

Exposition of Psalm 119

Verses 150-176

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**150. They draw near that follow after mischief: they are far from Your law.
151. You are near, O Lord: and all Your commandments are truth.**

The imminent danger in which David was living quickened his cries to his God. Often does the Lord permit this pressing trial!, Seldom, but in extremity, are our graces brought to their full exercise. Confidence is then shaken from man, and established in God. For now it is that we enjoy our God as "a very present help in trouble," and that our dependence on His commandment is a true and solid foundation of comfort to our soul. A dreadful character is indeed drawn of the ungodly—They are far from God's law—and that not from ignorance, but from willful enmity. This is God's witness against them; and they are not ashamed to consent, that this "witness is true." No wonder, therefore, that those, that are far from God's law, should draw near to follow after mischief. But if they draw near, the Lord is nearer still. "I am your shield"—says He to His distressed child—who echoes back the promise in the cheerfulness of faith, "You are my hiding place, and my shield: I hope in Your word." Elisha knew the power of this shield, when he quelled the alarm of his terrified servant. He beheld them draw near that follow after mischief. But the eye of faith assured his heart; and when "the Lord opened the eyes of the young man," he too was enabled to testify—You are near, O Lord!

But near as the Lord is to His people as their outward shield, is He not yet nearer still, as dwelling in their hearts? Here is "His temple," His desired habitation—like Zion of old, of which He said, "This is my rest forever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it." This is the dwelling, which, once possessed of its Divine Inhabitant, will never be left desolate.

Our spiritual enemies, like David's persecutors, are ever present and active. The devouring "lion," or the insinuating "serpent," is near to follow after mischief; and so much the more dangerous, as his approaches are invisible. Near also is a tempting, ensnaring world: and nearer still a lurking world within, separating us from communion with our God. But in turning habitually and immediately to our stronghold, we can enjoy the confidence—You are near, O Lord. Though "the High and Lofty One, whose name is Holy;" though the just and terrible God, yet

are You made near to Your people, and they to You, "by the blood of the cross." And You manifest Your presence to them in "the Son of Your love."

Indeed to the Son Himself, the nearness of His Father's presence was a source of consolation and support, when they drew near, that followed after mischief. "He is near"—said he, "which justifies Me: who will contend with Me? let us stand together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to Me. Behold! the Lord God will help Me: who is he who shall condemn Me? Lo they all shall wax old as does a garment: the moth shall eat them up." "Behold," said He to His affrighted disciples, as His hour drew near, "the hour comes, yes is now come, that you shall be scattered everyone to his own, and shall leave Me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." And thus His people in earthly desolation flee to the promises of their God; and in the recollection of His faithful, ever-present help, "set to their seal," that all His commandments are truth. The mischief intended for them only proves, that "You, Lord, will bless the righteous; with favor will You compass him as with a shield."

But may the Lord not only be brought near in our interest in Him, but may we be kept near in communion with Him! Let our hearts be sacred to Him. Let us be most careful to watch against any strangeness with this beloved Friend, and to cultivate a growing cordiality and closeness in our walk with Him. If our character is formed by the society in which we live, what "treasures of wisdom and knowledge" should we find, what a spirit of unbounded love should we imbibe—by a nearer and more constant communion with Him; willing as He is to impart Himself freely, inexhaustibly unto us! In a backsliding state, we must expect to lose this heavenly nearness. In a state of darkness, it is the exercise of faith, to believe that unseen He is near; and the practical influence of faith will lead us to speak, and pray, and think, and praise, "as seeing Him who is invisible." In a state of enjoyment, let us anticipate the time when He will be ever near to us.

"And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold! the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God."

152. Concerning Your testimonies, I have known of old, that You have founded them forever.

The "truth of the commandments," which the Psalmist had just asserted, was an everlasting foundation. He stated it not upon slight conviction. But he knew it—and that not recently—but as the result of early consideration—he had known it of old. It is most important to have a full certainty of the ground of our faith. How else can we have that "good thing—a heart established with grace?"—how "continue in the faith grounded and settled?"—how be kept from being "moved away from the hope of the gospel?" Praised be God! We feel our ground to be firm. As God is the same, so must His testimonies be. We cannot conceive of His

promising without performance, or threatening without effect. They are therefore expressly revealed as a firm foundation, in express contrast with this world's fairest promise.

But let us mark this eternal basis of the testimonies. The whole plan of redemption was emphatically founded forever. The Savior "was foreordained before the foundation of the world." The people of God are "chosen in Christ before the world began!" The great Author "declares the end from the beginning," and thus clears His dispensations from any charge of mutability or contingency. Every event in the church is fixed, permitted, and provided for—not in the passing moment of time, but in the counsels of eternity. All God's faithful engagements with His people of old are founded forever upon the oath and promise of God—the two "immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie." May we not then "have strong consolation" in venturing every hope for eternity upon this rock? nor need we be dismayed to see all our earthly stays, "the world, and the lust, and the fashion of it—passing away" before us. Yet we are most of us strangely attached to this fleeting scene, even when experience and Divine teaching have instructed us in its vanity and it is not until repeated proofs of this truth have touched us very closely in the destruction of our dearest consolations, that we take the full comfort of the enduring foundation of God's testimonies, and of the imperishable character of their treasure.

Now let me realize the special support of this view in a dying hour: 'I am on the borders of an unknown world; but "my hope makes not ashamed" at the moment of peril it is as "an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast;" and in the strength of it I do not fear to plunge into eternity. "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day." I know—not His sufficiency merely, but His All-sufficiency. I know His conquering power over the great enemies of my soul. I know that He has "spoiled the principalities and powers" of hell, of the strength to triumph over His ransomed people. I know also, that He is "the Lord; He changes not;" His word changes not; His testimonies abide the same: I have known of old, that He has founded them forever.' Thus we look for the removing of those "things which are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain." The scoffer may say, "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?"—Let God Himself give the answer, "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and those who dwell therein shall die in like manner; but my salvation shall be forever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished."

153. Consider my affliction, and deliver me: for I do not forget Your law.

Another note of the child of sorrow! Hated by the world—vexed by his restless enemy—chastened by his God—burdened with his "body of death"—what else

can he do but cry—Consider my affliction! How manifestly is this world, not our rest, but our exercise for rest! Well is it that our "days are few," when they are so "evil." But how could we hold on as we do, had we not our Savior's pitying heart and Almighty help? The want of this sympathy was the overwhelming sorrow, that well-near "broke His" sorrowing "heart" "I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none." This depth of trial combined with every other part of His unknown sufferings to make Him "such an High Priest as became us," "touched with the feeling of our infirmities"; considering our afflictions: and, "in that He Himself has suffered being tempted, able to support them that are tempted." With what sympathy did He consider the affliction of His people in Egypt!, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are; in Egypt, and I know their sorrows." At a subsequent period, "his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel"—a cheering example of that compassionate interest, with which "in all His people's afflictions He is afflicted." Well may His people take encouragement to pray, Consider my affliction. "Now, therefore, let not all the trouble seem little before You, that has come upon us."

Yet is He not only sympathizing to consider, but mighty to deliver. "Who is this glorious" conqueror with His "dyed garments" of victory, "traveling in the greatness of His strength? I that speak in righteousness—mighty to save." Such did the noble confessors in Babylon—such did Daniel in the den of lions—find Him, fully justifying their unwavering confidence in His love and power. And what age of the Church has been wanting in testimony, that "the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations," and that "He who has delivered, does deliver, and will even to the end deliver?" The consciousness that we do not forget His law, is our plea, that He would consider our affliction, and deliver us; and is of itself an evidence, that the affliction has performed its appointed work. Let me then expect in my affliction the fulfillment of His gracious promise, "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and "I will deliver him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him." In the midst of my trials I would prepare my hymn of praise for His kind consideration and faithful deliverance, "I will be glad and rejoice in Your mercy: for You have considered my trouble; You have known my soul in adversities, and have not shut me up into the hand of the enemy; You have set my feet in a large room!" Let me then remember my affliction, only as it may be the means of increasing my acquaintance with my tender and Almighty friend. Poor and afflicted as I may be, let me be more poor and afflicted still, if I may but have fresh evidence that He "thinks upon me"—that He considers my affliction, and in His own gracious time and way will deliver me.

154. Plead my cause, and deliver me; quicken me according to Your word.

Oppressed as the Psalmist appeared to be by the weight of his affliction, he is at no loss where to apply for help. He carries his righteous cause to Him, who "stills

the enemy and the avenger" "Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me: fight against them that fight against me. Take hold of shield and shield, and stand up for my help. Draw out also the spear, and stop the way against them that persecute me; say unto my soul, I am Your salvation." Thus must we throughout our warfare maintain "the patience of hope," waiting for the Lord, "until He plead our cause, and execute judgment for us." If there is an accuser to resist, "we have an advocate" to plead, who could testify of His prevailing acceptance in the court of heaven, "Father, I thank You, that You have heard Me. And I knew that You hear Me always." Our Redeemer does indeed plead our cause successfully for our deliverance; when but for His powerful advocacy we must have stood speechless in the judgment—helpless, without any prospect of acceptance. Awful indeed was the cause which He had to manage. Our adversary had the law on his side. We could not deny the charge, or offer satisfaction. We could neither "stand in the judgment," nor flee from the impending wrath. But at that moment of infinite peril, our cause was pleaded by a "Counselor," who never was nonsuited in court, who brought irresistible pleas, and produced satisfaction that could not be denied. The voice of deliverance was heard in heaven, "Deliver them from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom." This ransom is no less than the price of His own "precious blood," "shed for many for the remission of sins," a ransom, which has merited and obtained eternal deliverance for His people, and which still pleads for the expiation of the guilt, which attaches to their holiest services, and defiles their happiest approaches to their God. When therefore Satan accuses me: yes, when my own heart condemns me, I may look upward to my heavenly Advocate—Plead my cause, and deliver me. "O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me. You will answer, O Lord, my God."

Poor trembling sinner! take courage. "Your Redeemer is strong—He will thoroughly plead your cause," and leave no charge unanswered. But you say 'How know I that He speaks for me?' Yet if not for you, for whom does He speak? Who needs an advocate more than you? He pleads indeed nothing favorable of you; but much, very much for you. For He pleads the merit of His own blood, "that takes away the sin of the world"—even that great sin of "unbelief," of which His Spirit is now "convincing" you; and which you are now made to feel, lament, and resist, as the bitterest foe to your peace. And does He not "ever live to make intercession for you?" Why then hesitate to apply the certain and consoling inference, that "he is able to save to the uttermost?" Why discouraged by the sight of sin, temptation; backsliding, difficulty, and fear, arising before you on every side; when after you have taken the most extended view of the prospect of sorrow, this one word "uttermost" goes beyond it? If you feel it hard to believe, send up your cry, "Help my unbelief." Only do not dishonor Him by willful despondency; and do not add the sin of disobedience, in delaying this moment to come to Him.

After all, however, even while exercising faith in our heavenly Advocate, we must mourn over our sluggishness in His service. Well, therefore, do we accompany

our pleading for deliverance with the supplication—Quicken me! Every moment's perseverance depends upon this Divine supply. Blessed be God for the sure warrant of expectation—According to Your word! Here we shall receive not only the living principle, but its lively operation; not only the fire to kindle the lamp, but the oil to feed the flame. For He who is our Advocate to plead for us, and our Savior to deliver us, is also our quickening Head, filled with "the residue of the Spirit" to "revive His work." "You have ascended on high, and have received gifts for men: yes, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." Do we therefore want a heart to pray, to praise, to believe, to love? Let us only look to an ascended Savior, sending down the life-giving influence from above, as the purchase of His blood, and the fruit of His intercession. Thus will our hope be enlivened, our faith established, and the graces of the Spirit will abound to the glory of our God.

155. Salvation is far from the wicked; for they seek not Your statutes.

How striking the contrast!—how awfully destitute the condition! They have no one to consider their affliction—no one to deliver them—no one to plead their cause. Indeed, all the misery that an immortal soul is capable of enduring throughout eternity is included in this sentence—Salvation is far from the wicked. The full picture of it is drawn by our Lord Himself, "The rich man died, and was buried; and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and sees Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom." The present enjoyment of salvation is far from the wicked. "There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked." Their common employments are "sin." Their "sacrifice is an abomination." Their life is "without Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world." But who can tell the curse of eternity, with this salvation far from them? To be eternally shut out from God—from heaven! To be eternally shut in with the enemies of God, and the heirs of hell! Fellow-Christians—look from what you have escaped—what you were, when "you were sometimes afar off,"—what you would have been now and forever, had you not "in Christ Jesus been made near by the blood of Christ:" and then "if you hold your peace, the stones will immediately cry out" against you.

