Peter there and then fell, and fell repeatedly, and fell, too, in the most solemn manner. And yet, beloved friends, that is the very thing that he here speaks of, and puts upon their conscience, as if he had never been guilty of it along with them.

I refer to this as a beautiful illustration of what the apostle Paul calls in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "the worshippers once purged having no more conscience of sin." Of course that does not mean that conscience did not feel, but that now conscience is clear — so completely clear that one could speak with this perfect freedom and, in fact, lay it at the door of other people. Surely Peter would not have denied it himself for an instant, but Peter was bound there and then not to be speaking of what he had judged himself for already, and what he was completely clear of before God. Now he had to do with them, and he had also to do with them as a witness of Jesus and of His redemption.

Well, this discourse of Peter, which we have before us now, does not merely bring out the power of the blood of Christ, but further, there is another thing that I must draw your attention to, and that is, the manner in which he presents the coming of the Lord Jesus. He never speaks about the Lord taking us to heaven. It is His coming to the earth that occupies Peter. Indeed, this is the way in which, habitually, the coming of the Lord, wherever it is treated in the Acts of the Apostles, is named. For instance, in the first chapter that same Jesus should "so come in like manner as they had seen Him go into heaven." That does not mean His taking us there, but His coming thence Himself. It does not bring forward our accompanying, but it is the very same time; it is when we do accompany Him; when we follow Him out of heaven. In short, it is His coming into this scene — the world — His coming back again. So here, in addressing the Jews, he puts that before them. He says, "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." We are all familiar with that change — "*so*," not, "*when*." "And he will send Jesus Christ which before was preached unto you." Mark that. "Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things." That is the point. It is not the removal of the saints to heaven, but it is the restitution of all things on the earth.

Now you must not suppose that that is any defect in Peter. Not only was it no defect, but it was exactly the right doctrine at the right time. You see that he was addressing not the children of God that were looking to follow the Lord into heaven, but he was speaking to the Jew, and he was showing that the coming of the Lord already — His humiliation, His suffering here below, His cross — had not taken away in the least degree the hope of Israel. Here is the hope of Israel. It is as fresh as ever. It is as fully maintained by Peter as by Isaiah. It is even more clearly presented by the apostle now than it had ever been by any Jewish prophet before. And you see the propriety that the apostle of circumcision should follow in the steps of, but should, at the same time carry forward the hope of, the prophets of the circumcision. All is harmonious in the word of God, He that was called for another work, who is to be taken out of Israel for the purpose of making the grace of God so much the more conspicuous to the Gentile, will come before us later on. I do not say that I shall take up his doctrine and his history in this course, though I may just look at it in passing. Our proper theme is Peter, I am merely now showing the consistency of the preaching of Peter with the place which we have seen assigned him by the Lord Jesus. I am showing, too, how he was being guided of God as being the foremost man at that time in the testimony of God here below. But how blessedly and simply, too, but convincingly, he was made the instrument of bringing forward exactly the right word of God for that time and place.

He tells them to repent and be converted, and this has always a great place as said to Israel; not by any means that repentance is withheld by the great apostle of the Gentiles. It would be a terrible lack if *they*had been called to repent, and *we*had been called only to believe, but it is perfectly true that faith gets an exceedingly marked place in the call to the Gentiles, and that repentance has an equally strong and prominent place in the call to Israel; only you must remember that he who repents always believes, and he who believes always repents. Still there they are — in the one case repentance being the prominent thing, and in the other place faith. And why so, seeing that they were both found in both? The reason was just this: the one had had the favoured testimony of God, and had been false to it; therefore they are to repent. The other, people had had no testimony at all, and they are called to believe. That is not that they were not called to repent, for I repeat again that there is no soul ever brought to God without repentance. It is not merely without faith, but without repentance. That is to say, that Gentiles are just as truly sinners as the Jews, only there is this difference — that we are never called "transgressors" like the Jews, nor are the Jews merely called sinners "like us." Sinners of the Gentiles, "transgressors in Israel." This you will find to be, if I may so say, the technical or the great difference between the two; and it is connected with this very point that I am now pressing; that is, that repentance has a conspicuous place in the call to the Jew, and faith has a conspicuous place in the call to the Gentile. Only, I repeat, both elements are in every soul that is born of God.

Well, this discourse has another point in it which I would say a word upon, for I am obliged to choose in so large a subject. It is not strictly correct that the apostle presented our Lord as God's Son, as in our common version. It is said, for instance, in the 13th verse, "The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus"; and again, in the last verse, "Unto you first God having raised up his Son Jesus." In both these places it ought to be "*Servant*." He does not mean Son. It is the word that is translated "servant" in the Greek version of Isaiah. "My elect, my *servant,*in whom my soul delighted," and so on. It is not the proper word for son. I shall show the importance of this presently. It is Messiah; that is the point. And, as Messiah, the Lord Jesus is not prominently mentioned as Son. I do not the least deny that Son is recognised. For instance, in the second Psalm, "Thou art my Son." That does not mean servant. It is Son, and therefore it is perfectly true that we do find the Sonship of the Lord Jesus connected with the Messiah, but it is not at all the characteristic way of speaking of the Messiah; whereas, when the apostle Paul comes forward we shall find that "Son" is the very foundation-stone. Indeed, it is because Peter in the Lord's ministry had confessed Him to be the Son of the living God that the Lord Jesus said, "Upon this rock." I was right, therefore, in saying that it is the foundation-stone — the foundation-rock on which the church is built. And, immediately after, he reveals His intention to build the church.

Well now you see it is not a question of the church being brought out clearly yet. For that, Paul was raised up. Peter is still pleading with the Jews. He is still calling upon the nation to repent, and he is telling them that if they do repent God will send His Son, His Servant, His Messiah. That is the meaning of it. He would raise up His Servant, this Messiah, who would bless them, and he would bring in a new covenant and all their blessings. They refuse this, and accordingly this is what I am about to trace — the history of the refusal of the testimony of the Holy Ghost, as the Gospels show us the history of the refusal of the Lord Jesus.

When Peter was still preaching to them on this very occasion — "As Peter and John spake unto the people, the priests and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead." All their system of thought, their unbelief, properly speaking, was in danger, for at that time the prevalent notion among the leaders of Israel — not the Pharisees — was that there was no resurrection. Those that took the lead at that time were Sadducces, and they felt most deeply the proclamation of the truth that there was a man risen from the dead and gone to heaven. It overthrew their whole system. They were moved, therefore, that they preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. It was not only the resurrection, but it was aggravated by this — a resurrection that had brought the power of God into the world as it is now. A man was raised from the dead and gone into the heaven in the midst of them. Why, it was clear that if that was the case it brought the power of God very close to them. Where had this mighty deed been done? In their midst — in Jerusalem itself, in their own day. It was not done in a corner; it was not done in some recess of the earth; it was not done where nobody had seen it and nobody had heard anything about it. It was in the midst of an armed band. It was in the midst of a nation that had been fully warned against it. That deceiver, as they said, had told them that He was to rise in three days. They were, therefore, fully aware of what they were to expect. All that made the miracle so much the more mighty as a testimony of the present power of God in dealing with this very world. He had risen from the dead, we may say, before their very eyes, although they did not see it. But still, there they were, guarding the very spot, and if it had been possible to see it, it must have been seen. But no, it was of that character that God would not give it to be seen except by chosen witnesses. They saw the Lord after the flesh; they never saw Him after He rose from the dead. Well, but still there was the fact. They were grieved about it; and hence they come down and lay hands upon the apostles, and put them in hold until the next day. This did not arrest the work of the Lord. Many believed. The number of the men was about five thousand.

