

## Exposition of Psalm 119

Verses 76-100

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**76. Let, I pray You, Your merciful kindness be for my comfort: according to Your word unto Your servant.**

What! does the Psalmist then seek his comfort from the very hand that strikes him? This is genuine faith, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." The very arm that seems to be uplifted for my destruction, shall be to me the arm of salvation.

Several of the preceding verses have spoken of affliction. The Psalmist now prays for alleviation under it. But of what kind? He does not "beseech the Lord, that it might depart from him." No. His repeated acknowledgments of the supports given under it, and the benefits he had derived from it, had reconciled him to commit its measure and continuance to the Lord. All that he needs, and all that he asks for, is, a sense of His merciful kindness upon his soul. Thus he submits to His justice in accumulated trials, and expects consolation under them, solely upon the ground of His free favor. Indeed, it is hard to hold on under protracted affliction without this precious support. Patience may restrain murmuring but a sense of love alone keeps from fainting. Holiness is our service—affliction is our exercise—comfort is our gracious reward. All the candles in the world, in the absence of the sun, can never make the day. The whole earth, in its brightest visions of fancy, destitute of the Lord's love, can never cheer nor revive the soul. Indeed, it matters little where we are, or what we have. In the fullness of refreshing ordinances, unless the Lord meets us, and blesses us with His merciful kindness for our comfort, it is "a thirsty land, where no water is." Absalom might as well have been at Geshur as at Jerusalem, so long as he "saw not the king's face." Nothing that the Lord "gives us richly to enjoy" will satisfy, if this source of refreshment be withheld. The worldling's inquiry is, "Who will show us any good?" The Christian forms his answer into a prayer, "Lord! lift up the light of Your countenance upon me." Let Your merciful kindness be for my comfort. This gives the enjoyment of every real good, and supplies the place of every fancied good. It is a blessing that never cloy, and will never end: and every fresh taste quenches the thirst for earthly pleasures. "Whoever drinks of this water"—says our Divine Savior, "shall thirst again. But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst!" "Delight

yourself in the Lord; and He shall give you the desires of your heart."

But, Reader, do you wish to realize this comfort? Then seek to approach your God by the only way of access. Learn to contemplate Him in the only glass in which a God of love is seen, "in the face of Jesus Christ." Guard against looking for comfort from any other source. Beware especially of that satisfaction in creature-cisterns which draws you away from "the fountain of living waters." Learn also to prize this comfort supremely, and not to be content without some enjoyment, or even with a scanty measure of enjoyment; but rather let every day's refreshment be made a step for desiring and attaining renewed and sweeter refreshment for tomorrow. Some, however, appear to look at David's experience, as if at present they could hardly expect to reach its happiness: and so they go on in a low, depressed, and almost sullen state, refusing the privileges, which are as freely offered to them as to others. But such a state of mind is highly dishonorable to God. Let them earnestly plead their interest in the word of promise—According to Your word to Your servant. Let them lay their fingers upon one or all of the promises of their God. Let them spread before the Lord His own handwriting and seals; and their Savior has said, "According to your faith be it unto you." "The king is held in the galleries;" and, if He should "make as though He would go farther," He is willing that we should "constrain Him, saying, Abide with us." No veil now but the veil of unbelief need hinder us from seeing an unclouded everlasting smile of merciful kindness upon our heavenly Father's reconciled face. Only let us see to it, that He is the first, the habitual object of our contemplation, the satisfying well-spring of our delight—that He is the one desire, to which every other is subordinate, and in which every other is absorbed.

Lord Jesus! I would seek for a renewed enjoyment in Your merciful kindness. I would not forget, that it was this that brought You down from heaven—that led You to endure the death of the cross—that has washed me in Your precious blood—that visits me with many endearing tokens of Your love. Oh, let all my days be spent in the sense of this merciful kindness for my comfort, and in rendering to You the unworthy returns of grateful, filial service.

**77. Let Your tender mercies come to me, that I may live; for Your law is my delight.**

Sin is no light trouble to the man of God. Mercy, therefore, is to him no common blessing. Never can he have—never can he ask, enough. Hence his repeated cries. Mercy brought him out of sin and misery. Mercy keeps—holds him on—assures him to the end. Every blessing comes in the way of mercy. The most careful walker according to the gospel rule, needs mercy. The elect are "vessels of mercy"—filled up to the brim with mercy. The crown of glory at last is received at the hands of mercy.

The distinguishing character of God is, that His mercies are tender mercies—a father's pitying—yearning mercies. When His returning prodigal expected probably upbraiding looks, if not a frown of banishment, how did these tender mercies bury, not only his sins, but also his very confessions in the depths of the sea, and welcome him without a cloud to his forsaken home! The same tender considerations put away from His children all anxiety respecting "what they shall eat, or what they shall drink, or wherewithal they shall be clothed. As a Father He also "chastens" them, "he suffers their manners"—He "spares them, as a man spares his own son that serves him;" and, finally, He determines respecting each of them by an act of sovereign power, "You shall call Me, My Father, and shall not depart from Me." In a yet more endearing character He speaks, "As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you. They may forget; yet will I not forget You."

Yet have we no just apprehension of these tender mercies, unless they come to us. In the midst of the wide distribution, let me claim my interest. Let them come to me. Praised be God! the way is open to me. The mere report is unfruitful. I cannot speak of them with glow and unction. The application of them is life—not the mere breathing of spiritual existence, but the life of my life—the living principle of devotedness and enjoyment—living to and for God in every form and sphere, in every hour and action of the day; my feebleness becoming strength in the Lord; "walking up and down in His name." This truly is "reigning in life;" rising to more of its honor and dignity, and reaching forth to more of its excellence and happiness.

But let us not lose sight of the abundant overflowing spring, from which our life is maintained. "In Christ was life;" and He "came that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly." There can be, therefore, no exercises of life without a vital union to Christ—the source of life. Shall we then give up the hope of believing in Christ, until we feel the influence of this spiritual principle? This would be indeed like refusing to abide in the vine, until we could bring forth fruit; whereas the branch, while separated from the vine, must ever be fruitless and withered. We must receive life from Christ, not bring it to Him. Faith implants us in Him; and "Christ dwelling in the heart by faith" becomes the life of the soul, animating it in the ways of God.

This life, therefore, will manifest itself in delight in God's law. We shall not be satisfied to live upon the mere surface of the gospel (which is barren and unproductive, as any other surface, in spiritual usefulness), but we shall search into its hidden treasures, and draw forth its real life and consolation. This "delight" will furnish a plea for our use at the throne of grace. 'If this is the fruit and acting of the life of Your own implanting, Lord! cherish it. Let me live by the influence of Your tender mercies. I venture to plead my delight in Your law, as an evidence of my adoption into Your family. And, therefore, I would renew my plea and my petition—Let Your tender mercies come to me, that my life may be not only existence, but enjoyment—the beginning, the earnest, of the everlasting life

and bliss of heaven.'