But whence this inexpressibly awful condition of the wicked? Is not salvation offered to them? Are they shut out from hope, and sternly refused an interest in the covenant? Oh! no! it is their own doing, or rather their own undoing. Would they but seek the ways of God, they might plead for deliverance; yes, they might have a prevailing Advocate to plead their cause, and deliver them. But now salvation is far from them, because "they are far from God's law." It does not fly from them; but they fly from it. Every act is a stride of mind, more or less vigorous in departure from God. No—such is their pride, that "they will not even seek His statutes." They "desire not the knowledge of His ways." They say to God, "Depart from us;" God, therefore, will say to them, "Depart from me." They say to Christ, "We will not have this man to reign over us;" He will say of them, "Those My enemies, that would not I should reign over them, bring here, and slay them

before me." It is not then so much God that punishes them, as those who punish themselves. Their own sin—the necessity of the case—punishes them. They "will not come to Christ, that they might have life:" "so that they are without excuse"—die they must.

But who are the wicked? Alas! this is a melancholy question, as involving within its sphere so much that passes for amiable, virtuous, and lovely, in the estimation of the world. Not to speak of those, whose name is broadly written upon their foreheads; it includes "all that forget God," however blameless their moral character, or their external Christian profession. It is determined upon immutable authority—it is the decree of our eternal Judge, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His;" and if none of His, then it follows in unavoidable consequence, that salvation is far from him.

Oh! could we but persuade such of their awful state. Oh! could we awake them from their death-like, deadly sleep—slumbering on the brink of ruin! on the borders of hell! But they are closed up in their own self-esteem, or in the favorable comparison drawn between themselves and many around them; forgetting that the rule, by which they will be judged, is not the world's standard of moral rectitude, but the statutes of a holy, heart-searching God; forgetting too, that all may be decency without, while all is corruption within. Let them test their hearts by an honest and prayerful scrutiny of the statutes; and while they must confess themselves guilty before God, a sense of danger would awaken the hearty cry for salvation which would not then be far from them. For "the Lord is near unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of them that fear Him; He also will hear their cry, and—will save them."

O You Almighty Spirit, whose power is alone able to "turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just," "raise up Your power, and come among us;" "rend the heavens, and come down;" rend the hearts of sinners, of the ungodly, the moral, the naturally amiable, the self-righteous. "Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek Your name, O Lord."

156. Great are Your tender mercies, O Lord; quicken me according to Your judgments.

It is most cheering to pass from judgment to mercy—from the awful state of the wicked, to adore the mercies of God to His own people. We were naturally no better than they. The most eminent saved sinner looks on himself with wonder, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" Never will he lose the remembrance, "Who makes you to differ?" To mercy—rich mercy alone—we trace the distinction between those that are "quicken," and those that remain "dead in trespasses and sins."

But let us mark the features of this mercy. How great in extent! Estimate its greatness by the infinite debt which it blots out—the eternal ruin from which it saves—the heavenly crown to which it raises. Trace it to the mind of God—that first eternal purpose of mercy, which set us apart for His glory. Mark it in that "time of love," when His mercy rescued us from Satan, sin, death, and hell, and drew us to Himself. As soon might we span the arch of heaven, as fully grasp the greatness of His mercy. And then how tender is it in its exercise! Such was the first beam of mercy that "visited us." Such has been the continued display. So natural, as from a Father. So yearning, "as one whom his mother comforts!" Such a multitude of those tender mercies! The overflowing stream follows us through every step of our wilderness journey. The blessing "compasses us about," abounds towards us, keeps us steadfast, or restores us when wandering, and will preserve us to the end. Happy are we—not in the general perception—not in the hearsay report—but in the experimental enjoyment of it. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name." But what poor returns have we made for this infinite love! Surely the petition for quickening grace suits us well. This was the constant burden of David's prayer. For he was not like many professors, who can maintain their assurance in a lower and careless walk. No, he was a believer of a very high standard; desirous not only of proving his title to the blessing, but of living in its habitual and active enjoyment.

Often as this petition has been brought before us, in the course of this Psalm, it is too important ever to be passed over. Let us at this time use it for the purpose of individual self-inquiry. In what respects do I need quickening grace? Are my views of sin, and especially of the sin of my own heart, slight and superficial? Do they fail in producing humility, abasement, tenderness of conscience, circumspection of conduct? If it be so—Quicken me, O my God! Does my apprehension of a Savior's love serve to embitter sin to me? to crucify sin in me, to warm and enliven my heart with love to Him, and zeal in His service? If I am convicted of coldness to such a Savior, and sluggishness in such a service, I need to pray—O Lord, quicken me! And how do I find it with regard to prayer itself? Are not my prayers general—unfrequent—wandering? Is not my service too often constrained, a forced duty, rather than a privilege and delight? O Lord, quicken me!

Yet many Christians, through a mistaken perception, know not when they have received the blessing. They have looked for it in strong and sensible excitement; and in defect of this they sink into despondency. Whereas the solid influence is independent of sensations, and consists in a tender sensibility of sin, a spiritual appetite for the gospel, active energy in Christian duties, and continual progress in heavenly exercises. But under no circumstances must the evil of a dead and drooping state be lightly thought of; obscuring as it does the difference between the believer and the worldling, or rather between the believer and the formalist. O believer, you have great need to carry your complaint again and again unto the Lord! 'Quicken me—quicken me—according to Your judgments—according to those gracious promises, which are the method of Your proceedings, and the

rule of Your dispensations of grace.' You cannot be too earnest to welcome the breathings of the Spirit, or too cautious, that your indolence resists not His Divine impression. When He quickens you with His influence, do you quicken Him with your supplications, "Awake, O north wind; and come, you south: blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out." Persuade—entreat—constrain His stay. Enlivened by His energy, how happy, and in your own sphere how useful, a member of the Church of Christ you may be found! Your soul will be invigorated—your graces strengthened—and your affections elevated—in humble, cheerful, steady dependence upon the Savior, and in daily renewed devotedness to His service. The more the spiritual life is thus "exercised unto godliness, the more delightfully will you realize the active service and everlasting praise, which will constitute the perfection of heavenly enjoyment."

157. Many are my persecutors and my enemies; yet do I not decline from Your testimonies.

David's experience is common to us all. Many, indeed, are our persecutors and enemies. This is a solemn cost. Let those who are setting out in the Christian course count it well. From neglect of our Lord's rule of Scriptural calculation, many seem to begin well; but they have been "hindered"—they turn back; they are zealous but inconsiderate; warmhearted, but ignorant of themselves, their work, and their resources. They were allured at first, perhaps, by an interest in the Gospel—some delusive excitement of love to the Savior—the picture of the paths of "pleasantness and peace," or the joys of heaven. The cross was out of sight, and out of mind. But this promise of ease and happiness was no less foolish and unwarrantable, than that of a soldier, utterly forgetful of his profession, and who should promise himself peace at the very time that he was called out to the wars. Surely, if like God's ancient people, we begin our road in sunshine, it is well to be provided against the storms, which will soon overtake us. We would say therefore to all—specially to sanguine beginners—Let your course be commenced with serious consideration, and zealous self-scrutiny. Beware of hasty determinations. See to it, that your resources are drawn, not from your own resolutions, or from the sincerity and ardor of your love; but from the fullness that is treasured up in Jesus for your present distress. Feel every step of your way by the light of the sacred word. If you expect Christian consistency to command the esteem of an ungodly world, you have forgotten both your Master's word and example; and you will soon be ready to exclaim—Many are my persecutors, and my enemies. For if their hostility is not always active, the enmity "is not dead, but sleeps." If, however, their unexpected surprisals and inveteracy should daunt you in the conflict, you are again forgetting the word of cheering support in the most awful crisis, "My grace is sufficient for you; for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Thus the word of God will be "the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left." Presumption is cast down, self-confidence is humbled, and the trembling simplicity of dependence upon an Almighty arm is upheld and honored.

Count then upon the difficulties that beset the heavenly path. You will never pluck the Rose of Sharon, if you are afraid of being pierced by the thorns which surround it. You will never reach the crown, if you flinch from the cross in the way to it. Oh! think of the honor of bearing this cross. It is conformity to the Son of God. Let the mind be deeply imbued with the remembrance of his daily cross of suffering and reproach; and we shall gladly "go forth without the camp, bearing His reproach," yes—even "rejoicing, if we are counted worthy to suffer shame" with Him and for Him. Indeed, what is our love, if we will not take up a cross for Him? How can we be His followers, without His cross? How can we be Christians, if we are not confessors of Christ before a world that despises His Gospel?

But a steady, consistent profession is no matter of course. The crown is not easily won. Many are our persecutors, and our enemies. Persecution, to the false professor, is an occasion of apostasy; to the faithful servant of Christ, it is the trial of his faith, the source of his richest consolations, the guard of his profession, and the strength of his perseverance. It drives him to his God. He casts himself upon his Savior for immediate refuge and support; and the quickening influence, which he had just been seeking, enables him to say—Yet do I not decline from Your testimonies. Thus did the great Apostle, at the time, when his persecutors were many, and human help even from his friends had failed him, maintain an unshaken confidence in the service of his God, "At my first answer"—he tells us, "no man stood with me, but all men forsook me. Notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me." David himself often acknowledged the same principle of perseverance under similar trials, "Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! Many are those who rise up against me. Many there be, which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. But You, O Lord, are a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter-up of my head. O God the Lord, the strength of my salvation, You have covered my head in the day of battle."

But have we never taken a devious path in declining from the Lord's testimonies, to escape the appointed cross? Do we never shrink from "the voice of him that reproaches" and blasphemes, by reason of the enemy and the avenger? Can we always in the integrity of our heart appeal to an Omniscient God, "All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten You, neither have we dealt falsely in Your covenant; our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from Your way: though You have sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death?" This profession is not the foolish confidence of boasting; but the fulfillment of the covenant promise, "I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me." So beautifully does the promise of perseverance connect itself with the duty of persevering! And so clearly in this, as in every other way, does the "wrath of man" ("howbeit he means not so, neither does his heart think so") "praise God." How glorious is the display of the power of His grace in the constancy of His people! like the rocks in the ocean, immovable amid the fury of the waves; like the trees of the forest, "rooted and

established" by every shaking of the tempest! Must not the world, in witnessing the total defeat of their enmity against the Lord's people (or rather its eventual results in their increased prosperity), be constrained to confess to the honor of God, "Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel—What has God wrought!"

158. I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not Your word.

We shall not tire in listening to this repeated expression of the Psalmist's tenderness for the honor of God. No trouble from his many persecutors and enemies came so near to his heart, as the sight of the dishonor and contempt of God's word. The glory of God was dearer to him than life. O that every recollection of this tried servant of God might deepen the special mark of acceptance upon our too cold and indifferent hearts! Our joys and sorrows are the pulse of the soul. A fellowship with the joys of angels over repenting sinners will be accompanied with bitterness of godly sorrow over the hardness and impenitency of those, who keep not the word of God.

But even here we need much and earnest prayer, in order to obtain a clear perception of our real principles. Sin is so subtle in its nature and workings that it insinuates itself into our holiest desires, and often so far interweaves itself into the graces of the Spirit, as greatly to mar their beauty, and obstruct their operations. How often is zeal for the honor of God mingled with the unhallowed fire of our own spirit! True zeal is indeed a precious fruit of the Spirit. Its other name is love—active, self-denying, compassionate love for sinners. 'Let me never fancy I have zeal'—said a Christian of a very high order—'until my heart overflows with love to every man living.' If then we are really under its holy influence, we shall lose no opportunity of active exertions on behalf of wretched transgressors: and the limits of our zeal will be only the limits of a fallen world. Especially within our own sphere shall we employ all our labors and pains to stem the tide of unrighteousness, "saying unto the fools—deal not foolishly—How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? Turn, turn, why will you die?"

But the fervency of zeal will express itself in something more difficult than personal service. We can often warn and plead with transgressors, when we are sinfully backward in sending up sighs and cries on their behalf; and in presenting these poor lepers by faith to that great and good Physician, whose "power present to heal" has been so abundantly manifested. This is indeed zeal of rare attainment through our own unbelief. But it brings its own rich blessing to the soul; because it is the zeal of the compassionate Jesus; who, though He looked round on sinners with anger, "being grieved for the hardness of their hearts," did not forget to plead on their behalf, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." It was the zeal and love of Him, who so identified His Father's interest

with His own, that He endured the reproaches cast upon Him in His bosom. And should not the members feel, when the Head is wounded? Should not we consider every dishonor done to Jesus as a shaft piercing our own bosom? Can we bear to behold all around us united in a conspiracy against the honor, and—if it were possible—against the life, of our dearest friend and benefactor, and not be painfully grieved? Yet genuine grief must begin with our own heart, "all of us mourning, everyone for his iniquity." The wickedness of others will stir up the conviction within our own conscience, "I do remember my faults this day." And when once we begin the enumeration, where shall we end? Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. Enter not into judgment with Your servant."