Well, on the morrow we see they hold their council. They were gathered together; "Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost." It is clear that Peter was the man of that time. He was the man that God was using at that hour. Filled with the Holy Ghost, he said, "Ye rulers of the people and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole, be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead." And you will observe that he does not qualify it here. Now that he has these guilty leaders before him he does not say, "I wot that *through ignorance*ye did it," for now you see, they were making it most palpable and manifest that there was a will — a wicked will. Accordingly he does not allow of any excuse, and it is always so with God. When He meets souls at first He meets them as they are, with nothing but grace, and when they proceed in rejecting Christ it is no use denying that there is a rebellious will. And so it is here, "Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole." And he quotes the well known [Psalm 118](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Psalm+118&t=DBY), "This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner." It was only accomplishing their own scriptures. But he adds, "Neither is there salvation in any other." Here was the One they were rejecting above all! "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." And the Lord had brought in that great truth that it is in vain to look for salvation above the heavens. It is under the heavens; it is here on earth. The Son of man has on earth, as Christ says, "power to forgive sins." That is what He brought down from heaven, and here. it is that this name continues to go forth. The Holy Ghost gives it currency and power to go forth here alone. It is not there, it is here, that a man must be saved if saved at all. "So when they saw the boldness of Peter and John . . . ."

But mark another thing which is very interesting. Although Peter was filled with the Holy Ghost, although he spoke with this most convincing power, they could see that he was an unlearned man. Inspiration did not give the appearance of learning. Inspiration gave divine power and kept perfectly from error, but it did not hinder the character, the style, of the man who was inspired. This is of immense importance to us, because unbelief builds a great deal upon a certain style. For instance, you find the style of James, you find the style of Peter, you find the style of Paul. To be sure we do, and that is the perfection of inspiration. Inspiration does not mean God speaking to men. Inspiration means God speaking by man to men, and therefore you see that it is not only that you have God speaking, but you have God speaking by the man, and the man gives his own style to the word of God that is spoken. It is never called the word of man; it is the word of God, but still it is the word of God by man, passing through a human mind, a human heart, and a human mouth, it may be, to men.

Well, accordingly, there is a certain style which is impressed upon the word of God, only the Spirit of God takes care that there shall be no error; and so it was upon that day. They saw the boldness of these men, but further, they perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men. It was not that they were ignorant of the truth. They were ignorant themselves. It was not that they were unlearned in the Scriptures. It was Caiaphas and Annas and these others who were unlearned in the Scriptures; but still, judged by the mere standard of education or letters among men, undoubtedly Peter and John were ignorant and unlearned men; and their being filled with the Holy Ghost, I repeat, did not in the least set this aside. It did what was infinitely better. It showed the power and the grace of God, so to speak, made perfect in weakness. it showed that, although there was this ignorance and want of learning after a human sort, there was what manifested the Holy Ghost; and they were being used with divine power both for the blessing of the believer and for the conviction of the conscience of the unbeliever. "So they marvelled," it is said, "and they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus."

But then there is another thing. There was the very man that had been made strong, and they could not get rid of this evidence. They had him before them, but he was there who was the witness of the power of God. "Beholding. the man that was healed standing with them they could say nothing against it." You see it is not ignorance which is the terrible and damning thing in men's hearts. It is will that desires to expel the testimony of God, the grace of God, and the power of God, if they could, out of God's own world. That was their case, then. But God made them feel it.

"When they had, therefore, commanded them to go aside, they conferred among themselves." And they let out their conviction of the fact. There was no doubt of the miracle, "but that it spread no farther let us straitly threaten them." So we see the blindness of unbelief following, for how absurd to suppose that God had wrought in this way, and that it should be kept hidden, or that the persons who were the instruments of the power of God should conceal such a thing, or that that power was not to work in other ways similarly. "Let us straitly threaten them that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all, nor teach, in the name of Jesus." But this only brings out the divinely given courage and wisdom of the servants of God, for "Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God." What a position! And these were the servants of God! These men claimed to have God's own authority in the world. "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God" — that is what it came to "judge ye; for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." All that then remained was to threaten them further, and to let them go. And when they did go we find a new thing. They went to "their own company," and there it is for the first time that anything of that kind is mentioned in Scripture. And it is a very important truth, too, that now Christians had their own company. Before the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus, there was nothing of the sort. Their own company would have been the Jews. Now there was their own company separate from the Jews, and the people who were most opposed, most hostile, to their company were the Jews; so it was clear that God had wrought in some entirely new way on the earth. He had given a new relationship, new affections. What was the centre of this? Christ; that was what made the difference. Jesus, the rejected Jesus, the exalted Christ.

There, however, they find themselves, and they raise their voices to God with one accord, saying, "Lord, thou art God which hast made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is; who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things." They applied [Psalm 2](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Psalm+2&t=DBY). "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings, and grant unto thy servants that with all boldness they may speak thy word." And so they did. After that they had prayed there was an answer given of the most conspicuous kind. "The place was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and they spake the word of God with boldness. "

You must distinguish, therefore, between the gift of the Holy Ghost and the filling with the Holy Ghost. The gift of the Holy Ghost, once given, was for ever given. The filling of the Holy Ghost depends upon circumstances, and upon this circumstance above all others — that nature is denied any place practically. When that is the case the Holy Ghost fills the soul that is emptied enough of self to look to God to fill it. It is our own thoughts, out. own will at work, that hinders our being filled with the Holy Ghost. But now here they had learnt how completely it was a question of God and of God's grace; for what were they? And yet they could see now what were the high priests, what was all Israel. Enemies of God; enemies of Jesus! They therefore felt how Christ was everything to them, and the consequence is that they were filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. That was the effect of it.

"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul." There seems to be a fresh impetus given to all those spiritual affections that had been found even before. There was a fresh start. "Neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked, for as many as were possessors of land sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet, and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need." There was a remarkable form that the grace took as an outward sign. It is in the very thing which a Jew would have been as unlikely a man as any in the world to part with, for the Jew certainly has never been considered remarkable for this kind of readiness to lay down all that he has in the world. But that was exactly what the Spirit of God wrought within them. He had come to give men another being, another relationship, and that was the effect of it. The earth was nothing and the things on the earth were nothing.

And you must remember, along with this having things in common, that all the Christians in the world were there together in that one city. When God extended the testimony to other cities we never find anything of the sort. There never was what was commonly called community of goods when God began to work in the cities of Judea, and still more among the Gentiles. It is when they were all in Jerusalem. We all understand it. They were a family; they felt that they were one family; but when it came to God's working here and working there it is clear that the day for community of goods was passed, and so there was a modification entirely of this remarkable display of the grace of God when the testimony extended to other places. Otherwise it would have been mere independency.