**78. Let the proud be ashamed: for they dwelt perversely with me without a cause: but I will meditate in Your precepts.**

The prophecy with which God Himself condescended to open the history of the church, has ever since been in the course of accomplishment. "Enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman," has been the prevailing character and course of the world. "An unjust man is an abomination to the just; and he who is upright in the way is abomination to the wicked." David, however, prayed for the confusion of his enemies—not in a vindictive spirit, as if thirsting for their destruction; but as opening the way for his own more free service of God, and as a chastening, that might eventually turn to their salvation, "Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek Your name, O Lord!" That his prayer was the expression of his tender compassion, rather than of resentful feeling, is sufficiently evident from his affectionate weeping concern for their immortal interests. Prayers of the same deprecating character dropped from the lips of the gentle and compassionate Savior: while the objects of His awful deprecations were interested in the most yearning sympathies of His heart. A regard also for the honor of God dictated this prayer. David knew that the malice of his enemies against him was only the working of their enmity against God; that it was not so much him that they hated and persecuted, as God in him. And therefore as a servant of God he could appeal, "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate You? and am not I grieved at those that rise up against You? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies." The followers of a despised Savior must indeed expect to be severely distressed with the perverseness of the proud. But when, like their Master, they can testify that it is without a cause, how cheering are their Master's words! "Blessed are you, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven."

And have you, reader, been exercised with trials from an ungodly world? Has the derision of the proud, or the slight or ill-treatment of the ungodly, never excited revengeful feelings within? Have you always been enabled to set your Savior's example before you, and "in patience possessing your soul," to refer your cause to your Almighty Friend? "O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me." Remember, He has engaged to take up your cause, "Shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them?—I tell you that He will avenge them speedily."

But learn in the hour of trial where to go, and what to do. Go to the word of God for direction and support. Meditate in His precepts. There is often a hurry of mind in times of difficulty, which unhinges the soul from the simple exercise of faith. But habit brings practice, and steadiness, and simplicity, enabling us most sweetly to fix our hearts upon the word of God, and to apply its directions and

encouragements to the present exigency. Our enemies fight against us with an arm of flesh. We resist them with the armor of the word of God. And how inestimably precious is the armor, refuge, strength, and consolation, here provided for us against every effort to disturb our peace, "or separate our hearts from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!"

### **79. Let those who fear You turn to me, and those that have known Your testimonies.**

As the believer finds trouble from the world, he prays that he may find help from the Lord's people. The very sight of our Father's family is cheering. It brings not only fellowship but help. For the wise distribution of gifts in the body—each having his own gift—was ordained for the mutual help and sympathy of the several members. It is painful therefore to see Christians often walking aloof from each other, and suffering coldness, distance, differences and distrust to divide them from their brethren. Who then will not pray, that He, who has the hearts of all His people in His hand, would turn the hearts of those that fear Him and know His testimonies, unto their brethren? It was the honor of Mordecai, that he was "accepted of the multitude of his brethren." In the primitive church, "Demetrius had good report of all men, and of the truth itself;" and the members of the church generally "did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart; praising God, and having favor with all the people." 'Then,' as Chrysostom exultingly exclaims, 'the Church was a little heaven.' Then they could say to each other, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" and even their Heathen neighbors were awed and constrained into the confession, "See how these Christians love one another."

Alas! that our Jerusalem should no longer exhibit the picture of a "city compact together"—that so many "walls of partition" should separate brother from brother, so that our Zion has very rarely been exhibited in her "perfection of beauty," when "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul." Prejudice and misconception divided Job from his friends. Want of forbearance cankered the union of the members of the church of Rome, and even prevailed to separate chief friends—Paul and Barnabas. Diversity of sentiment injured the influence of brotherly love at Corinth. And thus it has been in every successive age of the church; so that the full answer to the Redeemer's prayer, and the grand display to the world of the Divine original of the gospel, is yet to be manifested. But as "the communion of saints" was the peculiar feature of primitive Christianity, and ever since has formed an article of her faith; in proportion as we return to the primitive standard, we shall hold closer fellowship with each other—as "members of one body" "considering one another, to provoke unto love and to good works" "bearing one another's burdens;"—and "receiving one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God."

Lack of Christian self-denial presents the main hindrance to this "keeping the

unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." But—admitting that some of the brethren are "weak in the faith" in comparison with ourselves—are we then to be 'rolling endlessly the returning stone,' obtruding always the same stumbling-offence upon them? We are "not to please ourselves" in compelling them to adopt our views; but rather to "receive them, and bear their infirmities." Accursed be that charity, that is preserved by "the shipwreck of faith!" But though scriptural truth must never be denied, there are times when it may be forborne. The Apostle "knew and was persuaded of the Lord Jesus, that there was nothing unclean of itself;" yet he would rather allow even the misconception of conscience, until clearer light should be given, than endanger the unity of the church. Liberty must give place to love; and for himself, he would rather restrain himself from lawful indulgence, than hazard the safety of a weaker brother, or turn from one that loved his Savior. Wherever, therefore, in the judgment of Christian charity, we discover those "that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity," we must be ready to give them our very hearts, to view them as brethren, as one with ourselves, and to welcome them with brotherly love, as those whom, with all their infirmities, Jesus "is not ashamed to call His brethren." We must be ready to turn to them, as those that fear God, and have known His testimonies.

And does not the believer's anxiety for the company and assistance of the Lord's people rebuke Christian professors, who are far too closely linked to the society of the world? Surely, if the lovely attraction of many of its most avowed votaries can compensate for the absence of their Savior's image, they can have but little relish for that heavenly enjoyment, which unites the children of God together in close and hallowed communion with God. And do we not see a proof of the deteriorating influence of this worldly spirit, in their readiness to feel disgust at the infirmities of the real brethren of the Lord, and to neglect the image of Christ in them, from the unsightliness of the garb, which may sometimes cover it?

But let us mark the completeness of the Christian—combining the fear with the knowledge of God. Knowledge without fear would be self-confidence. Fear without knowledge would be bondage. But the knowledge of His testimonies, connected with an acquaintance with His ways, molds the character of men of God into the spirit of love; and qualifies them, "as fathers" in the gospel, to counsel the weak and inexperienced. Should we, however, be excluded from the privilege of their communion; or should they be prevented from turning to us; may it not be the appointed means of leading us to a more simple dependence on Divine teaching and grace, and to a more blessed anticipation of our Father's house in heaven, where all will be harmony, peace, and love? 'We shall carry truth and the knowledge of God to heaven with us; we shall carry purity there, devotedness of soul to God and our Redeemer, Divine love and joy, if we have these beginnings here, with whatever else of permanent excellence, that has a settled, fixed seat and place in our souls now: and shall there have them in perfection. But do you think we shall carry strife to heaven? shall we carry anger to heaven? Envyings, heart-burnings, animosities; shall we carry these to heaven with us? Let us labor to divest ourselves, and strike off from our spirits everything

that shall not go with us to heaven, or is equally unsuitable to our end and way, that there may be nothing to obstruct and hinder our "abundant entrance" at length into the everlasting kingdom.'