159. Consider how I love Your precepts; quicken me, O Lord, according to Your loving-kindness.

Love for the precepts, such as this Psalm describes, is a distinguishing characteristic of a child of God. The transgressors neither love the precepts, nor desire quickening grace to keep them. For though "not grievous" in themselves, they are too strict, too humbling for the unrenewed, proud, worldly heart. Love therefore to them—not being the growth of the natural man—must be "a plant which our heavenly Father has planted," a witness of the Spirit of adoption, and the principle of Christian devotedness. And how encouraging is the recollection of the Lord's readiness to consider how we love His precepts! "I know Abraham, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He has spoken of him." Thus also did He challenge "the accuser of the brethren," to "consider His servant Job that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that fears God, and eschews evil."

But while love of the precepts realizes the full confidence of the Lord's consideration, the consciousness of its imperfection and scanty measure will always prevent us from urging it as the ground of acceptance. Christian! you know not—or at least you allow not—the proud boast, "God, I thank You, that I am not as other men are." No, rather—your constant cry to the end is—Quicken me. Your plea is not merit, but mercy. Not that you deserve to be helped—because you love the precepts: but you desire and trust to be helped—according to Your loving-kindness. And what must be the loving-kindness of a God of infinite love! Only do not sit still, and wait for the breezes of His love. Rather call to the "north wind to awake, and to the south wind to blow," to fill your sails, and urge you on. God—His word, His works, His perfections, His holiness; Jesus—His pity, His love, His grace—is your delight, your chief delight; yet how infinitely is it below the scriptural standard of privilege, attainment, and expectation!

Under the painful influence of straitened desires and heartless affections, how refreshing is it to mark the springs of life flowing from the loving-kindness of the

Lord! Yes, indeed—He is the overflowing spring of His church. Every mercy is His grace. Every holy suggestion is His influence. Even the passing thought that our Christian progress proceeds from our own resources, opens the door of fearful departure from God. And yet such is the self-deceitfulness of the heart, that, in the very act of professing to "rejoice in Christ Jesus," the Omniscient eye traces a "confidence in the flesh." The real dependence is on the "mountain that stands strong," not on "the favor that makes" it so. Even our first father, in his original unimpaired strength, could "not quicken his own soul." Can we wonder that the fallen nature, even though partially upheld by Divine power, is changeable and unstable? The most advanced Christian needs the supply to the end, as much as he did in his first stage of infantile weakness. And will he not continue to need it throughout eternity, in every exercise of adoring service, as well as for his active existence?

But when we ask for this quickening, are we expecting, as we ought to be, a large answer to our prayer? Or are we "limiting" our God, by the scanty apprehensions of our poor faith? Remember He is glorified—not in possessing, but in dispensing His gifts. If we really expect His blessing, can we be satisfied without it? It is not our unworthiness, but our unbelief, that stops the current. Would that we gave Him full credit for His exuberant flow of free, rich, ceaseless mercy!

Blessed Jesus! we plead Your promise to be filled. We have life from You; but give it us "more abundantly"—as much as these houses of clay—as much as these earthen vessels—can contain. Our taste of Your love, and our knowledge of its unbounded fullness, encourage our plea to ask You still for more—Quicken us according to Your loving-kindness. Often as the Psalmist had repeated this prayer for quickening grace, it was not a "vain repetition." Each time was it enlivened with faith, feeling of necessity, and ardent affection: and should we, in the consciousness of our weakness and coldness, offer it a hundred times a-day, it would never fail of acceptance.

160. Your word is true from the beginning: and everyone of Your righteous judgments endures forever.

The "loving-kindness and the truth of God" were two heavenly notes, on which "the sweet Psalmist of Israel" loved to dwell—His "loving-kindness" in giving, and His "truth" in fulfilling—His gracious promises. Indeed the displays of His truth—whether to His Church collectively, or to His people individually—have always been every way worthy of Himself. Often has His word seemed on the eve of being falsified, clearly with the design of a brighter and more striking display of its faithfulness. The very night previous to the close of the four hundred and thirty years, Israel was, to all human appearances, as far from deliverance as at any former period. But "the vision was for an appointed time:" nothing could hasten, nothing could delay it; for "it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and

thirty years, even the self-same day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt." At a subsequent period, the family of David appeared upon the point of extinction; and it seemed as if the promise of God would fall to the ground. But to exhibit the word of God, as true from the beginning, a providential, and almost a miraculous, interference was manifested. When Athaliah destroyed all the seed-royal of the house of Judah, Joash was stolen away, put under a nurse, hid in the house of the Lord six years, and in God's appointed time brought forth to the people as the fulfillment of the express promise of God, "Behold! the king's son shall reign, as the Lord had said of the sons of David." "Whoever is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."

And thus have many of His own people been tempted in seasons of despondency to "charge God foolishly." But who of them has not afterwards, in some unexpected deliverance, "set to his seal"—Your word is true from the beginning? "The Lord shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants, when He sees that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left." And how do these recollections put to shame the suggestions of unbelief, and strengthen our confidence in the prospect, or even in the present endurance, of "manifold temptations!"

The full acknowledgment of the truths of God's word is the ground of all our peace and comfort. The believing reception of the testimony opens to us a free access to God. We stand before Him self-condemned, and yet we believe that "there is no condemnation." "The Spirit bears witness" to and "with our spirits," that "this God is our God forever and ever" "unto death," in death, and through eternity. In this simplicity of rest upon the testimony, we go to our God, like Abraham, in sensible helplessness, but in assured confidence, "strong in faith, giving glory to God."

Many, however, have been so used to indulge the pride of their own reasonings, that they scarcely know how to read the Book of God without caviling. If they believe while it is in their hands, they are not prepared to give a reason of their faith. They have ventured into conflict with the enemy with unproved armor, and so have been shaken and troubled. Or perhaps their faith does not reach the whole testimony: and therefore, being partial only it is not genuine. For if we do not give full credence to all, we do not give true credence to any. We do not receive it on the authority of God, but only so far as our reasoning can explain it, or our will may approve it. What need then have we to pray for a teachable simplicity of faith—not asking—"What think you?" but, "How read you?" In this spirit we shall hold our anchor on solid ground; and should we again be "tossed with the tempest," we shall look to Him, who stills the storm, and there shall be "a great calm." Confidence simply built upon the word of God, will endure the storms of earth and hell.

Yet we may loosely believe all, while we practically believe none. The

generalities of truth have no influence without an individual application. The summary look of acquiescence will miss all the solid blessings of a reverential and experimental faith. But to find—as the woman of Samaria found—that 'it is all true,'—because it answers to our convictions, our wants, and our feelings to know that the promises are true, because they have been fulfilled in us—this is tasting, feeling, handling—this is indeed blessedness—this makes the word unspeakably precious to us, "a treasure to be desired." To have the witness in ourselves that "we have not followed cunningly devised fables," but that it is "a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"—this is indeed "life from the dead." Oh! how should we seek thus to receive the word "with much assurance!" The Israelites were not satisfied with inquiring respecting the manna, "What is this?" or with discovering that it had descended from heaven; but they gathered it each for himself, and fed upon it as their daily bread. Nor will it be of any avail to us to prove beyond contradiction, and to acknowledge with the fullest assurance, the truth of God's word, unless we thus embrace it, and live upon it as our heavenly portion. Faith alone can give this spiritual apprehension, "He who believes, has the witness in himself." But if the word be the truth of God from the beginning, it must be eternal truth in its character and its results; like its Great Author in every particular—enduring forever. "Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven; Your faithfulness is unto all generations." Here is the rock of my confidence. How could I rest my hope on any salvation, that did not proceed from the primary, unchangeable, eternal mind? What assurance could I have elsewhere, that the grand plan might not be defeated by some unexpected combination? Whereas every act of reliance in His faithfulness establishes more firmly His title to my confidence, and strengthens the soul into a habit of intelligent, vigorous faith.

Lord! give unto us that "precious faith," which makes the acknowledgment of the truth of Your word from the beginning, and its endurance forever, the spring of continual life and consolation to our souls.

161. Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart stands in awe of Your word.

So contrary are the principles of God and the world! God chastens His people for their sin; the world persecutes them for their godliness. So it has been from the beginning, and will continue to the end. David had before mentioned his persecutors as many. Now he tells us, that they were, like those of David's Lord, the princes of the earth. In both cases, however, was it confessedly without cause. Had it been with cause, it would have been his shame. Now it was his glory. In the former case it would have been his own—here it was his Master's—cross.

His awe of God's word was the gracious restraint to his own spirit. And this godly fear has always marked the people of God. Witness Joseph, Moses, Nehemiah,

and the Jews, and the three Babylonish captives. Josiah also obtained a special mark of acceptance. For the man "that trembles at God's word," whether he be found on the throne or on the ash-heap, is the man, "to whom the Lord will look." And certainly where, as with David, the wrath of princes and the wrath of God are weighed against each other; who can doubt, but that it is better to incur the persecution of men by a decided adherence to the word of God, than the wrath of God by declining from it?

Our Savior, "knowing what was in man," had clearly fore-warned and fore-armed His disciples against these difficulties. The trial at the first onset proved too hard for them; Peter's heart stood in awe of the persecuting princes, and in a moment of temptation he disowned his Master: but when "the Spirit of power" was poured from on high, such was the holy awe, in which himself and his brethren stood of God's word, that they declared, in the face of the whole council, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge you. We ought to obey God rather than men." 'I fear God,'—Colonel Gardiner used to say—'and I have nothing else to fear.'

Indeed the spirit of adoption—the Christian's distinguishing character and privilege—produces an awe of God; a dread of sinning against the tenderest Father, of grieving the dearest Friend. And this awe of God will naturally extend to His word; so that we shall be more tenderly afraid of disregarding its dictates, than the most faithful subject of breaking the law of his beloved Sovereign. There is nothing slavish or legal in this fear. It is the freedom and the holiness of the Gospel, the very soul of religion; the best preservative of our joys and privileges; and the best evidence of their scriptural character. We shall find, with David, this principle a valuable safeguard against the richest allurements, or the more powerful reproach of men, to go "beyond the word of the Lord to do less or more."

But what must be the state of that heart, where the word of the great God—the Creator and Judge of the earth—commands no reverence! Could the sinner hear a voice from heaven, addressed distinctly to himself, would he dare to reject it? Yet "we have a more sure word, whereunto we do well that we take heed;" that we receive it with silent awe, bow before it with the most unlimited subjection, and yield ourselves entirely to its holy influence. But if it does not stand infinitely higher in our estimation than all—even the best—books of man, we have no just perception of its value, nor can we expect any communication of its treasures to our hearts. The holiness of God is stamped upon its every sentence. Let us then cherish an awe of His word, "receiving it"—not as a common book, "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God", in the true spirit of Cornelius and his company, "Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded you of God."

162. I rejoice at Your word, as one that finds great spoil.

The awe in which we should stand of God's word, so far from hindering our delight in it, is, as we have just hinted, the most suitable preparation for its most happy enjoyment. In receiving every word of it as the condescending message from Him, before whom angels veil their faces, we shall rejoice at it, as one that finds great spoil. Often had David found great spoil in his many wars; but never had his greatest victories brought him such rich spoil, as he had now discovered in the word of God. The joy in this treasure (like that of the church at the advent of Christ [Isaiah 9:3], described by this figure) evidently implied no common delight. If then the saints of old could so largely enrich their souls from their scanty portion of the word; must not we, who are favored with the entire revelation of God, acknowledge, "The lines are fallen unto us in pleasant places; yes, we have a goodly heritage?"

This expressive image may remind us, that the spoils of this precious word are not to be gained without conflict: Here "the kingdom of heaven suffers violence." Our natural taste and temper revolt from the word. Our indolence indisposes for the necessary habitual effort of prayer, self-denial, and faith. But still "the violent do take the kingdom by force." No pains are lost—no struggle is ineffectual. What great spoil is divided as the fruit of the conflict! What abundant recompense is in reserve for the "good soldier of Jesus Christ," who is determined, in Divine strength, to "endure hardness," until he overcomes the reluctance of his heart for the spiritual duty? It is not a sudden flash, or impression upon the imagination; but the conqueror's joy in spoiling the field of conflict—solid and enriching. Sometimes indeed (as in the Syrian camp, 2 Kings 7:8), we find the spoil unexpectedly. Sometimes we see the treasure long before we can make it our own. And when we gird ourselves to the conflict, paralyzed by the weakness of our spiritual perceptions and the power of unbelief; many a prayer, and many a sigh, is sent up for Divine aid, before we are crowned with victory, and as the fruit of our conquest, joyfully appropriate the word to our present distress.