Now, there is no principle more opposed to the church of God than what is commonly called "independency" and "congregationalism." Nothing. There is no one thing more opposed to it, because the having, in our own little circle, that which is the boundary of our affections and our duties cramps the church of God and hinders our sense of oneness, which is the essential truth of the word of God. There is "one body" all over the earth. We see therefore that, while the members of that one body were all in the one city, a state of things was suitable in the hands of the Spirit of God which was quite unsuited when Christianity became propagated and found in other places also. I make that remark because it shows the great folly of those that think, "Oh, how nice a thing it would be to have community of goods now." The same kind of thing has entered into the heads of people at various times. It is true that they have carried it out in a very imperfect manner. There is another thing, too, that ruins it, and that is, making a law of it. Now there was no law in Jerusalem. Nobody asked them. It was a thing spontaneously done, and it was done, too, only by those who really had faith to do it. And it was there that Satan hindered. He put it into the heart of a man and a woman there to pretend to give up all their goods when they did not do so. And the story of this is the next thing that comes before us.

We have seen the hostile power of the world, and the world was defeated, but now we have to face another thing. Evil creeps into the church. But is there not power to meet it? There was ample power then, and so it was that the moment it appeared it was met by the superior power of the Holy Ghost. That is what I am going to show you as the great feature of the fifth chapter of the Acts. It is power of every variety meeting the effort of the devil to hurt the church of God. Now the first and most serious thing of all was the corrupting of some that bare the name of the Lord. And what showed the serious character of it was this: it was not merely an impulse, it was an agreement. It was deliberate deceit, and it was deliberate deceit of the very worst kind, because it was deliberate deceit to get the credit of superior grace without reality. This is what comes out, then. A certain man named Ananias — and this is confronted with what particularly marked a good man just before, Barnabas, that son of consolation — that man who in word and deed comforted so many desolate hearts — and a Levite too. No doubt things were only confused, too, because it was a strange thing that a Levite should possess lands and houses. And no doubt he felt it; and accordingly it was such a happy opportunity to lay them down for Him who had died for him; to lay them down for those who were dear to Him. And so he did. He brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

"But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it." They had time, therefore, to think what they were about. They were perfectly aware. It was no sudden impulse; it was a design. Just as if God were not looking upon it and quite aware! God was there; not now merely God in heaven, and not merely God in a vague way upon the earth, but God come down in special grace in the person of the Holy Ghost, to take His place with His people here below. It was an entirely new thing. It was not merely the vague sense of God delivering earth, but there was the dwelling of God — the special dwelling of God — in the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, who had now come and made the church His dwelling-place. So this aggravated the devil. "Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost? "

I will make this remark, which I think to be one of practical moment, that all sin now, properly speaking, is sin against the Holy Ghost. I know there are many people who are dreadfully afraid of that term — "sin against the Holy Ghost." They very often think and fear that they have sinned against the Holy Ghost. The fact is that every sin which a Christian commits is sin against the Holy Ghost — every sin, You will tell me, then, what a dreadful case that makes out. It is a very serious thing, but what you probably have got in your own minds is not sin against the Holy Ghost, but*blasphemy*against the Holy Ghost. Now the moment that you distinguish between sin and blasphemy it at once delivers you from a great deal of uneasiness which has no foundation whatever. What is the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost? The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is the sin of a man that not only gives way to utter unbelief, rejects Christ, rejects the gospel, but imputes it all to the devil, imputes it to Beelzebub, that is, denies the Holy Ghost to have His part in that which is all part of that wonderful working of the spirit of grace founded upon redemption in our Lord Jesus Christ. If I impute the word of God — because it is all a part of the same great system of divine grace which He has now wrought in Christianity — if I impute the word of God to the devil it is clear that I am given up to the most hateful and abominable rebellion against God, and therefore it is plain that I am destroying all possibility of salvation for my soul. This is what people forget to be that which is meant by blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, and it is plain that persons who are so found are lost. It is plain that they cannot be forgiven.

But this is clearly the last result of unbelief, and never can be found in a Christian person or anything like it. A person may be troubled with bad thoughts; that is another thing altogether. But these people were people that were not troubled at all. They were people that gloried in their wickedness; gloried in it; had no conscience about it whatever. They had got fully hardened and seared by Satan. I repeat that no sin now is what it was to a Jew. A Jew's sin was sin against the law. It was transgression of the law. But that does not define a Christian's sin. A Christian's sin is sin against the Holy Ghost, because the Holy Ghost has taken up His abode in the Christian, and, consequently, whatever sin he does is a disrespect to and a grief to the Holy Ghost. Hence a lie now is not merely a lie. In this case it was a very formal and deliberate one. Peter, therefore, brings out that which made its character to he awful: it was a lie against the Holy Ghost. "To lie to the Holy Ghost and to keep back part of the price of the land." And the consequence is that he laid this upon him — that it was not to man he lied, but to God. God was there, and he had acted as if God was not there. So Ananias, on hearing these words, expires, and great fear came upon all.

What added to it was this: the wife came in not long after. The young men, in fact, had only returned from burying the husband when the woman came in, not knowing what was done, about three hours after; and Peter said to her, "Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much. And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out." So she fell down also, "and great fear came upon all the church."

This is the first time, certainly, when the expression "the church" is applied. At the end of [Acts 2](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+2&t=DBY)the occurrence of the word is doubtful. It is very probable that it is not correct there. In that place "the Lord added *together*," is the true reading. I make this remark because it will show the great importance of having as correct a translation of the Scriptures as possible. I think that those who desire intelligence in the word of God ought to possess such a translation for their own private reading. I do not say that they should have it for use in the meetings, as the less said as to points of this kind, especially at a worship meeting or anything of that kind, the better; but I conceive that here I have the object and purpose of seeking to help the children of God to know the truth as much as possible, and therefore I do not scruple to speak of this, though I do not like it. If we all had the truth of God presented to us in the correct and best form there would be no need to dwell upon these things, but, unfortunately, we have been accustomed to an imperfect translation, and consequently it is necessary to show in certain cases, what is really the truth. In the second of Acts, then, the expression is, "The Lord added together such as should be saved." Those persons composed the church, but now He calls them the church. "And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things." It was not their own company — those that were destined to salvation, going on in unbelief, and despising the testimony of God; but those that bowed to it, and had repented, and had believed the gospel. Now they were brought together, and by the Holy Ghost they formed this dwelling-place of God. They are called, therefore, the church.

"And upon as many as heard these things." It is evident the power of the testimony affected many outside. "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them." You see God guarded them, kept off those that ought not to be there. "But the people magnified them."

"And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women." They were not afraid of multitudes, you see; they rejoiced at it, and indeed I often marvel how those that love the saints of God seem to think that there is some peculiar virtue in what they call "twos and threes." Now do not misunderstand me. I think it is an exceeding mercy when God has only two or three, but I cannot sympathise with the feeling that prefers two or three to two or three hundred. I should have thought that love would have desired the best blessing upon the largest number, and that love would have desired that those who are as dear to the Lord as ourselves should not be wandering about like poor sheep without a shepherd in all kinds of sorrow and trouble. Do you think that we are the happier because other people are strangers? Do you think it is a Christian feeling to desire that we should have a little less trial? No, I believe not. I believe that love likes the trial of those that it loves; that love has pleasure in bearing and forbearing. It may be tried at a time, of course, for we are poor and imperfect creatures; but still there is something very sweet in sharing the sorrows of those that God loves and that we love; so that while we are thankful that there are two or three here and there, still I think we ought to rejoice more than all in that He not only saves, but gathers and puts in the true place. Do we think it is the true place, or do we think it is only the true place for ourselves? If so, then you are a sect at once; but if you believe that it is God's place then it is God's place for all God's children. We may not deign to use any improper means, or trouble ourselves because people do not come, for that is the Lord's matter; it is the Lord's great work, not merely ours. We are under Him; we are mere journeymen. He is the One that carries on the work. I say, then, we ought to rejoice the more that there is divine blessing whether in saving or gathering.