### **80. Let my heart be sound in Your statutes, that I be not ashamed.**

The perverseness of the proud will be sure to put them to shame. As the preservative from this shame, David prays therefore for a sound heart—filled with solid principle—delivered into the mold of the word—like the sacrifices of the law—entire for God. Often had he prayed for Divine teaching—now he begs for soundness in the Lord's statutes. How many "have made shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience," from an unsound heart! Ignorant of the spirituality of God's requirements, and resting in an outward obedience, they falsely conceive themselves to be "alive without the law," and "touching the righteousness that is of the law, blameless." Others go a little beyond the surface; while the want of "simplicity and godly sincerity," of brokenness of heart, love to the Savior, and dependence upon His grace, sooner or later discovers to their eternal confusion, that "the root of the matter is" not "in them." "Their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust. Their goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goes away." An unsound professor, like beautiful fruit, may attract the careless eye; but a more narrow inspection will show a worm at the core, which has spoiled nearly to the surface. Such religion is only a shriveled mass of inactive formality—a dead image of a living thing.

Alas! how common is it to profess to take Christ for a Savior, while the heart is evidently worshiping Mammon as its God!—constrained—not inclined—to the Lord's statutes! How possible is it to be "carnally-minded" in the daily routine of spiritual exercises! How important is the recollection, that no change of place, of company, or of circumstances, can of itself effect a change of heart! "Saul among the prophets" was Saul still; with "another heart" indeed, but not a new heart. Sin was restrained, but not crucified. He "went out," therefore, as one of his progenitors, "from the presence of the Lord," and perished, a miserable apostate from the statutes of his God. Will profession—knowledge—gifts—feelings—privileges—avail for a sound heart? Need we speak of Judas—a follower—no, even, an apostle of Jesus Christ—living in a familiar communion with his Lord—yet with all his privileges—all his profession, "gone to his own place"—the melancholy victim of his own self-deceitfulness? Need we allude to Balaam, "the man whose eyes were open—which heard the words of God—which saw the vision of the Almighty"—who could in the ken of his eye mark the goodness of the Lord's inheritance, and even in the distant horizon catch a glimpse of "Jacob's star and scepter," and yet "loved the wages of unrighteousness?" Need we bring to the mind's eye Ananias and Sapphira? Alexander—and others of like stamp—all of whom once shone as stars in the skies of the church—need we speak of the end of these men, to give energy to the prayer—Let my heart be sound in Your statutes?

How fearful the thought of being "a branch in the true vine" only by profession! to be "taken away" at length, "cast forth as a branch—withered—gathered—cast into the fire—burned!" It is in the inner man that hypocrisy sets up its throne; whence it commands the outward acts into whatever shape or form may be best suited to effect its purpose. The upright Christian will therefore begin with calling in the help and light of God to ascertain the soundness of his heart. "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me." Can there be a true and solid work, where there is a professed change of heart, and no manifested change of temper and conduct? Can that heart, which is found upon inquiry to be earthly—unprofitable under the power of the word, "regarding" secret "iniquity"—seeking bye-ends of praise, reputation, or gain—and for the attainment of these ends shrinking from the appointed cross—can that heart be sound in the Lord's statutes? Impossible.

But, on the other hand, do you find that your trust in God is sincere, your desire towards Him supreme, your obedience to Him entire? Prize those evidences of soundness of heart. Thank God for them. They are the workings of His mighty Spirit in your heart—perhaps the answer to the prayer which that same Spirit had indited, Let my heart be sound in Your statutes. Diligently improve all the means of grace for keeping your heart in a vigorous state. Be daily—yes, continually—abiding in the vine, and receiving life and health from its fullness. Be much conversant with the word of God—loving it for itself—its holiness—its practical influences. Be chiefly afraid of inward decays—of a barren, sapless notion of experimental truth; remembering, that except your profession be constantly watered at the root, "the things that remain in you will be ready to die." Specially "commune with your own heart." Watch it jealously, because of its proneness to live upon itself—its own graces or fancied goodness (a sure symptom of unsoundness)—instead of "living by the faith of the Son of God." Examine your settled judgment, your deliberate choice, your outgoing affections, your habitual, allowed practice; applying to every detection of unsoundness the blood of Christ, as the sovereign remedy for the diseases of a "deceitful and desperately wicked heart."

But it may be said—will not these exercises of godly jealousy hinder our Christian assurance? Far from it. They will form an efficient preservative from carnal security. They will induce increasing tenderness, activity, and circumspection, in our daily walk; and thus, instead of retarding the enjoyment of our heavenly privilege, they will settle the foundation of a peaceful temperament. It is a light and careless frame, that is the real hindrance to confidence. An unsound professor knows nothing of the true spirit of adoption—nothing of that holy familiarity, with which a child of God unbosoms himself to his heavenly Father; and if he preserves an empty name in the church, he will be put to shame before the universe of God. But the sound heart is connected with "a hope that makes not ashamed"—the full blessing of scriptural confidence. For the heart is made sound by the "sprinkling of the blood of Christ;" and when thus "sprinkled from an

evil conscience," we "have boldness" to "draw near"—yes, even to "enter into the holiest," "in full assurance of faith." Blessed privilege of access and communion with our reconciled God! Every moment endears the Savior to our souls, and enlivens the hope of his glorious coming, as the joyful consummation of all the prospects of faith, "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment."

### **81. My soul faints for Your salvation; but I hope in Your word.**

The salvation of the Gospel was the constant object of faith and desire to the Lord's people under the old dispensation. Long had the church triumphed in the glowing anticipation, as if in the full possession of the promised blessing, "It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation; He has covered me with the robe of righteousness; as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels." And as it was the joy of their living moments, so was it the support and consolation of their dying hours. "I have waited for Your salvation, O Lord!" was the expression of the dying patriarch's faith. And how cheering were the last words of this "sweet Psalmist of Israel," whose soul was now fainting for God's salvation, even in his dark and foreboding family prospect! "Although my house be not so with God, yet has He made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although He make it not to grow." Good old Simeon, in the break of the gospel-day, was ready to "depart in peace, for his eyes had seen God's salvation." And shall not we, under this heavenly influence, naturally appropriate these feelings of ancient believers to ourselves? What interpreter but experience will be needed to explain them? The uneasiness felt by any interruption of our enjoyment, will show the soul to be fainting for this salvation. Nothing will satisfy but the Savior. The tempting offer of "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them," will fail in attraction. Still the cry will be, "Say unto my soul, I am Your salvation. Let Your mercies come also unto me, O Lord; even Your salvation, according to Your word."