But from a cursory, superficial reading of the word of God, no such fruit can be anticipated. When therefore the flesh or the world have deadened our delight, and taken from us this great spoil, should we not arm ourselves for repossession of it? Should we be unaffected by our loss? Oh, then, since there are such treasures found and enjoyed in this field of conflict, let us not lose our interest in them by the indulgence of presumption, heartlessness, or despondency. Before we attempt to read, let us cry to the Lord, under the sense of utter helplessness to perform one spiritual act, for His powerful help and Almighty teaching. Then we shall persevere with unconquerable and unwearied vigor, and not fail to share in the blessed spoil of victory, views of a Savior's dying love—an interest in the precious blessings of the cross—great spoil, "unsearchable riches."

163. I hate and abhor lying: but Your law do I love.

We can neither stand in awe of God's word, nor rejoice at it, unless we abhor all contrary ways. And here lies the spiritual conflict. For so opposed are our natural affections to the character and will of God, that we love what God hates, and we hate what God loves. Our new principle and bias, however, as directly falls in with the dictates of God's law, as before we have revolted from it. Lying is now hated and abhorred as contrary to "a God of truth;" and the law is now loved, as the reflection of His image, and the manifestation of His will. David had before prayed to have "lying ways removed from him," and a love for the law of God imparted. His utter detestation shows, that these ways had been removed, and a renewed inclination to the law granted to him.

To have avoided lying, and to have practiced the law, might have been sufficient for the regulation of his outward conduct. But his was the religion of the heart—not meant only to control his actions; but to renew his habits, motions, tempers, and taste. He would not therefore only refrain from lying, or manifest a disinclination to it—he must hate and abhor it as hell itself. Nor was external conformity, or approval of the law, his standard: he must love it. If sin was counted common, fashionable, venial, profitable, or pleasant; if contempt was cast upon the law of God—this stopped him not. Every sin, though only a hair's breadth deviation from the rule, was in his eyes hateful, defiling, damning. He would "resist unto blood, striving against it." Every act, desire, and habit of conformity, with whatever shame it might be attended, was his delight. Such, Christian, should be our standard. Lord! humble us in the daily sense of deviation and defect. Give to us larger desires, growing conformity to Your perfect rule.

Well had it been for Eve and for her children, had she turned from the tempter's lie with this strong determination. But, "You shall not surely die"—has from that fatal moment been a most effectual instrument in captivating unwary souls. So plausible is it in itself, so agreeable to our natural inclinations, that it is readily cherished, even where the first contact with temptation assures the wretched victims, that its "deceit is falsehood." But they do not hate and abhor it: they do not flee from it, as a concern for the honor of God and their own safety would lead them; and therefore justly are they "given up to believe it" as the fruit of their delusion, and the punishment of their unfaithfulness. Oh! if we are ever tempted by the flattery and allurements of the world, let us only mark the opposition of their standard, taste, maxims, and pursuits to the truth of God, and we shall turn away with hatred and abhorrence.

The "overseers of the purchased flock" of Christ—yes, all "who earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" will anxiously watch any deterioration of doctrine or principle—any deviation from the simplicity of the Gospel, and brand it as a lie. "I have not written unto you"—said the venerable Apostle, "because you know not the truth; but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar, but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?" How does the great Apostle teach us to look at the adulteration of the doctrine of grace before referred to—a system not of faith, but of fear—not of joy, but of

slavish awe—not of confidence, but of doubt—palsying the springs of life: withering, blighting, chilling the glow of love; "entangling again the free-born children of God in a yoke of bondage!" The champion of the faith would not tolerate it for a moment. And he bids his people hate and abhor it, even though from an angel's mouth, as the beguiling lie of the great "corrupter" of the church. Equally would he have us abhor the licentious abuse of the gospel flowing from the same source, "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid!"

After all, however, this verse must include an abhorrence of the literal sin of lying in all its forms. A lie is so gross a sin, that we might be disposed to spiritualize this expression, rather than to analyze some of the plausible shapes, in which the sin may be detected in our own profession. Exaggeration, a false gloss, a slight deviation (hardly perceptible) from the straight line, excuses made to one another, which we dare not make to God, want of accuracy in relating what we hear—all these are forms of lying to be shunned, hated and abhorred by the man, who is really "walking in the light, and having fellowship with God," as much as the more palpable falsehoods, with which the world abounds, which it excuses, and even boasts of.

Believer! would you have your hatred and abhorrence of every kind of lying yet further deepened? Would you summon every passion of the soul, "indignation, vehement desire, zeal, revenge"—against it? Then learn to abhor it, not only as your enemy, but as God's. Pray that the arrow of conviction may be dipped in the blood of Christ; and then, however deep and painful be the wound, it cannot be mortal. Mortal indeed it will be to the sin, but healing to the soul. Pray that your hatred of sin may flow from a sense of reconciliation; for never will it be so perfect, as when you feel yourself sheltered from its everlasting curse. To lie before your Savior as His redeemed sinner, and to wash His feet with your tears of contrition, will be your highest and happiest privilege on this side heaven. In this spirit and daily posture you will most clearly manifest the inseparable connection of hatred of lying ways with a love for the law of God.

164. Seven times a day do I praise You, because of Your righteous judgments.

David had just spoken of his fear, joy, hatred, and love. He now expresses his love in praise. And indeed it is the mixture of praise with prayer, that makes this Psalm so complete an exhibition of Christian experience. Early and late, and habitually throughout the day, have we seen this man of God "give himself to prayer." But his "spirit of supplication," in strict conformity with the Apostolic rule, was ever mingled "with thanksgiving." Indeed, self-love—the sense of want—may prompt us to pray. But love to God is the spirit of praise. The neglect, therefore, of this service is robbing God, no less than ourselves. Not that He needs it, but that He deserves and desires it. Not that it brings any merit to us, but that it strengthens our dependence, and elevates our love. If then we feel it to

be "good, lovely, and pleasant," it will be as needless to define its frequency, as to prescribe the limit of our service to a beloved friend, to whom our obligations were daily increasing. The casuistry of love would answer all the entangling scruples of a bondage system. We should aim at living in praise, as the element of our souls, the atmosphere of our enjoyment, our reward more than our duty—that which identifies our interest with heaven, and forms our fitness for it.

Young Christians indeed sometimes unwarily bring themselves into "bondage," in forcing their consciences to a frequency of set times for duty, interfering with present obligations, or pressing unduly upon the weakness of the flesh. Our rule of service, though not measured by our indolence, yet should be accommodated to those legitimate daily engagements, which, when "done as to the Lord," form as real and necessary a part of our religion, as the more spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise. To observe any particular time (beyond the Sabbath, and the "morning and evening sacrifice") because it is the time—however wearied our spirits may be, or however immediate obligations may interfere—is to forget the weighty instruction of one well qualified to speak, "Bodily exercise profits little." Rather let us "go, and learn what that means—I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." Growth in grace will, however, gradually mold our profession into habitual communion with God. As our views become more solid and settled, each duty of the day will find its proper place, our services will become more free, and our obedience more evangelical.

But the formalist considers seven times a-day—to be an infringement of the sacred canon, "Be not righteous overmuch." He pays his customary service twice a-day; he says his prayers and his praises too; and his conscience slumbers again. And alas! there are times of slumber, when we little differ from him. Oh! let us be alarmed at every symptom of such a state, and "find no rest to our spirit," until we have regained, some measure of this frame of hearty and overflowing praise. If there be a heavenly nature, there must be a heavenly work. Tongue and heart should be set on fire by love. Thus we will go to our work, whatever it may be, and sing at it.

But the Christian sometimes feels, that he has no heart, and—he almost fears—no right to praise. Having no sensible token of love to call him forth, his harp "hangs upon the willows;" nor does he care to take it down, even to "sing one of the Lord's songs in this strange land." But how many have found with Bunyan—"When I believe and sing, my doubting ceases!" "Meat comes out of the eater,"—cheering rays out of the darkest cloud. Endeavor therefore to bring to mind some spiritual, or even temporal, mercies. Or, if recollection fails you, open your Bible; turn to some subject of praise, such as the song of the Angels at the birth of our Savior, or the song of the Redeemed to the honor of the Lamb. Have you no part or interest in it? Do you not need the Savior? Can you be happy without Him? Then inquire, and feel, and try, whether you cannot give "thanks unto God for His unspeakable gift." Perhaps, your notes may rise into praise, and in the excitement of praise, prayer will again mingle itself with its customary enjoyment.

It is your sinful folly to yield to that continual depression, which unfits you for the exercise of your duties and your privileges. How fully do our Liturgical services elevate and sustain the ascent of the soul heavenward! Language better adapted for strengthening its feeble aspiration will not readily be found; consecrated as it is in the remembrance of its acceptable use by a throng of the Lord's favored people during successive generations, now united to the general assembly above, and worshiping with everlasting acceptance "before the throne of God and the Lamb."

The Lord's righteous judgments in His word are a constant matter for praise. Such light, food, and comfort! Such a stronghold of God! Such a firm hope to anchor on! Such a clear rule to walk by! Truly the distinguishing favor of this gracious gift stirs up the song, "Praise the Lord." Add to which—the righteous judgments—His decrees and declarations respecting His Church—occupied the Psalmist's "midnight," as well as his daily, song. "O Lord, You are my God"—said the enraptured prophet in the name of the Church, "I will exalt You, I will praise Your name; for You have done wonderful things; Your counsels of old are faithfulness and truth." Inscrutable indeed they may sometimes appear; and opposed to our best prospects of happiness; yet the language of faith in the darkest hour will be, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." But neither seven times a-day, nor "seventy times seven," will satisfy us in heaven. Then our song—even "the song of Moses and the Lamb"—will still be "the Lord's righteous judgments;" and for this ever "new song" the harps of God will never be unstrung, and never out of tune, throughout an eternity of praise. But a moment, and we shall be engaged in this heavenly employ—no reluctance of the spirit—no weariness of the flesh. Every moment is hastening on this near, this cheering, this overwhelming glorious—prospect. Blessed be God!

165. Great peace have they which love Your law, and nothing shall offend them.

Here is the happiness of a child of God summed up in one word—peace. Looked at with an eye of sense, slighted by the world, and often chastened with "the rod of affliction," he is an object of pity. But look at him with the eye of faith—he loves the law of his God, and his heritage is peace. Every feature of the covenant bears some resemblance to its nature; full of grace, peace, and love. Two of the agents are fitly represented by the lamb and the dove—emblems of peace. The tendency of its principles "is first pure," "then peaceable." Its present enjoyment and privilege is peace—great peace. Its end will be universal, eternal peace.

Christian! have you not discovered the connection of peace with love for the law—the whole revealed will of God? Looking at it as the law of truth—was not its disturbance of your peace of self-satisfaction and self-delusion the first step to the attainment of solid peace? You learned to see yourself as God sees you.

Every fresh view humbled you more deeply. Your dissatisfaction exercised you in an anxious and diligent search for true peace. And then, looking at it again as the "law of faith"—here is your ground of peace laid open. Your way to God is clear—your acceptance free—your confidence assured—your communion heavenly. "Being justified by faith, you have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;" yes—you are "filled with peace, all peace in believing." And have you not equal reason to love this law, as a law of obedience? Here is your question answered, "Lord! what will You have me to do?" Let "this word dwell in you richly in all wisdom;" and it will be your daily directory of life and conduct. You will "delight in it after the inner man." Walking in the light of it, you will go on to the full enjoyment of peace. "Taking" cheerfully your Savior's "yoke upon you, and learning of Him, you will" ever "find rest unto your soul." "All His paths are peace."

Professor! what do you lose by your indulged indifference to the law of God? Conscience tells you, that you are a stranger to this peace—this great peace. A secret root of idolatry cankers the principles of peace. Notions will not bring it. Nothing but vital godliness—the love for God's law, "the truth received in the love of it"—will realize the blessing.