And so it was here. This multitude of men and women, I have no doubt, were a great comfort to those that had the feelings, the sympathies, the grace of the Lord, strong in their souls. And what is more, there was mighty power that accompanied it this time, and one remarkable fact which I do not think is mentioned about any other person is that the shadow of Peter healed. just think of that! We never heard of that about the Lord. We never heard that the Lord's shadow healed people. Perhaps you think that I am exalting man against the Lord. I am exalting the words of the Lord, who said, "Ye shall do greater works than these, because I go to the Father." Now I say that that does exalt the Lord, and exalts Him particularly because people may have thought that the Lord was only, so to speak, like a great magnet that could affect only what was near it. Not at all. Because He went they did greater works than His. That is to say, it was the power of the Lord showing itself perfectly superior to everything of nature. Distance and time had nothing to do with it. It was Christ.

And this, accordingly, fills the high priest and his party with great indignation. The more that grace and truth wrought, the more they hated; and they laid their hands again on the apostles and put them in the common prison. But as this is not very particularly said to have happened to Peter till the latter part of the chapter, I need not dwell upon it. Still he was one, but it is only in the latter part that he comes out distinctly.

They put them, then, in prison, but the Lord stretches out His hand. The Lord sends His angel, who opens the prison doors and brings them forth, saying, "Go, stand and speak in the temple all the words of this life." The effect of that is increasing boldness, for now it was made extremely simple.. Before that, the apostles had acted on their confidence in the Lord's will, but now they had got the positive word of the Lord. It was not merely an instinctive consciousness of what He wished, but it was a certain, positive word. The Lord sent His angel and said, "Go and speak in the temple." The very place was given. "Go and speak in the temple all the words of this life" — unrestricted testimony of what was needed by souls. "And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the. morning." And quite right. "They entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest came and they that were with him." They met too. "But when the officers came, they found them not in the prison." And when they were troubled at hearing the tidings, one comes and tells them that the men whom they were seeking were standing in the temple and teaching the people. So they come and bring them before the council, who put the question, "Did not we strictly command that ye should not teach in this name? and behold ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." Thus it was. There was the burden of a wretched and guilty conscience.

"Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said." Not now, "judge *ye*." Now he judged. "We ought," says Peter, "to obey God rather than men." Now there is an uncompromising declaration of their obedience to the word of God. "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom ye slew and hanged on a tree: him hath God exalted at his right hand" — (oh, how blessed) — "to be a Prince and a Saviour" — not a Prince and a judge. That He will be by and by, but, meanwhile, "a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things." But there was another witness. "So is also the Holy Ghost." I draw your attention to the manner in which the Holy Ghost is spoken of as a living divine person that was there, not merely in them, but with them. So is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him. So they were exceedingly wounded with this, and they were only stopped from violence — from the last act, I mean, of violence — by Gamaliel, the teacher of Paul, a remarkable man who at any rate speaks the words of sobriety.

I would just rehearse in a few words the substance of the chapter. Here you see we have divine power in the church — the Holy Ghost adequate to all evil. The offenders fell dead on the spot. We have providential power in the angels, superior to the power of the world. And here we have God's indirect working by men in the world to arrest what was contrary to His will. Thus, you see, there need be no fear whatever where the church walks in the fear of what is unseen. God guards, God acts. This is what we have to build upon and go forward with. We need not be in the least afraid. God has His Gamaliels now, as He had then, in the midst of wicked people, surely, and although there be not a putting forth of the same kind of miraculous power as we find in the angel's opening of the prison doors, still God knows how to do a similar kind of thing and to bring about the same result in a way suitable to the present state of His testimony. But, above all, there is the exceeding comfort that the highest and deepest of that power is ours now as surely as then — the Holy Ghost dwelling in the church of God.

I need not dwell upon what follows. I shall pass over it, and say only a few words upon another scene. We need not speak of the choice of the seven men. Peter is not particularly mentioned. Still less need we speak of Stephen's discourse. Now a new witness comes forth. I may observe, therefore, that the title of this book is clearly a mistake. It is not the acts of "The Apostles." It is the acts more particularly of two great apostles, and besides that of one of the deacons, as we see — one of the seven men, quite as much as any of the apostles. Not even James figures as much as Stephen. I mention that, not as a criticism on the word of God. You must remember that the titles of the books are not inspired. Those titles that we read at the beginning — as, for instance, "the Epistle of John," "the Epistle General of James" — were not given by the Holy Spirit. That is merely what men have said. I make that remark because we are perfectly free to criticise what men have said, though we must always bow to what God has said. Therefore you see the book takes in more than the apostles, and by no means the acts of all the apostles.

But coming to [Acts 8](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+8&t=DBY), we have a very special scene. I pass by Philip's work. We have a good deal that he did. It is not merely Stephen, but Philip also, who was another of the seven men, and Philip was a true evangelist, and, what is more, too, Philip had not lost his place of evangelist when we find him very late in the book of Acts. That is an important hint that those who begin as evangelists should not lose that place later, and should not grow weary of the work, or give it up for another. Philip is still called an evangelist later on. Indeed, it is then particularly that he gets the name. Well now he is evangelising, and great was the blessing. Why, whole towns of Samaria were won by the gospel. What had never been done by any of the prophets — what had never been done by the twelve apostles when they went forth during our Lord's ministry, or by the seventy — was now done by that one, single-handed, and yet Philip had been set apart by the laying on of hands merely to take care of the tables and to look after the poor in Jerusalem. But God called him to another work, and this was his work. Indeed, it was a great time of evangelising. The church scattered abroad were preaching, and the Lord was with them. But Philip was peculiarly blest, and he baptised. I observe that he baptised men and women. We do not hear of his baptising others, but he baptised men and women, and we do not read farther.

We read of another thing, for certain, and that is that the Holy Ghost was not yet given. Now that was very striking — men converted, men baptised, but not yet having received the Holy Ghost. What a mistake to confound the gift of the Holy Ghost with their being born of the Spirit. I do not know anything of more consequence in its place to note than that fact. There was the very reason why the Holy Ghost was not given them. Samaria had always been a kind of rival of Jerusalem, and if they had got the Holy Ghost apart from the heads of the work in Jerusalem they might have tended to become independent and to say that they were just as good as the church in Jerusalem. We know very well that that is a sufficiently ready tendency, spite of the plain word of God against it. God will make known fully that it is one body and one Spirit; and so when the church at Jerusalem heard of this mighty work at Samaria they sent down Peter and John — two of the most honoured men there — and when they came, they prayed, and the Holy Ghost was given. There was a reason as we see, therefore, for that peculiar act. In other cases there was nothing of the kind. There was no laying on of hands or praying on the day of Pentecost. There was down at Samaria.

Well, but another thing occurred. There was a man that Philip had baptised, and when he saw the Holy Ghost given he offered money. There was nothing that he valued so much as money, except that it was to gain influence in order to gain more money. So he thought he would give a little to get more, and he considers that, because he valued money, so would Peter. But that very thing detected the state of his soul, and that which Philip had failed to find out, Peter saw at once. But you observe that it was not any special power. You must not confound what is called the discerning of spirits with this. The discerning of spirits has to do with detecting bad doctrine — what is taught. But Peter waited till the conduct of the man and the language of the man showed that he had no part or lot in Christ; and accordingly here we find him, then, betrayed, and the apostle pronounces the most solemn judgment — I conceive even more solemn than that which befell Ananias and Sapphira. Ananias and Sapphira were judged in this world; it was "sin unto death."