As the lowest expectant of this salvation, am not I richer than the sole possessor of this world's portion? And therefore if the Lord hides His face, I would look to no other quarter; I would stay by Him, and "wait on Him," though days and months and years may pass away, "until He have mercy upon me." My soul faints for His salvation: and—pressing to my lips the fullest cup of earth's best joy—my heart would burst with despair of satisfaction, "but" that "I hope in His word." "By this hope I am saved." In "the patience of hope" I am resolved to wait until the last moment, lying at the footstool of my Savior. I am looking for the "assurance of this hope"—when, in the joyous anticipation of eternity, and with "the earnest of" the heavenly "inheritance" in my soul, I shall echo the voice of my coming Savior, "Even so come, Lord Jesus."

Oh, how precious and important a part of our armor is Hope! As a "helmet," it has "covered our head in the day of battle" from many a "fiery dart of the wicked." In times of darkness—when the restless foe hides the prospect from the eye of faith, and the child of God can scarcely, if at all, mount up and sing—even then hope remains, and lights a candle in moments dark as the chamber of the grave, "Yet the Lord will command His loving-kindness in the daytime; and in the night-season His song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life." And when the afflicted, tempest-tossed soul is trembling at the prospect of impending danger—at this moment of infinite peril, Hope holds out the "anchor sure and steadfast;" so that in the awful crisis, when "deep calls unto deep, and all the waves and billows are going over us," most unexpectedly "an entrance is ministered unto us abundantly," in the Lord's best time, into our desired haven. And it is this hope alone that sustains us. Were we to conceive of God according to the notions of our own hearts, we should give way to most unbelieving patience. But the Divine character—as it shines forth in the word with such love and wisdom, such tenderness and grace—invigorates our hope. The strength of the strongest of God's people proves but small, when afflictions press heavily, and expected help is delayed. But though the soul faints, it cannot fail. We depend not on what we see or feel, but on what the word promises. If God has engaged, it must be fulfilled, be the difficulties—no, impossibilities—what they may. Fixed, therefore, upon this sure foundation, with our father Abraham, "against hope" from what we see, "we believe in hope" from what God has promised. Thus the word is faith's sure venture for eternity—stamped with such a marvelous, mysterious impression of Divine glory and faithfulness, and communicating such Divine power and refreshment, that the believer cannot but produce his experience of its efficacy for the support of his tempted brethren, "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart: wait, I say, on the Lord."

## **82. My eyes fail for Your word, saying, When will You comfort me?**

Though the believer may be enabled, in the habitual working of faith, to sustain his hope in the word, yet "hope deferred makes the heart sick." Still, Christian, as you value the promise, trust the assurance. Do not be discouraged by present appearances. The sunshine is behind the cloud. "The vision is for an appointed time; though it tarry, wait for it." "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise," but we are hasty in looking for it. The failing of our eyes is the impatience of the will, "limiting God" to our own time, ways, and means. Faith may be exercised in not seeing His reasons—not being able to harmonize His promises with His providences, or His outward dispensations with His Divine perfections. But let us leave this to Him, and be "still, and know that He is God." We shall find in the end, that perseverance in waiting has turned to double advantage; and that even when the present answer to prayer, and also sensible comfort and acceptance

have been withheld; yet that important blessings have been accomplished, and the merciful purposes given in bringing the wayward will into more entire subjection to Himself. Yes—the blessing will be so much the sweeter, from being given in the Lord's best time. Waiting time—whatever weariness may attend it—is precious time, and not a moment of it will be lost. The Lord secretly upholds faith and patience, so that every step of feeble perseverance in the way brings with it unspeakable delight. Even while our eyes fail for the fulfillment of the word, peace is found in submission and joyful expectation; and instead of a time of hardness, indolence, or carelessness, the Lord's return is anticipated the more intensely, as His absence had been felt to be the most painful trial. For as well might the stars supply the place of the sun, as outward comforts, or even the external duties of religion, supply to the waiting soul the place of an absent God.

Never, however, let us forget, that the real cause of separation between God and a sinner is removed. The way of access is opened by the blood of Jesus; and in this way we must be found waiting, until He look upon us. Here will our cry, "When will You comfort me?" be abundantly answered; and though the sovereignty of God be exhibited in the time and measure of His consolations, yet the general rule will be, "According to your faith, be it unto you."

But if unbelief clouds our comfort, turn the eye more simply to the "word" as testifying of Jesus. Here alone is the ground of comfort; and the more confidently we expect, the more patiently we will look. Nor shall we ever look in vain. Sin will be rebuked. But restoration and acceptance are assured. We shall obtain—not the spurious comfort of delusion—but those wholesome comforts, founded upon the word of promise, and connected with contrition, peace, love, joy, and triumph. The gospel shows hell deserved, and heaven purchased thus combining conviction and faith. Indeed, conviction without faith, would be legal sorrow; as assurance without conviction would be gospel presumption. Paul's experience happily united both. Never was man at the same moment more exercised with conflict, and yet more established in assurance. Thus may we maintain our assurance as really in wrestling trouble as in exulting joy; honoring the Lord by an humble, patient spirit—in Bernard's resolution—"I will never come away from You without You"—in the true spirit of the wrestling patriarch, "I will not let You go, except You bless me."

But we sometimes seem to go "mourning without the sun," "shut up, and we cannot come forth"—straitened in our desires and expectations—doing little for the Lord—with little enjoyment in our own souls, and little apparent usefulness to the Church. At such seasons it is our clear duty and privilege to "wait upon the Lord, that hides His face from the house of Jacob, and to look for Him." "He waits that He may be gracious. He is a God of Judgment; and blessed are all those who wait for Him." He waits—not because He is reluctant to give, but that we may be fitted to receive.

### **83. For I am become like a bottle in the smoke, yet do I not forget Your statutes.**

What an affecting picture of misery! Not only were his patience and hope—but his very body, "dried up" by long-continued affliction. This is he, who in the prime of youth was "ruddy and of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to,"—now shriveled up like a bottle of skin, hung up in the smoke! Such is the mark that the rod of "chastening" leaves on the body of humiliation. The soul is strengthened—the body withers—under the stroke.

What might naturally have been expected to have been the result of this lengthened exercise? Saul, under protracted trial, resorted to the devil for relief. An infidel nation took occasion from thence to throw off the yoke. Even a good man, under a few hours' trial, murmurs against God—no, even defends his murmuring. How did this man of God behave? When his soul was fainting, his hope in the word kept him from sinking. Under the further continuance of the trial, the same recollection gives him support—yet do I not forget Your statutes.