Young Christian! be not disheartened, though your love to the law be so weak, interrupted, clouded, that sometimes you fear that you have no love at all. Do you not mourn over its coldness? Do you not desire to love? Seek to know more of the constraining influence of the love of Christ. If your chariot-wheels now, like those of the Egyptians, drive heavily, you will then move, like the chariots in the prophet's vision, "upon wheels and upon wings." At least you are on the way to peace. Stir up the habit of diligent faith; be active—be more earnest in dependence on the Lord. Soon will He visit you with His cheering sunshine, and bless you with His heavenly peace. "The Lord is your shepherd:" and dwelling near the shepherd's tent, "you shall not want." Nothing comes to you without His appointment; and whatever He takes away was only what He had first given, and leaves you nothing but to say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord!" Whatever He lays upon you is infinitely less than you deserve, and with the fatherly design "to do you good at the latter end." Whatever He gives you is peace, great peace, "perfect peace:" and though at best, as to its actual enjoyment, it is only a chequered gift, linked with "this world's tribulation;" yet, as the earnest of that "peace into which the righteous shall enter, when taken away from the evil to come," it is an incalculable blessing.

The steadfastness of our profession is a most important fruit of this blessing—Nothing shall offend them. The daily cross, the humbling doctrine, the fiery trial—which, by offending the professor, detect the unsoundness of his heart—these are the principles of strength and consolation to the faithful lover of God's law. Those "had no root in themselves," who were stumbled by "tribulation or persecution." Hence there was no love in their hearts; consequently no peace in their experience, and no stability in their course. The frequency of such cases in

a day of profession is a most painful subject of observation. A course of religion, commenced under the impulse of momentary excitement, is like a "reed shaken by the wind." The first breath of the storm beats down all resolutions, that were not formed upon the conviction of utter helplessness, and in entire dependence upon Divine grace. Light without love ends in fearful ruin. Genuine love to the law alone keeps the soul—a love of no common character—a devoted, persevering attachment. The claim of the law is above every other. Everything—even life itself—if need be—must be sacrificed for it. And when it has been thus embraced on a fair calculation of its cost, from a deep sense of its value, and with a spiritual perception of its character and application to our necessities—there will be no stumbling-block.

Indeed genuine love will prove our safeguard against all grounds of offence. The doctrine of the total depravity of man is objected to: but love to the law of God, molding our minds into its heavenly impression—will remove all ground of offence. The pride of man's wisdom revolts from the doctrine of the cross, and the freeness of the grace of God. But we love it as a part of the law of faith. It suits our case. It answers our need, and therefore here also nothing offends us. Thus, whatever be the hindrance—whether from Satan or himself—whether from the enmity of the world, or the inconsistencies of the church—the believer, while he mourns over these things, is not offended at them, or at the Gospel through them. He has learned a more Scriptural standard, and to exercise a more discriminating judgment. Love to the law of God enables him, instead of being "tossed to and fro" in doubtful perplexity, to "make straight paths for his feet." If his cross be grievous, he seeks from the Lord a quiet spirit; and thus, "in patience possessing his soul," he finds "the yoke easy, and the burden light." His difficulties exercise and strengthen his faith, and add fresh testimony to the faithfulness of the promise. Whether therefore his way be dark or light, his soul is at peace. In the enjoyment of his Savior's love, he has the witness in his own heart, that "the work of righteousness"—of love to the law of his God, "shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever."

166. Lord, I have hoped for Your salvation, and done Your commandments.

The great peace connected with the love of God's law, is at once the fruit of faith, and the motive of obedience. And the enjoyment of it leads the man of God to give renewed expression to his faith and devotedness. "Faith, which works by love," is no less the characteristic of the Old, than of the New Testament, Church. For mark here the principle and the object of faith—I have hoped for Your salvation—and the practical influence of faith—I have done Your commandments. "Walked not believers always in the same spirit? Walked they not in the same steps?"

Faith is the exercise of the soul in a sense of need, in desire, and in trust. Faith

goes to God on the ground of the promise; hope in the expectation of the thing promised. Thus hope implies the operation of faith. It appropriates to itself the object of faith. The power to take hold of the promises of faith, and to stay our souls upon their "everlasting consolation," is the energy of "a good hope through grace"—such as "makes not ashamed." Conscious unworthiness may give a trembling feebleness to the hand of faith; but the feeblest apprehension of one of the least of the promises of the gospel assures us of our interest in them all. Why may we not set all the fullness of the covenant before the weakest as well as before the strongest believer, and proclaim to both with equal freedom the triumphant challenge, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Who is he who condemns?" Every believer is alike interested in the gospel of grace. "There is no difference" in the righteousness of the gospel, which is "the righteousness of God"—nor in the imputation of it, which is "unto all and upon all," nor in the subjects—which is them that believe—nor in the means of its application, which in all cases is "by faith of Jesus Christ,"—nor in the need of the blessing, "All have sinned" without difference. All therefore are justified without difference. The only difference regards the strength or weakness of the faith, by which the righteousness is more or less distinctly appropriated, and its consequent blessings enjoyed. No soul, however, can sink into perdition, that grasps the promise of Christ with the hand of faith, be that hand ever so weak and trembling; though if the promise did not hold us more firmly by its unchangeableness, than we hold it by our faith, who could ever attain the blessing?

Not that our interest in the Gospel is transient or uncertain. For though the perception of it may be often interrupted, yet is it not still in the Bible, in the covenant of God, in the heart of God? And is it not constantly renewed in the exercise of faith? The repetition of the same act of faith is therefore equally necessary every successive moment, as at the first moment of our spiritual life. What ever be our standing in the Gospel, faith will always realize to the end the same hope for God's salvation. Indeed the neglect of the cultivation of its habitual exercise materially weakens its operation in great emergencies. Let it then be regarded as the breathing of the soul. Let it be constantly exercised in the daily occasions of need; and we shall enjoy its clear light and active influence upon occasions, where its special energy is required.

Now is not this sometimes your experience? You are distressed by an unsuccessful struggle with wandering, defiling imaginations. You know the promise, and the remedy. But "the shield of faith" has been laid by. You have therefore to seek it, when you want it at hand for the present moment; and thus you lie powerless, at a distance from the cure, instead of being able to bring your sin at once to Jesus—"Lord, this is my trouble; this is the "plague of my heart;" "but speak the word only, and Your servant shall be healed." Thus the indolent neglect of the quickening principle greatly impairs its powerful energy, and the "confidence and rejoicing of hope" flowing from it. If "the life in the flesh is" not "a life of faith on the Son of God," no solid rest or acceptance can be known.

But on what ground is this hope for the Lord's salvation built? On His faithfulness, not on our sincerity; on His promises, not on our frames; on His unchangeableness, not on our constancy. It is built, not on the work of grace in us, but on the work of Christ for us; a work which has satisfied every claim, provided every security, and pledged all the Divine perfections on our behalf; a work so finished and complete, that all the difficulties of salvation on the part of God are removed; and the sinner, finding no hindrance in the way but himself, is warranted, though covered with guilt and defilement, to apply for full, immediate, and unconditional forgiveness. What then hinders the instant reception of the privilege, but disbelief of the record? It is this which dares to "make God a liar;" which therefore must not, as is too often the case, be lamented as an infirmity (except indeed in cases of constitutional weakness); but watched, prayed against, and resisted, as a deep and aggravated sin. The present enjoyment of the blessing is indeed often marred by looking at the fruits of faith (contrition, love, diligence, &c.) as prerequisites for believing, instead of looking to the object of faith, to put away our sin, and to produce these fruits in us. This not only binds our sin upon us, but robs God of His honor;—and, while it restrains His blessing on our souls, reflects upon His wisdom and grace, who has laid the foundation of a sinner's hope on His own dear Son, irrespective of any warrant of faith in himself. We want to be enlivened with sensible comfort, as a ground for our believing in Christ; or, if we look for it from faith, it is from faith as an act (in which respect it is no more a proper ground for comfort than any other grace,) instead of looking for it from the object of faith. Thus we not only lose the peace and joy we are seeking, but we lose it by our mistaken way of seeking it.

The fullness of Christ, and the promises of God in Him, are the only basis of a full assurance of salvation: and this basis is equally firm at all times, and under all circumstances. "You are complete in Him." Your title at this moment is as perfect, your interest as secure, as ever it will be at the day of "the redemption of the purchased possession." Awakened sinner! let not then a sense of unworthiness paralyze your faith. As a guilty sinner, you are invited. As a willing sinner, you are welcome. As a believing sinner, you are assured. Why hesitate then to "lay hold on eternal life?" Is it presumption in the drowning man to attempt to swim to the rock of safety? Why then should not the sinking soul cast itself upon the "Rock of Ages?" Lord, I have hoped for Your salvation.

Believer! "Behold!" says your Lord, "I come quickly; hold that fast which You have, that no man take your crown." "Hold fast your confidence and the rejoicing of your hope." This is of no trifling importance. An established confidence ought to result from, and to witness to, your interest in the Lord's salvation. For without it, you have no relief from the spirit of bondage; no enlargement in duties; no enjoyment of privileges; no "growth in grace, and in the knowledge of the Savior;" no honored usefulness in the Church of God. "The things which remain will be ready to die." Rest not, then, satisfied with an occasional gleam of light and joy, while your horizon is overcast with doubts and fears. Waste not time in heartless

complaints, that would be far better employed in a vigorous habit of faith. Live above frames and feelings, upon this glorious truth—'Christ has undertaken for me.' He lives, and reigns, and pleads for every sinner that trusts in Him. Exercise your dependence upon Him in importunate and persevering supplication. "Give all diligence"—at all times—in all ways, private and public, "instant in season and out of season." Thus "an entrance into" the joy, peace, and glory of "the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior, will be richly ministered unto you." You shall be released from the prison-house of despondency, and shall breathe the free atmosphere of adoption and heavenly love.

But remember, that this "assurance of hope," even in its weakest and lowest influence, is a practical principle—I have done Your commandments. "Every man that has this hope in Him purifies himself, even as He is pure." All obedience that springs not from this source is of a low and legal character; the fruit of self-will, self-righteousness, self-sufficiency. Evangelical obedience can only flow from Evangelical faith and hope. Love to Christ catches fire from the perception of His love to us. Without this perception, all is weariness, toil, and travail of soul in His service; duty, not privilege; constraint, not delight; conscience, not love. Hence the most assured believers will be the most devoted servants of their Master. "The joy of the Lord" "the joy of faith," of acceptance, of communion, "is their strength." They live by faith; and as they believe, they love; they deny themselves; they lay themselves out for their Master's work; they conquer all that opposes their progress.

We cannot, therefore, do His commandments without a hope for His salvation. For only in proportion as we have assured our title to the promises of the Gospel, can we take hold of them, plead them, or experience their support. When therefore our hope is indistinct, we are almost left to our own unassisted resources; and our course will probably end in "perpetual backsliding." Active devotedness flows from assured acceptance. Where there is no certainty, there can be little love, little delight, little diligence. Let us walk in sunshine, and we shall work cheerfully and honorably for God.

Keep then the eye fixed on Christ as the ground, and on obedience as the evidence, of our hope. Thus will our own confidence be more established; and others, beholding in us the power of our Christian hope, will be led to say, "We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."

167. My soul has kept Your testimonies; and I love them exceedingly. 168. I have kept Your precepts and Your testimonies: for all my ways are before You.

Those only who have hoped in the Lord's salvation can express this joyful delight in His precepts. The Christian does not acknowledge the popular separation of duty and privilege, according as it may be constraint or indulgence to his

inclination. Every part of his walk identifies these terms of distinction. If it is his duty, it is no less his privilege, to love the precepts. Nothing holds him to them—nothing enables him thoroughly to keep them, but love. All resolutions, vows, covenants, would be as ineffectual to bind him, as the green withs to fasten the giant. David had not done the commandments from constraint; but his soul kept them; yes, he loved them exceedingly. Indeed, the bias of the new nature to keep the precepts is as prevalent, as that of the old nature to break them. Once the believer would have wished the law of God blotted out of the universe, or at least exchanged for a more indulgent dispensation. But now that it is written in his heart, even its restraint is delightful to him; and as he gains a closer intimacy with it, and a clearer discernment of its spirituality, he loves it exceedingly. Not one, indeed, of the precepts or testimonies does he keep as he ought, and as he desires; but there is not one of them that he does not delight in, and most anxiously desire to fulfill. Thus every feature of the Divine image is inwrought in the soul, beautiful in its place and proportion; and all other graces grow in connection with love to the testimonies.

Nor let our consciousness of daily failures restrain this strong expression of confidence. The most humble believer need not hesitate to adopt it 'as an evidence of grace, not as a claim of merit.' This frequent repetition marks the godly jealousy of the man of God, mindful of his own self-deceitfulness and manifold infirmities, and "giving" careful "diligence to make his calling and election sure." David knew himself to be a poor sinner; but he was conscious of spirituality of obedience, exceeding love to the word, and an habitual walk under the eye of his God—the evidences of a heart (often mentioned in the Old Testament) "perfect with Him." 'Christ alone kept the old law, and He enables us to observe the new.'