Simon Magus was judged for eternity. Simon Magus was judged in terms that left no hope for his soul at that moment. I do not say that God might not interfere afterwards. He, at any rate, asked them to pray for him, but it is quite evident that he had no confidence in God. It is not a question of looking to God about his soul. He looked to them, and you will find, often, that people who have no confidence in God have great confidence in the prayers of God's servants. It is a common thing in unconverted people. They have not confidence in Christ, but they would have a great deal of confidence in your praying for them. That, you see, finds its example in these early days.

I need not, then, do more than just glance at another thing, and that is that Peter has been found in an active testimony at the end of the ninth chapter, where he raises a dead person and heals a sick man, and is most diligent in visiting the saints. But the next opportunity will afford me occasion for bringing out a still more wonderful account that the Holy Ghost has given us of that which was allotted to this blest servant of the Lord.

**Acts 10.**

The occasion that claims our attention first tonight is one of the deepest possible moment. It is not merely that God had abandoned His ancient people as the seat of His power — that He had done hundreds of years before. There is a further step, and a great one, in the development of God's ways; for the call still remained to this people, but now henceforward the call is going out to the Gentiles. It is not merely power. One can understand power being vested in a people that were altogether unworthy. Power does not necessarily suppose conversion — does not suppose the communion of the mind of God. Power might be given sovereignly. Power might be employed by one who was wholly alien to the thoughts of God, though God might be making use of him. As we are told, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain." We know, therefore, that God is able to use anything for His purpose; but it was a very different thing when the call of grace was going from the Jews, the favoured people of God. And going out to whom? To the dogs of the Gentiles. For so they had ever been regarded; they were "sinners of the Gentiles," even to put it in the mildest possible form. They were those who had, from the beginning, from the earliest days, from the flood, grown old in idolatry of every form; and now to these very Gentiles the call of God was about to go forth. The Lord had prepared Peter on the first great occasion when He distinguished him — when He said to him, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." He did not say that only. He said, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

We must never confound the kingdom of heaven with the church. They are two totally distinct things. I do not deny that there may be links of connection between them, but they are distinct. The keys of the kingdom were used by Peter, or, at least, one key, if I may so express myself, on the day of Pentecost, in opening the kingdom to the Jew in a far fuller manner than had ever been true before; and now that same Peter, albeit the apostle of the circumcision, was the very one that God used in His own holy wisdom to open the door to others, that is to say, to the Gentiles. And God was pleased on this occasion also to make it very marked; for, though there was no question of any fitness on the part of the Gentile, and though it was pre-eminently to be grace, yet the one by whom God brought out the grace in all its fulness was Paul, himself a master of the law trained up under the most distinguished of the legal teachers.

Peter was used of God, first of all, to present the gospel to a very pious man — a man of godly character and of good report, more particularly in Israel. And I think it was just as wise on God's part to bring in a godly man first — a man that was evidently known as such by Peter — as, on the other hand, to present the gospel by Paul to the very vilest and worst, wherever they might be found — as, for instance, at Corinth. It was a question of stopping the mouths of the circumcision, and this, therefore, was done, and guarded too, remarkably, in sending Peter first of all to Cornelius. For we are told here that Cornelius, while the centurion of the band which was called the Italian band, was a devout man; and I do not believe that that means merely that he was a devout man after the flesh. Not only so, but he fasted, he feared God, and gave large alms, and prayed, and so on. He was a person that was known for his devotedness in various ways. He was one that had intercourse with God habitually.

Thus, you see, we learn that it was not strictly a question of conversion. The man was converted already. He was not a bit more converted after Peter went than before. We must never confound conversion with salvation. The two things may coalesce, but they may not; and in the case of Cornelius they most certainly did not. Cornelius may have been converted for years before, but then he could not say that he was saved. That was what he was brought into. He was brought in so that not only he should know that he was saved, but that all the others, too, should know that he was saved. That is, he was to be put openly and publicly by God's own work, and according to His will, on the same ground of known common salvation which the gospel had brought the believing Jew into, for we must always distinguish these two things.

There is often a haze in the minds of many persons on this very important matter, and I could not think that people are at all clear as to the gospel, and certainly not as compared with the Old Testament dealings with God, who do not see this difference. If one thinks merely of getting to heaven — of being delivered from judgment — well, it is evident that all the Old Testament saints were; but that is not what is called the salvation of the soul. Receiving the end of your faith," says Peter, "the salvation of your souls." That means the soul consciously brought, as a present thing, to know that all is clear between God and it — the soul knowing that sins are gone and righteousness come. Was that the case in Old Testament times? Certainly not. All that you could say of an Old Testament soul was that he was hoping for righteousness: he was waiting for this salvation. But the salvation was not come, and the righteousness was only near, for it was not yet arrived. That was all that Isaiah could say, even in the prophetic spirit.

But there is a different thing now. Now, the Spirit of God is not a Spirit of prophecy, but a Spirit of communion — not a Spirit of leading you to wait for a blessing which you have not got, but a Spirit of leading you into communion with that which you have — that which God has now given you and has announced as your portion. That is salvation, and until a soul is brought there it is not scripturally just to say that that soul has got salvation in the true full sense of the term. If you merely mean that the person is quickened — and that is what people do mean, and a most mischievous confusion it is — if you merely mean that a soul may be quickened and be still full of anxieties, still tried, still unhappy, that is another question. This is not salvation. The person may be as truly born again as you; and indeed very often you might have more confidence in a person who is full of doubts than in many a person who seems never to know what doubt is. You might be afraid that such a person had never judged self, or learnt what sin was, or had any adequate sense of the judgment of God; whereas, although it is a most unhappy state for a person to be in — full of continual anxieties and questions about acceptance — still there might be other things that would show a conscience towards God, earnestness of desire to serve Him, though there might be ignorance, no doubt, of His ways — ignorance of this great deliverance — of what scripture calls "salvation."

Now that was what Cornelius was brought into that day. It was not only salvation. The Jews on the day of Pentecost had been brought into salvation, for they had known nothing of that at all. Up till the accomplishment of redemption nobody knew salvation as a present thing. It could not he said of any one, and yet at the same time you would have no doubt of their eventual security. What people confound is future security with present salvation. Now they are not at all the same thing, and no amount of confidence about security is the same thing as the enjoyment of known present salvation. That was what Cornelius was brought into that day, and this is what is characteristic of the gospel today, and therefore it is said, The word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.

Hence, at once you find sealing. There was sealing with the Holy Spirit, because the seal of God comes upon those who enter into present salvation. What we find on this occasion was not merely the Spirit of God working in the soul of Cornelius — there was much more. Cornelius, I repeat, was not a self-righteous man that was merely going through forms of religion. If Cornelius had died he would have gone where all the other saints had gone before him. There were saints among Jews, and saint; among Gentiles, but there were none before Pentecost, even among Jews, that were brought into this salvation. And, on the other hand, there had been none up to this time among the Gentiles at all. Cornelius was the first. And God particularly took care that the man that was first brought should be a man that was of most excellent character — prayerful. But still, had you asked him, "Are you saved, Cornelius?" he would have said, "Oh, I would not presume — I would not dare — to say such a thing." "But do you not know that God is giving salvation to His people? Do you not know the great work that is going on in Jerusalem?" "Oh, yes," he would say, "but that is for the people that have got the promise; that is for the people to whom God bound Himself. Now He has accomplished it; now He has given the Spirit according to prophecy. But then, for me, I am only a Gentile."