Now—Christian—do not expect a new way to heaven to be made for you. Prepare for the cross. It may be—as with David—a heavy, long-continued burden, and, should it come—look on it as your appointed trial of faith, and your training discipline for more enduring conflicts. And remember that your determined resolution rather to pine away in affliction, than "make a way of escape" by sin—is the proof of the reality of His own grace in you, and of His faithful love towards you. Think how honorably He manifests your relation to Christ, by causing "His sufferings to abound in you," and making you "bear in your body the marks of the Lord Jesus." And do you not thus realize, as you could not otherwise do, the sympathy of our High Priest, who was Himself "a root out of a dry ground, having no form nor loveliness, and no beauty that He should be desired—despised and rejected of men" to the end? Oh, what a supporting cordial to His afflicted people is the sympathy of this suffering, tempted Savior!

But to look at David, under his long-continued trials, preserving his recollection of the Lord's statutes—what a striking evidence of the presence of his God, and the sustaining power of his word! If we then—blessed with much larger Scriptures than he—fail in deriving from them the same support, it can only be, that we do not search them in a dependent, prayerful, and humble spirit—that we do not simply look for the revelation of Christ; to mark His glory, and to increase in the knowledge of Him. In this spirit we should have more to say of the comfort of remembering the Lord's statutes; and of their upholding influence, when all other stays were found as "the trust in the shadow of Egypt—shame and confusion."

Job's history strikingly illustrates both the trial and its sanctified results. When "scraping himself with a potsherd, and sitting down among the ashes,"—the temporary victim of Satanic power—he might well have taken up the complaint, I am become like a bottle in the smoke. But when in this hour of temptation he was

enabled to resist the tempter in the person of his own wife, and commit himself with implicit resignation into the hands of his faithful God, "What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"—was not this the confidence—Yet do I not forget Your statutes?

This confidence is indeed an encouraging seal of the Lord's love to our souls. For we never should have remembered His statutes, had He not written His covenant promises upon our hearts. And how much more honorable to our God is it than the desponding complaint, "The Lord has forsaken me, and my God has forgotten me!" Let us watch then against a proud sullenness under every little trial—such as the coldness of friends, the unkindness of enemies, or our Father's providential dispensations. How sinful to allow hard thoughts of Him, whose name and character, "without variableness or shadow of turning," is "Love!" A steady trust in the long and wearisome seasons of tribulation, is indeed "to glorify God in the fires." Nothing honors Him so much as this enduring, overcoming faith, persevering in despite of opposition, in destitution of all outward prospects of relief. It is when "against hope we believe in hope, not staggering at the promise of God through unbelief," that we are "strong in faith, giving glory to God."

**84. How many are the days of Your servant? When will You execute judgment on them that persecute me?— 85. The proud have dug pits for me, which are not after Your law.**

Though a steady confidence in severe and protracted exercise may enable us, not to forget the statutes; yet we shall hasten to carry our complaint before Him. How many are the days of Your servant?—my days of affliction under the "fury of the oppressor." To complain of God is dishonorable unbelief. To complain to God is the mark of His "elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bears long with them." Christians! study this instructive pattern; and, when exposed to the lawless devices of the proud, do not forget your hiding-place. God in Christ is your stronghold, "whereunto you may continually resort. He has given commandment to save you." Your trial has done its appointed work, when it has brought you to Him; and inclined you, after your blessed Master's example, instead of taking the vengeance into your own hands, to commit yourself and your cause "to Him that judges righteously." 'And this,' as Archbishop Leighton excellently observes, 'is the true method of Christian patience—that which quiets the mind, and keeps it from the boiling tumultuous thoughts of revenge; to turn the whole matter into God's hands; to resign it over to Him, to prosecute when and as He thinks good. Not as the most, who had rather, if they had power, do for themselves, and be their own avengers: and, because they have not power, do offer up such bitter curses and prayers for revenge unto God, as are most hateful to Him, and differ wholly from this calm and holy way of committing matters to His judgments. The common way of referring things to God is indeed impious and dishonorable to Him, being really no other than calling Him to be a

servant and executioner of our passion. We ordinarily mistake His justice, and judge of it according to our own precipitate and distempered minds. If wicked men be not crossed in their designs, and their wickedness evidently crushed, just when we would have it, we are ready to give up the matter as desperate; or at least to abate of those confident and reverent thoughts of Divine justice which we owe Him. However things go, this ought to be fixed in our hearts, that He who sits in heaven judges righteously, and executes that His righteous judgment in the fittest season.'

Usually the Psalmist is expressing his love for the law. Here he is complaining against his enemies; yet still implying the same spirit, that the pits, which the proud dug for him, were not after God's law. The martyr's cry under the altar shows the acceptance of this complaint; "seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble" His people, "and to them that are troubled rest." Some of us indeed have known but little of "cruel mockings" and bitter persecutions. Let such be thankful for the merciful exemption from this "hardness:" but let them gird on their armor for the conflict. Let none of us, in the determination to "live godly in Christ Jesus," expect to escape "persecution." Let us "count the cost" of suffering for Christ, whether we shall be able to abide it. For the mere spiritless notions, or for the unenlivened forms of religion, of which we have never felt the power, nor tasted the sweetness, it would be little worth our while to expose ourselves to inconvenience. But if we understand the grand substantial of the gospel—if we are clearly assured of their reality, practically acknowledge their influence, and experimentally realize their enjoyment, we shall dare the persecuting malice of the proud in defense of a treasure dearer to us than life itself. Should we, however, be too rich to part with all for Christ, or too high in the estimation of the world to confess His despised followers, it will be no marvel, or rather a marvel of mercy, if He should sweep away our riches, and suffer the proud to dig pits for us. To make this world "a wilderness or a land of darkness" to us, may be His wisely-ordained means to turn us back to Himself as our portion, to His word as our support, to His people as our choice companions, and to heaven as our eternal rest.

**86. All Your commandments are faithful: they persecute me wrongfully; help me.**

In the lengthened duration of trials, the eyes fail with looking upward, the voice of prayer grows faint, and in a moment of weakness, the faithfulness of God is almost questioned, as if we should go mourning to the very end of our days. It is at such a season that He who delights to "comfort them that are cast down," realizes to the view of faith the unchangeable faithfulness of His commandments with respect to His people. In this recollection we can "look up and lift up our heads," and "go on our way," if not "rejoicing," yet at least with humble acquiescence; assured, that in the perseverance of faith and hope, we shall ultimately be "more than conquerors through Him that loved us."

Many Old Testament histories beautifully illustrate the reward of this simplicity of faith in temporal emergencies. When Asa's "hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob," "his bow abode in strength." When at a subsequent period he "trusted in man, and made flesh his arm, and his heart departed from the Lord," he became, like Samson, "weak, and as another man." So true is it, that no past communications of Divine strength can stand in the stead of the daily habit of dependence upon the Lord, without which we are utterly helpless, and are overthrown in every conflict. Our best prosperity, therefore, is to leave our cause in His hands, looking upward in the simplicity of wretchedness for His help: 'All Your commandments are faithful; they persecute me wrongfully; help me. Wretched and forlorn I am; but Your truth is my shield.'