The active love to the word should be cultivated on the principle of our public walk before God. We must not study the Scripture merely for our present gratification, or to furnish materials for our Christian communion. We ought rather, from every step in the history of Christ, as well as from the more finished course of instruction in the Epistles, to be gathering some help to "set the Lord always before us"—realizing the interest that He takes in us, and His presence with us as our Father, Governor, Teacher, Comforter, Friend.

Now, let us ask—Do our souls thus keep the Lord's testimonies habitually, perseveringly? Does conscience testify that, with all our defects and sinful mixture, they are uppermost in our minds; that our love rises above the worldly rules of expediency, prudence, or the example of those around us (the too common measurement of scanty obedience)—as if it could never burn with sufficient fervor in His service, "who loved us, and gave Himself for us?" Why, then, should we shrink from this acknowledgment of "simplicity and godly sincerity?" If we are ready to own, that "without Christ we can do nothing;" that His Spirit "has wrought all our works in us;" that "by the grace of God we are what we are;" that our hope of acceptance is grounded only upon the finished

work on the cross—why should we refuse to confess the grace of God in us? Yet we must not forget, that allowed unfaithfulness, neglect of secret prayer, impurity of motive, or any "iniquity regarded in the heart"—though they will not loosen the ground of our hope—will obscure the comfort of our Christian confidence. How beautiful is that princely spirit, which will not serve the Lord "of that which costs us nothing;" that not only longs for holiness as the way to heaven, but loves heaven the better for the holy way that leads to it, and for the perfect holiness that reigns there eternally!

But never let us lose sight of the recollection, that all our ways are before God! that every act, every thought, every desire, every word, is registered by conscience as His viceregent, and laid up in His book of remembrance! Well would it be for us, if we walked less before men, and more before God; if in secret, in business, at home and abroad, we heard the solemn voice, "I am the Almighty God: walk before Me, and be perfect." We may be unproveable in the sight of men, while it is a mere artificial walk, grounded upon base external principles—a "walking after the flesh"—not before God. Even the engagements of active duty may be the subtle snare of the great enemy to divert us from intense personal religion, and to spoil the hidden walk of communion with God, by concentrating the mind upon a more public, and, apparently, a more useful walk. Thus too often the vital principle of religion sinks into a stated formal habit. "Walking with God" is the secret spring of the Christian. "Walking before God" is the manifestation and the exercise of the hidden principle. For in all things, private as well as public, the most trivial as well as the most weighty, to have our eye fixed in dutiful reverence upon the Omniscient, Omnipresent eye of Jehovah—what solemnity would it give to our whole behavior! what influence would it have upon our public professions, our general conversation, our secret duties! We should be energetic in "serving our own generation by the will of God;" and yet, while walking before men, should be truly "walking before God"—all our ways before Him, "done" in His sight, "as to Him," and accepted in His favor.

When, therefore, I am about to venture upon any line of conduct, let me consider the watchful eye, that pierces into the deepest recesses of my thoughts, and brings, as it were, to daylight, my principles, my motives, and my ends. Above all, let me ever recollect, that he, before whom are all my ways, is He who hung upon the cross for my sins. Let me then walk, as if He were standing before me in all the endearing obligations of His love. Oh, do not I owe Him sacrifice for sacrifice, heart for heart, life for life? Then surely I cannot be dead, insensible, sluggish in keeping His precepts. I cannot forbear to show this practical proof of my love to Him. Let not, then, the fear of legality make me neglect this privilege of "keeping the commandments" of my beloved Master and Lord. Let me live under the solemn recollection, "You, God, see me;" and in the joyful assurance, "You, God, love me;" and His ways will be to me holiness, happiness, heaven.

169. Let my cry come near before You, O Lord; give me understanding, according to Your word. 170. Let my supplication come before You: deliver me according to Your word.

We mark David here, where he always loved to be, a suppliant at the throne of grace. Many had been his cries and supplications. His petition now is—that they may come near before his Lord. Oh, that our wants of every moment were felt with the same pressure, and carried to the Lord with the same faith, earnestness, humility, and perseverance! Richness of expression, and fluency of utterance, are the mere shell and shadow of prayer. The life of prayer is the cry of the heart to God. The eloquence of prayer is its earnestness. The power of prayer is that, which comes not from education, or from the natural desire of the man; but that "which is from above" "the spirit of supplication" "the spirit of adoption." The urgency of present need calls for instant prayer. The soul is at stake; the enemy is within the walls, perhaps within the citadel. Oh, what a privilege to know, that we have a "strong habitation, whereunto we may continually resort;" to be able to remind the Lord, "You have given commandment to save me: for You are my rock and my fortress!"

But then we must see that our cry comes before—comes near before—the Lord; that nothing blocks up the way, or interrupts the communication. If we are believers, the way is open: "the middle wall of partition is broken down." Oh, let us be excited to greater nearness of communion, "Having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He has consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh," why should we be backward to come? Had we not seen the way marked by this blood of sprinkling, we should (if we have had any sight into our own hearts) no more have dared to take one step into the awful presence of God, than to rush into the devouring flame. If in a moment of extremity, we had felt that we must pray or perish, we should have had no boldness to open our mouth before God, much less to expect that our supplication would come near before Him, had we not been "made near by the blood of Christ." But what an amount of privilege is it, that this way to God is always open; that, as members of Christ, we stand in the sight of God as pure as Christ is pure; that we have not only "access," but "access with confidence;"—yes, with the same confidence as the Son of God Himself! For the Father is never weary of delighting in His dear Son, or in those who are one with Him. If He, therefore, takes our names into the holy place; if He offer sacrifice and incense for us, and sprinkle us with His blood, we "are complete in him" "in Him," therefore, let us "glory." "Having an High-priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith."

But where we feel as if we did not, could not, reach the throne of grace, "is there not a cause?" Our distance from God must be traced to a deeper origin than the dullness and insensibility of our hearts. The real difficulty of prayer, and indeed the actual inability to pray, arises in many, and probably in most, cases, from an indistinct perception of the way of access. We must admit this, not only in those

who are totally ignorant of Christ, but also in the cases of weak, unestablished, or negligent Christians. Through ignorance of the fullness and freeness of the gospel in the one, and indulgence of sin or secret unwatchfulness in the other, the way of access (only perceptible by the eye of faith) becomes obscured, the desire faint, the spiritual strength weakened. And instead of the acknowledgment, "The Lord has heard the voice of my supplications," we have the mournful complaints, "My soul cleaves to the dust—oh, that I were as in months past!" It must be so; for prayer without faith is a heartless ceremony in the spirit of bondage. That which gives to it life and acceptance is the believing apprehension of Christ. The ignorant and self-righteous may find it a matter of course (as easy as it is fruitless) to bow their knee in the form of prayer. But the light that darts in upon the awakened conscience reveals something hitherto unknown of God and of themselves, and shows the ground of confidence, for a self-condemned sinner, to be a matter of the deepest mystery, and most amazing difficulty. Such a confidence, however, God has laid open to us. We cannot honor Him more than by making use of it. All that come in the name of Jesus are welcome. Why, then, penitent sinner, should not you be welcome? The throne of grace was raised for sinners such as you. You cannot want larger promises or a better plea. You come, not because you are worthy, but because you are bid, to come. Take the command and lay it upon your conscience. Christ is your only way to God. Faith is the act and exercise of coming to Christ. Faith, therefore, will bring you to God, if you have not hitherto come; or restore you to God, if you have wandered from Him.

But there may be a secret departure from God even in the engagement of active service, or in the exercises of social religion. For if these duties are substituted for secret communion with God, "the things that remain in us will be ready to die;" ordinances will fail to enrich; Christian fellowship will bring no refreshment; and the soul, while blessed with the abundance of means of grace, "in the fullness of its sufficiency will be in straits." Indeed, if our affections and feelings are moved in social exercises, and are cold and insensible when we are alone with God, it is a bad symptom of our state. What, then, do we know of the comforts of the closet? Do we pray, because we love to pray, or only because our consciences constrain us to the duty? Does the Lord mark those secret transactions with Himself, that manifest our hearts to be really drawn to Him? Is it any pressing business of our soul's salvation that brings us to God? Are our services enlivened with spiritual manifestations of Christ? It is possible long to continue in the outward course of duty: and yet not one of our prayers to come near before the Lord. We have not come in the appointed way; and, therefore, we have not really come at all. Or if the name of Christ has been affixed to our prayers, it has been as a component part of a formal system, not as an exercise of dependence in seeking acceptance with God.

But it may be, that we have backslidden from God, in a habit of indulged coldness or willful iniquity. Now if we would expect "the candle of the Lord again to shine upon our heads, and His secret to be upon our tabernacle," we must rest

satisfied with nothing short of the full restoration of our privileges. We must return to the Lord with deepened contrition in His appointed way, and wait for Him to look upon us, and once more to let our supplication come near before Him. He had "gone, and returned to His place, until we acknowledged our offence, and sought His face;" and He is now sitting on a "throne of grace, waiting that He may be gracious." Again and again, therefore, let us fall down at His feet, and never cease to pray, until we feel that our cry and supplication come near before Him, and spiritual understanding of our case, and deliverance from our danger, are given. As a God of wisdom and yearning mercy, we may trust Him to "perform all things for us." Let Him then judge for the time and means of our deliverance. Only let it be according to His own word of faithfulness, and we "shall yet praise Him."

It is beautiful to observe the oil of the Psalmist's faith feeding the flame of his supplication. Every petition is urged upon the warrant of a promise—according to Your word. The promises were the very breath of his supplication; exciting his expectation for a favorable answer, and exercising his patience, until the answer should come. Though in possession of so comparatively small a portion of the blessed book, he seemed always to find a word for the present occasion; always able to show to his God His own hand and seal. Alas! sometimes, with the whole word of God before us, we are at a loss to appropriate one of its innumerable promises to the present emergency. Yet with all our contracted views of the covenant, still our interest in it is not denied. Such is the condescension of our tender Father, that He accepts even the stammering language of faith in His children! The cry "Abba, Father"—'though' (as Luther sweetly expresses it) 'it is but a cry; yet it does so pierce the clouds, that there is nothing else heard in heaven of God and His angels.' And how delightful is the thought that God's elect—as they will shortly be gathered a countless multitude around the heavenly throne—so do they now hold spiritual communion with each other, while "they cry day and night" before their Father's throne of grace! True it is—we understand not one another's tongues. Yet does our loving Father understand us all. Nor do our different dialects cause any confusion in heaven—rather do they unite, and form one cloud of incense, ascending with continual acceptance and delight in His presence. Ineffable is the delight, with which our Beloved enjoys that communion with His people, "which He purchased with His own blood" "O my dove, that are in the clefts of the rocks, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice; for sweet is your voice, and your countenance is lovely."

171. My lips shall utter praise, when You have taught me Your statutes.

How happy is it to bring to God a heart as large in praise as in prayer! The answer of the supplication for spiritual understanding and deliverance naturally issues in the sacrifice of praise. Guilt had sealed David's lips; while living in sin, and restrained alike the utterance of praise and prayer. But when awakened to a

sense of his sin, how earnest were his cries!, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation. O Lord, open my lips; and my mouth shall show forth Your praise." And if guilt or unbelief has made us dumb, his petitions will tune our hearts to the "songs of Zion." When the Lord has taught us in His statutes the revelation of Himself, as having given His dear Son for us and to us, "the tongue of the dumb is made to sing." "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift!"

And do I not remember "the time of love," when I first knew myself to be "a brand plucked out of the fire"—a redeemed sinner—a pardoned rebel—destined for a seat on the throne of God—indulged with a taste, and assured of the completion, of heavenly bliss? This was a work worthy of God—a work, which none but God could have wrought. What mercy is this! Everlasting! Unchangeable! Let me cast myself daily upon it; yes, let me bury myself in it! What gratitude is demanded! My lips shall utter praise, now that He has taught me His statutes. "O Lord, I will praise You; though You were angry with me, Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me."

Again—I seemed to have sunk beyond all help. No means, no ministers, no providences, could reach my extremity. All were "physicians of no value," tried and tried again: but tried in vain. But "in weakness" thoroughly felt, "strength was made perfect." The threatening clouds were dispersed; the breaches were healed; the veil of unbelief was rent. "The right hand of the Lord has brought mighty things to pass." "He has both spoken unto me, and Himself has done it," and it is "marvelous in our eyes." Let my stammering lips utter praise. What a display of power! It is the spark preserved in the ocean unquenched, the drop in the flames unconsumed; the feather in the storm unshaken. "Who is a God like unto You? Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us; but unto Your name give glory."