In short, he took what people sometimes call the place of the uncovenanted mercy of God. It was not at all that he doubted the mercy of God to his soul, but, as to present clearness, present consciousness of nearness to God, he had no thought of it, did not know that God was about to bring His people, whether Jews or Gentiles, on to this common ground. He knew it for the Jews. For Peter, in his preaching to him, alludes to the peace that was being preached to the Jews. It was not that he doubted that. But is it for the Gentile? He learns that it was. And God made His new dealing very marked, for, you observe, in the whole matter we have special intimations from God. God was not content to leave Peter to act now merely by any less thing, such as reminding him of the commission of the Lord Jesus. Do you not remember, Peter, that the Lord said, "Preach the gospel to every creature"? Do you not remember that he said, "Make disciples of all the Gentiles"?

None of these things first. There was a present dealing. There was a trance into which Peter fell, and in that trance he learns. There was that great sheet, those creatures of all kinds of which Peter was commanded to kill and eat, he being very hungry. And the voice that accompanied it showed what the meaning of it was, interpreted as it now was by the messengers that came to Cornelius to whom God had sent His angel. That angel had directed him to send for Peter. Thus, you see, there was a most careful, watchful care on God's part. There was a dealing in Caesarea; there was a dealing also in Joppa — two different intimations from God, each of them having its own distinct type but to the same point. And now they meet at the house of Simon. Peter commits himself to the guidance of the servant of Cornelius, and they came down to Caesarea. Here was Cornelius waiting, with his kinsmen and near friends. "And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him." We see how little he entered into the measure of man in the presence of God which the knowledge of Christ gives. We see the extraordinary veneration, which Peter stops at once. Peter was only a man, after all, though he was come down to declare the salvation of God.

But there are some other particulars to which I shall direct your attention in a moment. In the discourse of Peter, he says, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him." Now Cornelius was one of these. Cornelius, let me reiterate, was not a man of mere forms — he was anything but that. He was a man of reality. It was no question of his being born again, but of his being saved; that is, saved in the sense which you will not find generally in Christendom. Christendom has lost the true sense of salvation. It has not lost the idea of the Lord Jesus as a Saviour, after a sort. But salvation as a present state, as a present state of soul entered into by faith, unquestionably it has lost. It has lowered it down and confounded salvation with the new birth. This is not it all merely a question of the mere ignorant formalist. You will find it, bad or worse, if possible, among excellent men, and it does not matter what school — Arminian or Calvinist — it makes no difference. The Calvinist is just as ignorant about it as the Arminian. There is no difference in this respect among any of them as far as I know. That is, the want of perception of the truth as to this great matter, is universal. And that is my reason for dwelling upon it at considerable length, because it is eminently practical. You know very well how many souls are tried, and full of what they call their anxious experience — their painful experience. Well! no doubt. But the reason is just this: that experience is founded upon Old Testament truth. They have not entered into the fulness of the blessing and deliverance which is now preached in the gospel.

This, then, Peter opens. "He that feareth God and worketh righteousness" — the case with Cornelius — "he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel" — that was what I described at the beginning — "preaching peace by Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all); that word, I say, ye know." Cornelius was not ignorant of that, but his very humility made him unwilling to appropriate it until God sent it to him — until he knew that it was presented to him. This will be so the greater your value for the people of God, if you know that you do not belong to them. And there again I am reminded of another thing, and that is, that the phrase "people of God" has lost its sense; for now all that people mean by "the people of God" is the elect, They obliterate by that very fact the distinction between the ancient people of God and the Gentiles to which they naturally belong; so that you see the fact is that the phraseology of Scripture is completely misleading in modern Christendom, and, indeed, in ancient too; and the phrase, "people of God" has been appropriated by those who are now found here below, to the denial of it to the ancient people. Here it is used in its scriptural sense.

"That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached; how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost, and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they slew and hanged on a tree; him God raised up the third day and showed him openly, not to all the people" — you see "the people" is constantly used here for the Jewish people only — "not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen of God, even to us"; for now God was forming a new people altogether, "who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead." But was it only to the people? He commanded us to preach to the people. What does he mean by that? The Jew, of course. Not so. "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him." So we find light beginning to dawn upon this going forth of the gospel to every creature — to the Gentile as much as to the Jew.

"And, while Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word."' A very notable difference to what we saw on the day of Pentecost, for there they were baptised first. They were baptised every one, and believed on Jesus for the remission of sins, and then they received the gift of the Holy Ghost; but here it was while he spake the word, and these were Gentiles. This was the way of God, as you observe, with the Gentiles. "While Peter spake these words the Holy Ghost fell on them which heard the word." And no doubt there was great wisdom in it, because who would have been bold enough? Perhaps Peter. But then there were these brethren of the circumcision there. What would they have thought? So it is plain that there was the remarkable anticipation of the difficulty of souls, in tender anxiety, on the part of God who would remove their difficulties. There was this fact. How was it attested? God had taken care of that also. It was a new thing — the gift of the Holy Ghost — and accordingly, as in the case of all new things ushered in by God into the world, there were outward signs and wonders. It was accompanied by speaking with tongues — by miracles.

It was not that these signs or miracles that accompanied it were the gifts of the Holy Ghost, but they were the means of manifesting the gift of the Holy Ghost. The signs might drop, but not the gift of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost when given was to abide for ever. So our Lord had declared. Now it was made good. The Spirit of God was come. There never was a promise that the signs were always to be given. It was said in the Gospel of Mark, "These signs shall follow them that believe." It was never said that these signs shall always follow them that believe. That is what people constantly assume who harp upon the importance of miracles, and are constantly yearning for God to restore miracles. They seem to assume that the Lord gave ground in this statement for looking for miracles and signs at any time. Not so. "These signs shall follow them that believe." How long was just a question for God — for His wisdom. God gave an unmistakable token of that which was still deeper  - that which the world will not and cannot believe — a divine person coming down and deigning to dwell both in the saint and in the church. That is what is meant by the gift of the Holy Ghost. It is the Holy Ghost given in a way in which He never was before. And this, accordingly, was given to Cornelius and his house, They "were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost; for they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God." Accordingly, "Can any man forbid water?" said Peter. It was not a question of keeping them till they learnt what baptism meant, but they were brought into the privilege of baptism at once. It was a thing conferred upon them. It was not to be as a kind of duty, or law, or attainment, or a question of intelligence, or anything of the sort, but it was a privilege conferred upon them. Who could forbid water baptism to those that were baptized with the Holy Ghost? So the thing was settled. The great question was solved, and now grace could have its free way, and the mouths of Pharisaic objectors outside and inside were stopped for ever. At. least it ought to have been so.