Believer! This is your only posture of resistance. Should you enter the field of conflict without this "shield of faith," some crevice will be found in your panoply, through which a "fiery dart" will inflict a poisonous wound." But how can faith be exercised without a distinct acquaintance with the object of faith? We cannot repose trust in, or expect help from, an unknown God—an offended God, whom every day's transgression has made our enemy. There must, then, be reconciliation, before there can be help. Those, therefore, who are unreconciled by the death of Christ, cry for help to a God, who does not hear, accept, or answer, them. But when Christ is known as "the peace," and the way of access to God, what instance can there be of trial or difficulty, when our reliance upon the Lord will fail? Not indeed that we shall always return from the throne of grace with the wished-for relief. For too often we bring our burden before the Lord, and yet through distrust neglect to leave it with Him. Oh! let us remember, when we go to Jesus, that we go to a tried, long-proved, and faithful friend. Dependence upon Him is victory. "The good fight" is the fight "of faith." We are best able to resist our enemy upon our knees; and even such a short prayer as this—Help me—will bring down the strength of Omnipotence on our side. But we might as well expect to crush a giant with a straw, as to enter the spiritual conflict with weapons of carnal warfare. Every trial realizes experimentally the help of a faithful Savior. He does indeed deliver gloriously; and leaves us nothing to do, but to "stand still," wonder, and praise. "Fear not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will show to you today; for the Egyptians, whom you have seen today, you shall see them again no more forever."

### **87. They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not Your precepts.**

And why did they not quite consume him? Because "the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in behalf of them, whose heart is perfect toward Him." "Surely the wrath of man shall praise You; the remainder of wrath shall You restrain." And why have not our spiritual enemies consumed us upon earth? "Satan has desired to have us, that he may

sift us as wheat." But—says the Savior, "I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not." "My sheep shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of My hand." Steadfastness of profession is the evidence of the life of faith: grounded upon this security, the more we are shaken, the more we shall hold fast. Neither long-continued distress, nor determined opposition, will turn us from the ways of God. We would rather forsake all that our heart held dear upon earth, than the precepts of our God. With whatever intensity of affection we love father and mother (and the influence of the Gospel has increased the sensibilities of relative affection), we remember who has said, "He who loves father and mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me." Unlike the deluded professor, we have counted the cost of the "tribulation and persecution" of the Gospel; and the result has only served to confirm our love and adherence to our heavenly Master. Shall not we find in heaven—no, do not we find in the gospel—a far better portion than we lose?

When, therefore, we are tempted to neglect the precepts, or when we fail to live in them, and to delight in them, let us each bring our hearts to this test: 'What would I take in exchange for them? Will the good-will and approbation of the world compensate for the loss of the favor of God? Could I be content to forego my greatest comforts, to "suffer the loss of all things," yes, of life itself, rather than forsake one of the ways of God? When I meet with such precepts as link me to the daily cross, can I throw myself with simple dependence upon that Savior, who has engaged to supply strength for what He has commanded?' How often in times of spiritual temptation, if not of temporal danger, they had almost consumed us upon earth! but "in the mount" of difficulty "the Lord has been seen." Oh! let each of us mark our road to Zion with multiplied Ebenezers, inscribed Jehovah-jireh, Jehovah-nissi. "By this I know You favor me, because my enemy does not triumph over me. And as for me, You uphold me in my integrity, and set me before Your face forever."

What a fine testimony of the upholding grace of God! How could a helpless believer stand against such an appalling array? Yet it is a great, but a true word, suitable for a babe in Christ, as well as for an Apostle, "I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me." Yes, I can "wrestle even against principalities and powers" of darkness, if I be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might."

**88. Quicken me after Your loving-kindness: so shall I keep the testimony of Your mouth.**

We need continual quickening to maintain our steadfastness in the precepts. "God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us, together with Christ." But without daily quickening after the same loving-kindness, "the things which remain will be ready to die." For every breath of prayer, Divine influence must flow, "Quicken us, and

we shall call upon Your name." For the work of praise, without the same influence we are dumb., "Let my soul live, and it shall praise You." For the exercise of every spiritual grace, there must be the commanding voice of our Divine Head, "Awake, O north wind; and come, you south: blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out." Thus is the creature laid in the dust, and all the glory is given to God. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God."

Why is it, then, that at one time we spring to duty as the joy of our life; while at other times the soul is so chained down under the power of corruption, that it scarcely can put forth the feeblest exercise of life? The source of our life is the same; "Hid with Christ in God." But the power of the flesh hinders its every motion. Such a spiritual sloth has benumbed us—such backwardness to prayer, and disrelish for heavenly things! These are sins deeply humbling in themselves, and aggravated by the neglect of the plentiful provision laid up in Christ, not only for the life, but for the peace, joy, and strength of the soul. Nothing but indolence or unbelief straitens our supplies. Oh! stir up the prayer for quickening influence, and we shall be rich and fruitful. Sometimes also self-confidence paralyzes our spiritual energy. We expect our recovery from a lifeless state by more determined resolutions, or increased improvement of the various means of grace. Let these means indeed be used with all diligence, but with the fullest conviction that all means, all instruments, all helps of every kind, without the influence of the Spirit of grace, are dead. "It is the Spirit that quickens; the flesh profits nothing."

These records of David's prayers strikingly mark the intensity of his desire to live to God. Every decay of strength and activity was, as it were, death to him, and awakened his reiterated cries. Do we desire to keep the testimony of His mouth? Do we mourn over our shortcomings in service? Oh! then, for our own sake, for the Lord's sake, and for the church's and the world's sake, let our petitions be incessant each one for himself—'Quicken me—Quicken this slothful heart of mine. Enkindle afresh the sacred spark within, and let me be all alive for You.' Let faith be kept alive and active at the throne of grace, and all will be alive; our obligation will be deeply felt, and practically acknowledged.

The title here given to the directory of our duty—the testimony of God's mouth—adds strength to our obligations. Thus let every word we read or hear be regarded as coming directly from the mouth of God. What reverence, what implicit submission does it demand! May it ever find us in the posture of attention, humility, and faith, each one of us ready to say, "Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears!"

**89. Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven. 90. Your faithfulness is unto all generations; You have established the earth, and it abides. 91. They continue this day according to Your ordinances, for all are Your servants.**

The Christian extends his survey far beyond the limits of his individual sphere. His view of the operations of God in creation enlarges his apprehensions of the Divine attributes, and especially that of unchanging faithfulness. Indeed, the very fact of a creation in ruins—a world in rebellion against its Maker, failing of the grand end of existence, and yet still continued in existence—manifests His faithfulness unto all generations. How different is the contemplation of the Christian from that of the philosopher! His is not a mere cold, speculative admiration, but the establishment of his faith upon a clear discovery of the faithfulness of God. Thus he stays his soul upon the assured unchangeableness of the Divine word, "Concerning Your testimonies, I have known of old, that You have founded them forever. Your word is true from the beginning: and everyone of Your righteous judgments endures forever." How striking is the contrast between the transient glory of man's goodness, and the solid foundation of all the promises, hopes, and prospects of the children of God!, "The grass withers, and the flower fades; but the word of our God shall stand forever." "Unbelief" is the character of our "evil hearts." Man chooses his own measure and objects of faith; he believes no more than he pleases. But it is a fearful prospect, that the threatenings of God rest upon the same solid foundation with His promises. "Heaven and earth shall pass away but My word shall not pass away."