And again—I was perplexed in a dark and bewildered path. Every dispensation appeared to frown upon me. One dark hour had blotted out all the recollections of my former comforts; and it was as if I never could, never should, rejoice again. But little did I think how the Lord was "abounding towards me in all wisdom and prudence"—how His arrows were sharpened with love—how He was "humbling me, and proving me, to know what was in my heart" and in the moment of chastening was speaking to me, "I know the thoughts that I think towards you, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." What a display of "wisdom!" My lips shall utter praise; for if I "should hold my peace, the stones would immediately cry out."

The thought of what I was before my conversion—what I have been since—what I am now, overwhelms me with shame and with praise. "Lord, how is it that You should have manifested Yourself to me, as You have not unto the world?" "Who am I, O Lord God, that You have brought me hitherto?" And how much more "that You have spoken of Your servant for a great while to come!" For You have prepared for me a happy eternity in Your unclouded presence. Should not then my praise be bubbling up, as from a fountain—pouring forth, as from a rich

treasure-house? Should not my instrument, if not always employed, be always kept in tune? Forward we may be in prayer. But how backward we are in praise! Self-love may constrain the one. Only the love of God will quicken the other. And yet ought we not to be more touched in receiving mercies, than we were in asking for them? In the one case we only knew them by testimony or report. In the other we know them by our own experience. We hear of one, who had much forgiven, and who "loved much." And surely the more sin pardoned—the more mercies received—does not God justly expect of us more love in the heart—more utterance of praise from the lips?

And yet who of us are fit to praise, except those whom God has taught? The "new song" ill accords with the old heart. God vouchsafes His grace for the praise of His grace. Ought not we then to glory in our Savior—a privilege as high as to enjoy Him—no—the very means of increasing our enjoyment of Him, in the active excitement of our love, and every grace for His sake? Let not the enemy rob me, as too often he has done, of my high privilege. Let me prize secret prayer. Let me be separated from an ensnaring world. Let me dread separation from my God; and if ever estranged from Him, let me never rest, until, by "receiving the atonement," always presented and accepted on my behalf, I once more walk in the light of His countenance. Let me then fix the eye of my faith, weak and dim as it may be, constantly upon Jesus. He must do all for me, in me, by me; He must teach me more and more of the statutes of my God, that my heart may be delightfully engaged with my lips in uttering His praise.

172. My tongue shall speak of Your word; for all Your commandments are righteousness.

To speak of God and for Him, will be the desire and delight of him, whose heart and lips have been taught to utter praise. Yet alas! how seldom is "our conversation seasoned with grace!" So much of this poor world's nothing! So little of Jesus! 'If only five minutes can be redeemed for prayer, for Scripture, or for thought; let it be seized as an inestimable jewel. If we can pass five minutes less in foolish or ensnaring company, secure the advantage.' If vain words are flowing up from the bottom, look on the restraint that represses them from our lips as a triumphant mercy. This active energy of Christian discipline will communicate a fragrance to our conversation, most acceptable to our beloved Lord; and will make our "lips" enriching, feeding, and instructive to His church. And truly when we see how hardly men judge of Him, how they count His "commandments grievous," and His ways "unequal," it will be delightful to bear our testimony, that all His commandments are righteousness; restraining the power of sin, and conforming the soul to His image.

"Lord, open my lips, that my tongue may speak of Your word." Honor me, O my God, by helping me to show, that all Your commandments are righteousness. In our own atmosphere, and our own spirit, how often do we pour out our words

without waiting on the Lord for unction and power; speaking of the things of God without His presence and blessing! Were we living fully in the atmosphere and breathing of prayer, enriched with habitual meditation in the word; how much more fluent would our tongue be to speak of His word "to the use of edifying!" It would be made really our own, known experimentally; and then how cheering, how enlivening the conversation of the man of God! His "light so shines before men, that" they are constrained to "glorify His Father which is in heaven."

Perhaps, Believer, supposed inability, natural bashfulness, or want of seasonable opportunity, may restrain your lips. But under the most unfavorable circumstances something may generally be said or done in the service of God. And while it is well carefully to watch against the "talk of the lips, which tends only to poverty;" beware, lest, through the scrupulous tenderness of conscience, "Satan get advantage" to shut the mouth of the faithful witnesses of God, and thus to weaken that cause, which it is your first desire to support. Guard then against the influence of unbelief. Bring your weakness and inability daily to the Lord. Let any dreaded inconsistency of profession be searched out, examined, and lamented before Him, and opposed in dependence on His grace; but never let it be made a covering for indolence, or supply fuel for despondency. Consider how your interest in a Divine Savior makes your way open to bring all your wants to Him. Be encouraged therefore to ask for the Spirit of God to guide your lips: that a poor weak sinner may be permitted to "show forth the praises of Him," who is surrounded with all the Hosts of Heaven.

When however our silence has arisen from the too feeble resistance of our natural carelessness and indolence, the recollection of many important opportunities of glorifying our Savior, lost beyond recall, may well excite the prayer, "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God; and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness." Oh! to have the preciousness of souls deeply impressed upon our hearts! Oh! for that compassionate love, that would never suffer us to meet a fellow-sinner without lifting up our hearts to God on his behalf: without making an effort to win his soul to Christ, and manifesting an earnest desire for his salvation! What loss is there to our own souls in these neglected opportunities of blessing the souls of others! For never do we receive richer fruit to ourselves, than in the act or endeavor to communicate to others. The heart becomes enlarged by every practical exercise of Christian love. Yet much simplicity, much unction from above, much tenderness of heart, much wisdom combined with boldness—is needed in our daily conversation, that we may "make manifest the savor of the knowledge of Christ in every place;" and especially, that our very desires to bring sinners to the Gospel may proceed, not from a goading conscience, much less from pride and vainglory; but from the pure source of love to Christ and to our fellow-sinners. For even if we are as "full of matter" as Elihu was, nothing will be said for God—nothing, that will "minister grace to the hearers," unless the influence of the Divine Spirit fills our hearts, as "a well of water, springing up into everlasting life"—a blessing to all around us.

173. Let Your hand help me: for I have chosen Your precepts.

David, having engaged himself to a bold profession of his God, now comes to seek His needful supply of help. Let Your hand help me. And if we may "come to the throne of grace," that we may find "grace to help in time of need," when should we not come? For is not every moment a "time of need," such as may quicken us to flee to the "strong tower," where "the righteous runs, and is safe?" Besieged without; betrayed within; "wrestling against flesh and blood," and yet "not against flesh and blood" only: disputing every inch of ground, yet often discouraged by the little ground we seem to gain; surely we need all the help of Omnipotence to sustain us in the tremendous conflict. We may plead our choice of His precepts, in looking for His help. David had before "taken the testimonies of God as his heritage"—including all the precious promises of the Gospel, extending to every necessity of time, and to every prospect of eternity. He now confesses his obligation, in choosing the precepts—a happy choice, the influence of the Spirit upon his heart.

This choice is the distinctive mark of the Lord's people—the exercise of a well-instructed and deliberate judgment; prompt obedience in the simplicity of faith. It is the choice of all the precepts—no other than the voluntary acknowledgment of our Baptismal obligations. Many carnal suggestions offer themselves the moment that the purpose is forming into the choice. "The things that were gain to us," and which now must be "counted loss for Christ," (should we allow their weight in the balance at this crisis) will bring much hesitation and perplexity. Conferences "with flesh and blood" are most subtle hindrances to Christian determination. 'What will the world say? If I go too far, I shall give offence; I shall lose all my influence, and blast all my prospects of eventual benefit to those around me.' The apprehension also of losing the affection and of incurring the displeasure of those whom my heart holds dear, is most fearful. And then this sacrifice is too costly to make; that pleasure too hard to resign. Such thoughts—the injections of the tempter—are ever at the door; and even when effectual resistance is offered, the struggle is most severe. But it is such a mighty help in this conflict, when one desire has taken sole possession of the heart, "Lord, what will You have me to do?"—when we are so crucified to worldly influence, whether of pleasure, profit, fear, or esteem, as to be ready to act upon the resolution, "Therefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh." Now the heavenly beauty of the religion of the gospel breaks in upon us.

Experience of our own weakness, and of the great power of the world, is gradually preparing us for victory over it. We shall then most specially find our happiness in losing our own will; and our Master's cross will be a delightful burden; like wings to a bird, or sails to a ship; assisting, instead of retarding, our course. The more we trust to His help and guidance in everything, the more we shall be able to do, and the more delightful will His service be to us.

The lack of a determined choice is the secret of the halting profession that prevails among us. A compromise is attempted with the world. "The offence of the cross" begins to "cease." A middle path of serious religion is marked out, divested of what is called needless offensiveness. But the religion that pleases the world will never be acceptable with God; nor can the religion that pleases God, be ever accommodated to the inclination of the world. Oh! we shall do well to consider, whether the way of the Lord's precepts may not be found too hard, too strait, too unfrequented; whether we are prepared to brave the pointed finger and whispered scoff of the ungodly, and perhaps the mistaken opposition of beloved friends. Often has the profession of Christ been hastily taken up and relinquished. He who wishes to abide by it, must daily learn this lesson, "Without Me you can do nothing:" and in conscious helplessness, he will often breathe the cry—Let Your hand help me.

Nor is this petition needful only in the first determination of this choice. In the growing and more decided conviction of its superior happiness, and in the daily endeavor to live in it, we shall find increasing need for the same acknowledgment of helplessness, and the same cry for support. Dependence is a principle of deep humility and mighty energy. The thought that we are entering upon the work in the Lord's strength is a great stay. Blessed indeed is that helplessness, that makes us lie in the bosom of our Savior, supported and cherished! Blessed be God for the "help laid" for us "upon one that is mighty;" so that our insufficiency and all-sufficiency are visible at one glance: and "when we are" most "weak, then are we" most "strong!" "Those who war against you shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nothing. For I the Lord your God will hold your right hand, saying unto you, Fear not, I will help you."

174. I have longed for Your salvation, O Lord; and Your law is my delight.

Before we close this Psalm, let us dwell once more upon this word—salvation. Common as is its use, to the believer it has a constant freshness and an infinite meaning. Do we wonder at his longing for it? Look at its fullness—including all the mercy of the everlasting covenant. Look at its ground—that work of Calvary's cross once "finished," and leaving nothing to be filled up or improved; standing out in all its glorious completeness; constraining the admiration—and encouraging the confidence, of the chief of sinners; but wholly disclaiming all assistance from the most eminent saint. Look at its simplicity—not keeping the sinner aloof from the Savior, not hedging up or bewildering the open freeness of his path, but bringing to him immediate peace and joy in resting upon the great atonement of the gospel. Mark its unchangeableness—independent of and above all frames and feelings, so that, while "walking in darkness" we can "stay upon our God," expecting salvation even from the hand that seems ready for our destruction; leaving it to our heavenly Father to frown or to smile, to change as He pleases from the one to the other; and looking at every aspect of His countenance, as only a different arrangement of the same features of ineffable

paternity; and the different, suitable, and seasonable expression of unchangeable covenant love.

Is not this an object for the longing of the soul, that feels its own pressing wants, and sees in this salvation an instant and full supply? This longing marks the character of evangelical religion—not merely duty, but delight. The mind wearies in the continued exertion for duty; but it readily falls in with delight. Duties become privileges, when Christ is their source and life. Thus every step of progress is progress in happiness. The world's all to the believer is really nothing. It presents nothing to feed the appetite, or quench the thirst, of an immortal soul. Indeed the creatures were commissioned to withhold consolation, until every desire was concentrated in the single object. "You, O God, are the thing that I long for;" until the sinner has found rest in the answer to his prayer, "Say unto my soul, I am Your salvation." And now he enjoys his earthly comforts, "as not abusing them," because he loves them as God would have them loved, and longs for His salvation above them all. This is true religion; when the Lord of all occupies that place in the heart, which He fills in the universe—There He is "All in all." Here the believer cries, "Whom have I in heaven but You? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside You." Oh, what a privilege is it to have Him in heart, in thought, and in view; to be rejoicing in His presence; and to be longing for a more full conformity to His image, and for a more lively enjoyment of His love! If this be but earth, what must heaven be! This longing is a satisfactory evidence of the work of God. It exercises the soul in habitual contemplation of the Savior, in nearer communion with Him, and supreme delight in His law. Such desires will be unutterably increased, and infinitely satisfied in the 'fruition of His glorious Godhead.'

But the Lord often brings this charge against His professing people, "You have left your first love." The principle is not dead, but the energy is decayed. Human nature is prone to apostasy. Slumber unconsciously steals upon the soul. Faith is not in habitual exercise. The attraction of the Savior is not felt. His love is not meditated upon. The soul is satisfied with former affections to Him. There is little heart to labor for Him. The means of communion with Him are slighted. The heart naturally becomes cold in spiritual desires, and warm in worldly pursuits and too often without any smittings of conscience for divided love.