**Acts 11, 12.**

The Scripture is beautiful in dealing with difficulties — in showing that, even as we might be startled with objectors now, such objectors were not unknown in Jerusalem — not only that, but even in the church in Jerusalem — not only that, but even against an apostle such as Peter was. The apostles, therefore, had to bear the objections of ignorant and unreasonable men, and that among Christians themselves. And so it was upon this very occasion. "The apostles and brethren that were in Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised and did eat with them. But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning and expounded it by order unto them" ([Acts 11:1- 3](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+11.1-+3&t=DBY)). On that I need not dwell. He takes particular care to show that the Spirit bade him go. It was not simply an angelic interposition. We have the two things. We find here the same distinction as is found elsewhere; namely, that where it is providential it is angelic; and where it is anything that touches upon truth for the soul, it is the Spirit. Both are true, and, although there may be a difference in the form, and there may not be any visible interposition of an angel, or any audible interposition of the Spirit of God, it is as real now as then. Angels are not the less real because we do not see them; and the Spirit of God as surely gives His guidance as if we heard Him. That is a matter of faith simply.

But I recall your attention to this — that men were to be sent to Joppa. "And call for Simon whose surname is Peter; who shall tell thee words whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved." It is not, "Whereby thou and all thy house shall be *converted*," for several of them, at least, if not all, were converted already. But though converted, they had not been entitled to that peace, joy, liberty, conscious relationship of sons of God, which now they were, The Holy Ghost only seals them as settled on redemption by the grace of God — not merely waiting for it, or hoping that in some inscrutable way God would give them the benefit of it, although they never had the enjoyment of it as a possessed thing in this world; but now they had it here in this world. "And, as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptised with water, but ye shall be baptised with the Holy Ghost."

There we have this very important phrase of the Spirit of God; that is "the baptism of the Holy Ghost." Here it takes in the Gentile as well as the Jew. As Paul says in chap. 12 of First Corinthians, "For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, bond or free, and have all been made to drink of one Spirit." It is the great distinctive position of the church of God. It is what makes the believers to be not merely believers, but the church — nay, more than that,*the body;*because one may look at the church in the point of view of a building — a house where God dwells. That is a very different thing from being the body of Christ. The house where God dwells may have stones in it that are not really instinct with life. There may be deceivers. There may be persons that enter into that house that ought not to be there. We see how Simon Magus was brought in before. I do not say that the church was yet in its full place. If it was not, he was, at any rate, baptised; but, no doubt, what was true of him was even more carried out with others. That is to say, they were baptised and even breaking bread. But the body of Christ means those, and those only, who are united to the Lord Jesus by the Holy Ghost — who consequently have a unity which is divine. There are no false members. There are none that are not living — more than living. They have this oneness by the Holy Ghost which is a very different thing, and another and greater privilege altogether.

Well, the apostle Peter, then, was the great instrument of this new work of God, and thus the Lord accomplished what He had said, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." At the same time we have in the chapter just an incidental allusion made, which I must not pass by entirely, to another remarkable fact; and that is that the people that had been dispersed abroad in consequence of the persecution that arose were also preaching to the Gentiles. They went to various parts and preached, not merely to "the Grecians," as they are called in our New Testament, but to the Greeks. The New Testament distinguishes between Greeks and Grecians, only we must remember that in this verse, what is called Grecians ought to be Greeks. The "Grecians" were Greek-speaking Jews. The "Greeks" were Gentiles, not Jews; and the point here was not that they preached to the Grecians — which was no new thing, and which had been done long before but they preached to the Greeks. If you look at any proper version — any correct version of the New Testament — you will find it is Greeks here and not Grecians. These, then, had heard the gospel; "and the hand of the Lord was with them; and a great number believed and turned to the Lord."

And this brings in Saul of Tarsus, but Saul is not the object that I have before me, but Peter. Herod comes before us in a new way in [Acts 12](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+12&t=DBY). At that time there was a persecution. Herod had already killed James, the son of Zebedee, whom we must distinguish from James, the Lord's brother, who wrote the Epistle. This was the son of Zebedee. He was baptised with the baptism wherewith the Lord was baptised. He was drinking of that same cup, as the Lord said. Herod meant to lay his hand on Peter also, but the Lord ordered otherwise, and, the very night before the day he was to suffer, an angel was sent. But Peter was asleep; so little was he affected by any anxiety as to that which was coming. He lay between the soldiers, chained to them. The angel enters, awakes him from his sleep, delivers him from the chains, bids him clothe himself, leads him out, and afterwards brings him from the courts of the prison into the street, and leaves him. Peter goes to a house where at that very night there was a prayer-meeting. And the prayer- meeting was about Peter. So it is plain that, as far as that is concerned, they had very much the same thing that we should have ourselves under similar circumstances. No doubt it had a special character, but that also we know, too. There they were, praying for him; and the remarkable thing is that as Peter was little expecting the angel's visit to deliver him, so also the saints that were praying were taken completely by surprise when Peter stood at the door. We have in the most graphic manner the Spirit of God showing how Rhoda herself kept him there, for the joy that it was he, and she ran and told it to them to their astonishment, bringing out their unbelief indeed; but Peter was let in, and he tells the story, and goes to another place. Where he went we are not told.

But after this we find a still more remarkable occurrence, and a great event in the history of the church. One word, however, before I pass on. I have no doubt whatever that the 12th of Acts has a look to the future, and that, just before we have Paul coining out in his full character as the apostle of the Gentiles, we have an account of, or typical view of, God's dealings with the Jews. We have under James and Peter them that suffer and those that are spared. We have the Lord interfering to deliver, and at the very same time the presence of the persecutor — the wicked one — in Jerusalem itself, as there will be "the wicked one" in Jerusalem at the latter day. We have Herod seen under heaven, who is evidently a figure of the antichrist that will persecute, and receive his doom, in the day that is coming. It is remarkable, too, how close the analogy is, because, when Herod is seen upon his throne, the voice of the people was that it was not the voice of a man but the voice of a god, and because he gave not God the glory — because he did not, like Peter, rebuke them, and tell them to stand up upon their feet, and that it was not god but man — because, on the contrary, he arrogated to himself and delighted in this false ascription, God smote him by His vengeance, just as the false prophet will be smitten in the day that is coming. Well, that clears the way for the dealing of God with the Gentiles.

And after the Holy Ghost is given, and Paul and Barnabas go forth on their first great Gentile mission, we have the final struggle. The Pharisaic spirit that had objected to Peter's going to the Gentiles now put forth itself once more, and the great question had to be decided whether the Gentile believers had anything to do with the law of Moses; whether they were virtually to become Jews in any measure. And the Spirit of God decided this, Peter taking a remarkable part in the discussion, and, indeed, the apostles in general, Paul and Barnabas, too, having their place, though it is important to observe that they are not spoken of as apostles. It was not the authority of Paul and Barnabas that decided it. On the contrary, there was a great deal of dissension and disputation, and it is quite clear that Paul and Barnabas were not able to stop the mouths of the objectors in Jerusalem. Who did it then? The Jewish apostles themselves. Nothing could be more profitable. It was out of Jerusalem that the evil came; it was in Jerusalem that the evil was judged. It would not at all have met the case to deal with it at Antioch. It was there they went down, no doubt, and did the mischief; but it was not decided there. It was decided in the fountain of the mischief. It was decided not by Paul and Barnabas, which would not at all have answered the same thing, but it was decided by the Jewish apostles. And this is exactly what [Acts 15](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+15&t=DBY) brings before us, together with the part that Peter took in it. I shall be brief in speaking of it.