Need we any further proof of His faithfulness? Look at the earth established by His word of power. See how "he hangs it upon nothing," as if it might fall at any moment;—and yet it is immovably fixed—it abides—and with all its furniture, continues according to His ordinances. This—though the scoff of the infidel—is the encouragement to Christian faith. It is at once a token of His covenant with nature, that "while the earth remains, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease;" and an emblem of His covenant with the seed of David, that He "will not cast them off for all that they have done." Thus every view of the heavens—yes—every time we set our foot on the earth—shows the unchangeableness of His everlasting covenant, and the security of the salvation of His own people.

In this vast universe, all are His servants. "The stars in their courses" "fire and hail, snow and vapors, stormy wind—fulfill His word. He sends forth His commandment upon earth: His word runs very swiftly." Man—the child of his Maker, "created in His image"—destined for His glory—is the only rebel and revolter. Most affecting is the appeal, that his own Father and God is constrained to make concerning him, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord has spoken. I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me!"

Is not then the universe of nature a parable of grace—setting out on every side—in every view—a cheering display of the faithfulness of God? If His providence fails not, will the promise of His covenant disappoint us? Why should He change? Does He see or know anything now, that He has not foreseen and foreknown

from eternity? What more sure ground of salvation than the unchangeableness of God? If I can prove a word to have been spoken by God, I must no more question it than his own Being. It may seem to fail on earth; but it is forever settled in heaven. The decrees of the kings of the earth, "settled" on earth, are exposed to all the variations and weakness of a changing world. They may be revoked by themselves or their successors, or they may die away. The empty sound of the "law of the Medes and Persians that alters not," has long since been swept away into oblivion. But while "the word settled" on earth has "waxed old like a garment," and perished; the word settled in heaven—is raised above all the revolutions of the universe, and remains as the throne of God—unshaken and eternal; exhibiting the foundation of the believer's hope and of the unbeliever's terror to be alike unalterably fixed.

But we also remark the foreknowledge as well as the faithfulness of God. From the eternity that is past, as well for the eternity that is to come, Your word is settled in heaven. Before this fair creation was marred, yes, before it was called into existence, its ruin was foreseen, and a remedy provided. "The Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world," and fore-ordained before that era. Concurrent with this period, a people "were chosen in Him," and forever the word was settled in heaven., "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me." For the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom upon earth "the decree is declared;" however earth and hell may combine against it, "Yet have I set My king upon My holy hill of Zion." And what a blessed encouragement in the grand work of bringing back "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and those "other sheep" with them, "which are not of this fold" is it, that we do not depend upon the earnestness of our prayers, the wisdom of our plans, or the diligence of our endeavors; but upon "the word" forever settled in heaven!, "The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, says the Lord. As for Me, this is My covenant with them, says the Lord—My Spirit that is upon You, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, nor out of the mouth of your seed, nor out of the mouth of your seed's seed, says the Lord, from henceforth, and forever." "I have sworn by Myself, the word is gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return—That unto Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear."

## **92. Unless Your law had been my delights, I should then have perished in my affliction.**

The support of the word is as sure as its basis—and that in the time when other supports sink—in affliction. David—like his great prototype—was a man of affliction—sometimes ready to perish—always kept up by the law of his God. How many a false professor has been tried and cast by this hour of affliction! But he who has been sifted by temptation—who has "endured the hardness" of persecution, as a "good soldier of Jesus Christ,"—and who is ready rather to be "consumed upon earth," than to shrink from his profession—this is he whom his

Master "will lift up, and not make his foes to rejoice over him." It is the established rule of the kingdom, "Them that honor Me I will honor." "Because you have kept the word of My patience, I also will keep you from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."

The law of God opens to us a clear interest in every perfection of His Godhead—every engagement of His covenant. What wonder then, that it brings delights, which the world can never conceive, when bowed down with accumulated affliction? However the believer's real character may be hidden from the world, the hour of trial abundantly proves, both what the law can do for him, and what a lost creature he would have been without it. In affliction, friends mean well; but of themselves they can do nothing. They can only look on, feel, and pray. They cannot "speak to the heart." This is God's prerogative: and His law is His voice.

But for this support, Jonah probably would have perished in his affliction. In the belly of the fish, as "in the belly of hell," he appears to have recollected the experience of David under deep and awful desertion; and in taking his language out of his mouth, as descriptive of his own dark and terrific condition, a ray of light and hope darted upon his dungeon-walls. Indeed it is a mystery, how a sinner, destitute of the support and comfort of the word of God, can ever uphold himself in his trials. We marvel not, that often "his soul should choose strangling, and death, rather than his life."

But in order to derive support from the law, it must be our delights—yes—that it may be our delights it must be the matter of our faith. For what solid delight, can we have in what we do not believe? Must it not also be our joy in prosperity, if we would realize its support in affliction? For this, how ineffectual is the mere formal service! Who ever tasted its tried consolations in the bare performance of the outward duty? It must be read in reality; it will then be taken as a cordial. Let it be simply received, diligently searched, and earnestly prayed over; and it will guide the heavy-laden to Him, who is their present and eternal rest. The tempest-tossed soul will cast anchor upon it., "Remember the word unto Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope." One promise applied by the Spirit of God is worth ten thousand worlds. And each promise is a staff—if we have but faith to lean upon it—able to bear our whole weight of sin, care, and trial.

Is then affliction our appointed lot? If "man is born"—and the child of God twice born, "to trouble, as the sparks fly upward,"—how important is it to lay in a store of supply from this inexhaustible treasury, against the time when all human support will fail! Supplied hence with heavenly strength, we shall be borne up above the weakness and weariness of the flesh. And as the riches of this storehouse are "the riches of Christ," let those parts be most familiar to us, which mark His person, His character, offices, life, sufferings, and death, resurrection and glory, together with the promises, encouragements, and prospects directly flowing from this blessed subject—and oh! what a treasure-house shall we find,

richly furnished with every source of delight, and every ground of support!