Some professors indeed consider this declension of affections to be a matter of course. The young convert is supposed to abound most in love, and, as he advances, his fervor gradually subsides into matured judgment. Those indeed, who "have no root in themselves," lose their lively affections, and their religion with them. But surely the real principle of love cannot decay; that is, our esteem of God cannot be lowered: our longing for His salvation cannot languish; our delight in its enjoyment cannot diminish, without guilt and loss to our souls, He claims our love, and it is most unreasonable to deny Him His own. He is the same, as when we first loved Him. Then we thought Him worthy of our highest love. Do we now repent of having loved Him so much? Have we found Him less

than our expectations? Can we bestow our heart elsewhere with stricter justice, or to better advantage? Do not all the grounds of our love to Him continue in full force? Have they not rather increased every day and hour? What would an indulgent husband think of incessant and increasing attentions repaid with diminished affection? Oh! let us be ashamed of our indolence, and "remember" the times when our longings for His salvation were more intense; when our communion with Him was more heavenly; when we were ready to labor and suffer for Him, and even to die to go home to His presence. Let us "repent" with deeper contrition, and "do our first works:" never resting until we can take up afresh the language of delight—I have longed for Your salvation, O Lord.

Some, however, of the Lord's dear children are distressed in the conscious coldness of their spiritual affections. But if it be a mark of the decay of grace to "lose our first love," it is at least a mark of the truth of grace to mourn over this loss. There is always a blessing for those "that hunger and thirst after righteousness." These restless desires are the beating pulse of the hidden life; and if there be not always a sensible growth of desire and enjoyment, there may be (as with the trees in winter) growth at the root, in a more fixed habit of grace and love, in a deeper spirit of humility, and in a more established self-knowledge and simplicity. Yet the shortest way of peace will be to look off from our longing for this salvation, to the salvation itself. For nothing is more desecrating to this great work—nothing is more paralyzing to its saving power, than the incorporating with it the admixture of our own experience as the ground of hope. The most Christian feelings must find no place at the foundation. Indeed their continual variation renders them, especially in the hour of temptation, very uncertain. Yet amid all these fluctuations, Christ may always be safely trusted. While therefore our coldness humbles us before Him, let not brooding despondency cover His precious cross from view. Let not our eyes be so filled with tears of contrition, as to obscure the sight of His free and full salvation. "Looking" singly "unto Jesus" as our peace and our life, is at once our duty, our safety, and the secret principle of our daily progress heavenward. We shall but realize the perception of our own emptiness in the contemplation of His unbounded fullness.

But the connection between longing for salvation, and delight in the law, is at least an incidental evidence, that right apprehensions of salvation must be grounded upon the word or law of God; and that a religion of feeling is self-delusion. Our delight is not only in His love, but in His law. And so practical is Christian privilege, that longing for salvation will always expand itself in habitual delight in the law: which in its turn will enlarge the desire for the full enjoyment of salvation. All spiritual desire therefore, that is not practical in its exercise, is impulse, excitement; not, as in this man of God, the religion of the heart; holiness, delight.

Would that this beautiful Psalm might quicken us to be followers of Him, who evidently knew so much of the heavenly joys of religion! Why should we not, why

do we not determine to know as much of God as we can? Why are our longings for His salvation so transient and so few? The religion of thousands who bear the name is of a very different stamp; empty instead of solid; withering instead of profitable; insipid instead of delightful. If there be any exercise, it is only "the door turning upon hinges," movement without progress. The head is stored with knowledge, but there is no unction in the heart, "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

But the soul that really longs shall "not be ashamed of its hope." Even to taste the present fruits (though it be but a taste) in a sense of reconciliation, liberty of access, a beam of the love of Jesus in the heart, is unutterable enjoyment. It strengthens the soul for endurance of trials, and for a devoted, self-denying, obedient service. But there are heights and depths of Divine love yet unexplored. He who has given large apprehensions of them to others, "is rich in mercy to all that call upon Him." The fountain of everlasting love is ever flowing, ever full; and He who commands us to "open our mouths wide," has promised, "I will fill them." After all, however, the grand consummation is the object, to which these longings for salvation stretch with full expansion. The fullness and likeness of God; the complete and everlasting deliverance from sin; the glorious "manifestation of the sons of God;" the coming of the Lord. Then—not until then—will they be fully and eternally satisfied. Praised be God! "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."

Lord of all power and might! create in our souls a more intense longing for Your salvation, and a more fervent delight in Your law. And as our longings for Your salvation increase, oh! nail us to the door-posts of Your house, that we may be Your happy servants forever!

175. Let my soul live, and it shall praise You; and let Your judgments help me.

There must be life, in order to praise. For how can the dead speak? Yet is it as natural for the living soul to praise, as for the living man to speak. And is not the life that the Psalmist is now praying for, the salvation for which he was longing? The taste that he has received makes him hunger for a higher and continued enjoyment; not for any selfish gratification, but that he might employ himself in the praise of His God. Indeed, the close of this Psalm exhibits that pervading character of praise which has been generally remarked in the concluding Psalms of this sacred book. Yet he alone is fitted for this heavenly exercise, of whom it has been said, "This my son was dead, and is alive again." And how will he, who has "looked to the hole of the pit whence he was dug," who has been awakened to a sight of that tremendous gulf, from which he is but "scarcely saved," long to give utterance to the effusions of a praising heart! How will he cry for the quickening influence of "the Lord and Giver of life," to stir him up to this delightful privilege! Praise springs from prayer—Let my soul live, and it shall praise You.

When the breathing of life into our souls enlivens our services, we become, in the noblest sense, "living souls."

Too often, however, the consciousness of inconsistency, carelessness, and unspirituality, damps our song. But let every recollection of our sin be accompanied with an humble yet assured confidence in the Lord's pardoning grace. The abominations of a desperately wicked and unsearchably deceitful heart may well lead us to "abhor ourselves in dust and ashes." Yet in the lowest depths of abasement, the Savior's blood, applied to the conscience, "cleanses from all sin." He who once "passed by us, and saw us polluted in our blood, and said unto us, when we were in our blood, Live"—still "holds our souls in life;" covering our daily infirmities, and maintaining our everlasting acceptance before God.

But while the song of praise dwells on our lips for life thus freely given, let us guard against all hindrance to its growth and influence. For if the life within waxes low, praise will be dull and heartless. But when the assured believer cries with acceptance—Let my soul live, and it shall praise You—see how his spirit kindles with holy fire, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!" The work of praise is now his nature, his element, his delight. No wonder, then, that he continues his cry for the daily renewal of his spiritual life, that he may return to this sweet foretaste of heaven—Let my soul live. And, indeed, this life—the more it is known, the more will it form the constant matter for prayer. For what besides makes existence tolerable to a child of God? The mere actings of a sickly pulsation can never satisfy him. Considering how much nearer he might live to God than he has yet known, he longs for more vigorous influence of the Divine principle. In his most active enjoyments, his insufficiency for this sacred work presses upon him, and stirs up petition for help—Let Your judgments help me. Give me such an enlightened apprehension of Your word, of Your character, and of Your perfections as the God of my salvation, as may furnish abundant matter of unceasing praise; so that my daily exercise may be, "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

176. I have gone astray like a lost sheep: seek Your servant; for I do not forget Your commandments.

The natural disposition to wander from the fold is constant ground for prayer for the help of the Lord's judgments, to give us clearer light and preserving principles. Yet our need of this safeguard opens to us a most humbling truth. Who can gainsay the testimony from the mouth of God—that "all we like sheep have gone astray?" But how afflicting is the thought, that this should not only be the description of a world living without God, but the confession even of God's own people! And yet where is the child of God that does not set his own seal with

shame to the confession—I have gone astray like a lost sheep? "Who can understand his errors?" If he be not found, like Peter, in the open path of wandering; yet has he not need to cry, "Cleanse me from secret faults?" Is he never led away by sense, fancy, appetite? If the will be sincere, how far is it from being perfect! And only a little yielding, a little bending to the flesh, giving way to evil—who knows what may be the end of this crooked path? Who knows what pride, waywardness, earthliness, may be working within, even while the gracious Lord is strengthening, guiding, comforting His poor straying sheep? That they should ever wander from privileges so great, from a God so good, from a Shepherd so kind! What can induce them to turn their backs upon their best Friend, and sin against the most precious love that was ever known, but something that must, upon reflection, fill them with shame! The blame is readily cast upon the temptations of Satan, the seductive witcheries of the world, or some untoward circumstances. But whoever deals with himself must trace the backsliding to his own heart, "This is my infirmity." And have we replaced what we have wilfully yielded up, with anything of equal or superior value? May it not be asked of us, "What fruit had you in those things, whereof you are now ashamed; for the end of those things is death."

But there is no enjoyment while distant from the beloved fold. It is as impossible for the child of God to be happy, when separated from his God, as if he were in the regions of eternal despair. He has not lost—he cannot wholly lose—his recollection of the forsaken blessing. In struggling, weeping faith, he cries—Seek Your servant. 'I cannot find my way back: the good Shepherd must seek me. Once I knew the path: but now that I have wandered into bye-paths, I am no more able to return, than I was to come at first. I have no guide but the Shepherd whom I have left.' How cheering, then, is His office character!, "Behold I, even I, will both search My sheep, and seek them out: as a shepherd seeks out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out My sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day" Cannot I set my seal to His faithful discharge of His office, "He restores my soul?"

If I want further encouragement to guide my steps homeward, let me think of His own description of tender faithfulness, and compassionate yearnings over His lost sheep; not showing it the way back to the fold, and leaving it to come after Him: but "laying it upon His own shoulders, and bringing it home:" all upbraidings forgotten; all recollection of His own pains swallowed up in the joy, that He has "found the sheep which was lost." Let me remember the express commission, that brought the Shepherd from heaven to earth, from the throne of God to the manger, and thence to the garden and cross, "to seek and to save that which was lost." Let me see upon Him the especial mark of "the Good Shepherd, giving His life for the sheep." Let me observe this sacrifice, as covering the guilt of my wanderings, and opening my way to return—yes, drawing me into the way. Surely then, I may add to my contrite confession the prayer of confidence—seek Your servant. I cannot forbear to plead, that though a rebellious prodigal, I am

still Your servant, Your child: I still bear the child's mark of an interest in Your covenant. Though a wanderer from the fold, I do not forget Your commandments. Nothing can erase Your law, which was "written in my mind and inward parts" by the finger and Spirit of God, as an earnest of my adoption, as the pledge of my restoration. What man writes is easily blotted out; what God writes is indelible. Let me then lie humbled and self-abased. But let me not forget my claim—what has been done for me. Thus, again, I hope to be received as a "dear" and "pleasant child;" again to be clothed with "the best robe," to be welcomed with fresh tokens of my Father's everlasting love, and to be assured with the precious promise, "My sheep shall never perish, and none shall pluck them out of My hand."

Such, Christian reader, would be the application we should make of this verse to ourselves; and such a penitent confession of our backslidings, united with a believing dependence on the long-tried grace and faithfulness of our God, would form a suitable conclusion to our meditations on this most interesting Psalm. We would unite the tax-collector's prayer with the great Apostle's confidence; and, while in holy brokenness of heart we would wish to live and die, smiting upon our bosom, and saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner:" the remembrance of our adoption warrants the expression of assurance, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day." Yet, as it regards the experience of David, is there not something striking, and we had almost said, unexpected, in the conclusion of this Psalm? To hear one, who has throughout been expressing such holy and joyful aspirations for the salvation of his God, such fervent praises of His love, that we seem to shrink back from the comparison with him, as if considering him almost on the verge of heaven—to hear this "man after God's own heart," sinking himself to the lowest dust, under the sense of the evil of his heart, and his perpetual tendency to wander from his God, is indeed a most instructive lesson. It marks the believer's conflict sustained to the end:—the humility, and yet the strength, of his confidence; the highest notes of praise combining with the deepest expressions of abasement—forming that harmony of acceptable service, which ascends "like pillars of smoke" before God. And thus will our Christian progress be chequered, until we reach the regions of unmixed praise, where we shall no longer mourn over our wanderings, no longer feel any inclination to err from Him, or the difficulty of returning to Him—where we shall be eternally safe in the heavenly fold, to "go no more out."

That is why they are standing in front of the throne of God, serving him day and night in his Temple. And he who sits on the throne will live among them and shelter them. They will never again be hungry or thirsty, and they will be fully protected from the scorching noontime heat. For the Lamb who stands in front of the throne will be their Shepherd. He will lead them to the springs of life-giving water. And God will wipe away all their tears. Revelation 7:15-17

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