"Certain men, which came down from Judea, taught the brethren, and said, Except ye he circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed." You must remember that it was not the unbelieving Pharisees, but persons within the bosom of the church who retained their old leaven. And they said, "It was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together, for to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing." I mention that, because I am persuaded that there is often an idea that it is one of the sad signs of the present state of ruin that one finds sometimes a spirit that is uncomely and disputatious. But we see that this was the case even in the presence of the apostles — the whole of them — so that, although I do not say that to mitigate our sorrow and shame at everything that is unworthy, still there is the sad fact that from the beginning there was too much disputation, even against the very persons who had a title and an authority that no men have ever had since their day.

"Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and 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." That gives us the peculiar work of Peter, and my object has been to show the way in which God put honour upon that blessed servant of His. It was by his mouth that the Jews, as a whole, heard the gospel in its fulness and received the Holy Ghost on their being baptised as well as believing, as we find on the day of Pentecost. That is, it was not enough that the Jews must be baptised, as we have seen (for he would not allow such a thing as their shirking the place of separateness to the name of the Lord), but now you see it is a question of the Gentiles, and it was by the same. Now this is very important, and Peter was used to preach to the Gentiles first of all; and Paul, I would observe, was used to write to the Jews last of all. Both were perfectly in season, and this shuts out all thought of independence, because it might have been thought that Peter was out of his place. He was the apostle of the circumcision. Yes, but for all that it was by his mouth that the Gentiles first heard the gospel.

On the other hand it might have been said, "What has Paul to do with the Jews?" Paul has this to do with the Jews — that he wrote a much more important epistle to them than any of the apostles of the circumcision; and therefore the Epistle to the Hebrews has a character altogether peculiar. It is not merely making use of Jewish types and law and prophets and psalms, but it is much more than that. The Epistle to the Hebrews is the summons to go outside the camp — the old place where the tabernacle and everything were — to go forth unto Christ. Forms were tolerated by such Christians, and in such Christians as had been Jews; but from the moment that the Epistle to the Hebrews was written — from that time forth they had to quit everything for Christ; so that Peter, the Jewish apostle, should be used to preach to the Gentiles, and that Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, should be used to write such an epistle to Jews, strikes me as a beautiful proof of the way in which God took care that, where every man had his work, He would not allow the slightest thought of two churches, or of such absolute separateness of work as to make one independent of the other. Independence was completely set aside by such an action on the part of the Spirit of God by those two blessed men.

We shall now see how truly that is the case here by Peter. Although he was the apostle of the circumcision, God made choice of him, "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 through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they." Mark the strength of the language. Any one else would have said, "We believe that *they*shall be saved, even as but now Peter puts down the Jew, and says, "We believe that, through the grace of God, *we*shall be saved — we Jews — even as*they*"; not, "they, even as *we."*Thus there is the utmost care, to show the ground of sovereign grace that was now given out, and more particularly with such a certain sound, from the apostle of the circumcision. It is a sorrowful thing that that is the very man that went down to Antioch and there dissembled.

It is not my purpose tonight to enter into the subject of Peter in his own Epistles, but I may just add a closing word as to Peter in Paul's Epistles. The Epistle to the Galatians, as we know, speaks, I presume, of what occurred after this council. Peter goes down, and, sad to say, forgets in practice not only the word of the Lord in His life, and the word of the Lord in resurrection, but the word of the Lord from heaven — forgets all these wondrous dealings of God. And how was that? In a way that may often snare: for peace sake, compromise! It is true it did not look much. He would not eat with the Gentiles. It is a question, not of the Lord's table, but of ordinary intercourse with them, and this was so extremely important, as it appears to me, that the apostle Paul treats Peter's absenting himself, and not eating with the Gentiles, as compromising the truth of the gospel. A very little thing in itself, it might seem, but it was the symbol of a mighty truth. It was the question whether Jew,-, and Gentiles stood on a common ground of grace. Not eat with them? Why that was the very figure by which God had instructed him, in lowering the sheet. "Arise, Peter, kill and *eat*." And now this very Peter, sad to say, lives to show the utter failure of the most blessed servant of the Lord, and that, too, after the wonderful grace that God had shown him, and the honour that He had put upon him.

And, mark, he breaks down in the very thing that God had given him to do as his peculiar work. Has that no voice to us? And are we not to learn, beloved friends, that it is always true that whenever we are confident, that whenever we lose either the sense of dependence, or the need of waiting, upon God because we distrust ourselves — whenever we go down thinking we are strong, as no doubt Peter did — such is the time when we fail. The very fact of Peter's going down to Antioch was a proof of communion with the Gentiles. You may depend upon it, he never had the smallest question or slightest thought of what he was going to do there; nor did he when he separated himself from the Gentiles see the desperate evil that was involved in it, and what a blow was struck at the truth of the gospel; because the truth of the gospel is to make nothing of man; the truth of the gospel is to make everything of Christ. Why then did he not eat with the Gentiles? These Gentiles, too, were believers. Thus there was a complete failure in what least of all became Peter. Do I say that for the purpose of magnifying his fault? I say it for the purpose of guarding against such a fault in ourselves, and more particularly in the thing in which we might not suspect ourselves. I have always known this to be the case — that in the very point in which we have been proud we have been broken down. Have you never seen persons boast of their faith? Look for unbelief there. Have you never seen persons confident of their love? Expect that in that very matter of love they will fail. Have you ever seen them boastful of knowledge? They will break down in knowledge. In the very thing in which we exalt ourselves we must be abased.

What, then, is the great lesson of it all? To boast of nothing, to be confident of nothing, to exalt ourselves in nothing, but Christ, Exalt Him, and know that in dependence upon Him we shall he kept, spite of our weakness. No previous blessing, no previous power, no previous honour that God may have put upon us, is any safeguard in the hour of difficulty, and more particularly when we enter upon anything confidently.

It is thus, I believe, that we are to explain what took place at Antioch. We must not allow the dreadful idea that was started in the early church, that this dispute was a kind of friendly skirmish between Paul and Peter for the purpose of illustrating a principle; that is, that Peter pretended to fail in what he did not fail in, and that Paul rebuked him in order to bring out a principle. Let men — let divines if they will — represent the apostles as playing the miserable part of religious actors upon the world's stage! It. is not for us to doubt that it was a far more solemn thing. It was Satan. Satan took advantage of one whom he had overturned before; but that might have been said to have been in the days when he had not the Holy Ghost. Ah, but remember, beloved friends, that though the Spirit of God is power, the Spirit of God does not act as power except so far as Christ is before us. We have not got a lease of the Spirit. We have not got that kind of possession of the Spirit that can claim His activity for our own purposes, or at our own will.

We have only the power of the Spirit where we are abased, and where Christ is the Object that is before our soul. And it is because this was not so that both Peter and Barnabas failed on that very day. It was indeed a failure so serious that the apostle Paul does apply to them what ignorant men — as I must call them — have dared to apply to them all — the charge of dissimulation. It was so; and it was of a most serious character, and it was sinful dissimulation. It was not merely the appearance of it; it was really so. It was shirking what God always calls us to — the truth of Christ at all costs — the truth of Christ for the comfort of souls, and more particularly for the despised. The despised Gentiles for such they were — were special objects for the grace of God; and Paul felt it, and judged and rebuked even the great apostle of the circumcision.

I need not then, beloved friends, say more now This will suffice for the glance, which I have been endeavouring to give, at the history of Peter as shown us in the Acts of the Apostles.