**93. I will never forget Your precepts; for with them You have quickened me.**

An admirable resolution! the blessed fruit of the quickening power of the word in his deep affliction. He had before acknowledged this supernatural efficacy, "Your word has quickened me." Now he more distinctly mentions it, as the instrumental only—not the efficient—cause—With them You have quickened me. Had the power been in the word, the same effect would have immediately and invariably followed. Nor should we have been constrained to lament the limited extent of its influence. How many, Christian, shared with you in the outward privileges; but perhaps unto none was the life-giving blessing given, save unto yourself—the most unlikely—the most unworthy of all! Thus does "God work in us both to will and to do"—not according to any prescribed law, but "of His good pleasure." The grace therefore is not from, but through, the means. Almighty God is the source of the life. The word is the instrument—yet so "quick," so melting, so attractive, that we might ask, out of what rock was that heart hewn, that is proof against its power? Yet while the precepts work nothing without the agents they are the ordinary course, by which the Lord quickens whom He will.

And do not we find them still lively channels of refreshment? Surely, then, we will hold to our purpose of not forgetting the precepts. The leaves of the word of God are the leaves of the tree of life, as well as of the tree of knowledge. They not only enlighten the path, but they supply life for daily work and progress. "The words that I speak unto you"—said Jesus, "they are spirit, and they are life:" so that the times when we have been most diligent in our meditation and obedience to the precepts, have been uniformly the seasons of our most holy consolation.

Men of the world, however, with accurate recollections of all matters, connected with their temporal advantage, are remarkably slow in retaining the truths of God. They plead their short memories, although conscious that this infirmity does not extend to their important secular engagements. But what wonder that they forget the precepts, when they have never been quickened with them—never received any benefit from them? The word of God is not precious to them: they acknowledge no obligation to it: they have no acquaintance with it. It has no place in their affections, and therefore but little abode in their remembrance.

But this resolution is the language of sincerity, not of perfection. The child of God is humbled in the conscious forgetfulness of the Lord's precepts. And this consciousness keeps his eye fixed upon Jesus for pardon and acceptance: while every fresh sense of acceptance strengthens his more habitual remembrance. Then, as for his natural inability to preserve an accurate recollection of Divine things—let him not estimate the benefit of the word by the results in the memory, so much as by the impression upon the heart. The word may have darted

through the mind, as a flash of lightning, that strikes and is gone; and yet the heart may have been melted, and the passing flash may have shed a heavenly ray upon a dubious path. If the heart retains the quickening power, the precepts are not forgotten, even though the memory should have failed to preserve them.

But whatever word of conviction, direction, or encouragement, may have come to us, affix this seal to it—I will never forget Your precepts. It may be of signal use in some hour of temptation. The same Spirit that breathed before upon it may breathe again; if not with the same present sensible power, yet with a seasonable and refreshing recollection of past support.

#### **94. I am Yours; save me; for I have sought Your precepts.**

What a high and honorable character is stamped upon the lowest believer! He is the Savior's unalienable property, his portion, the "workmanship" of His hand, the purchase of His blood, the triumph of His conquering love. He is given to Him by His Father, "preserved in Him, and called." The evidence of his character is found in seeking the Lord's precepts. "Whom we serve" will prove "whose we are." "His servants you are, to whom you obey." "Know that the Lord has set apart him that is godly for Himself." "The carnal mind is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then those who are in the flesh" cannot seek the Lord's precepts. A new and spiritual bias, therefore, is the visible stamp and seal of the Lord's interest in us.

True it is, that our Divine Savior can never be robbed of His property—that His people are saved in Him, beyond the reach of earth and hell to touch them. Yet are they dependent still—always sinners—every day's provocation making them more sinners than before; needing, therefore, from day to day, fresh power, fresh keeping, and, above all, fresh cleansing and acceptance. But what a powerful plea for mercy may we draw from the Lord's interest in us! Will not a man be careful of his children, his treasure, his jewels? 'Such am I. Your sovereign love has bought me—made me Yours—I am Yours; save me. You have saved me; "You have delivered my soul from death; will You not deliver my feet from falling?" Save me from the love of sin, from the daily guilt and power of sin; from the treachery of my own foolish heart from all this, and all besides, which You see ensnaring to my soul. If I am not Yours, whence this desire, this endeavor to seek Your precepts? What mean my privileged moments of communion with You? What mean the yet unsatisfied desires after a conformity to Your image? Lord, I would humbly plead Your own act, Your free and sovereign act, that made me Yours. Save me, because You have brought Your salvation near to me, and sealed me Yours. I need mercy to begin with me; mercy to accompany me; mercy to abide with me forever. I am Yours; save me.'

And what irresistible energy does it give to our pleading, that this was the sole purpose, that brought down the Son of God from Heaven! "I came down"—said

he, "from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me. And this is the Father's will which has sent Me, that of all which He has given Me I should lose nothing." Of this purpose He was enabled to testify at the conclusion of His work, "Those that You gave Me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition."

But some cry for salvation, who neglect duty, and thus make void their plea. Can we make our interest good, by seeking His precepts? Is it the way in which we love to walk? Then let us not desist from our plea before God, until our heart listens to the voice of love, centering every blessing of creation, redemption, and heavenly calling, in the privilege of adoption, "Thus says the Lord, that created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel Fear not, for I have redeemed you: I have called you by your name; you are Mine. You are My servant; O Israel, you shall not be forgotten of Me. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions; and as a cloud your sins." I have regarded this your plea. I have heard this your prayer—I am Yours, save me.

### **95. The wicked have waited for me to destroy me; but I will consider Your testimonies.**

Am I, as a believer, safe as the Lord's property, and in the Lord's keeping? Yet must I expect that the wicked, the ungodly, as the instruments of Satan, will not cease to distress me. The Psalmist had before alluded to this trial, as driving him to his refuge. And, indeed, this is the constant character of the believer's walk—enduring the enmity of the ungodly, and seeking his refuge in the word of God—in that hiding-place of safety to which the word directs him. How striking is the proof of the irreconcilable variance between God and the world—the world encouraging all that is contrary to God, and persecuting His image in His people! Yet the word opens to us a sure defense. If our "soul is among lions," cannot we testify to the astonishment of the world, "My God has sent His angel, and has shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me?" We hear indeed the roaring of the winds and waves; but we hear also the voice hushing the storm to rest, "Peace, be still."

The experience of this trial and support beautifully illustrates the promise, "He who believes shall not make haste." He whose hope is firmly fixed on that "tried corner-stone," which God Himself has "laid in Zion as a sure foundation" "shall not be greatly moved;" no—he "shall not be moved" at all, by the wicked waiting for him to destroy him. In the hour of difficulty, instead of perplexing himself with successive expedients for his safety (sought more from human contrivance, than from asking counsel at the mouth of God) he "possesses his soul in patience," and calmly commits all events to the Lord. Such a man "shall not be afraid of evil tidings! his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." "This trust is grounded on the word of God, revealing His power and all-sufficiency, and withal His goodness, His offer of Himself to be the stay of the soul, commanding us to rest upon Him.

People wait on I know not what persuasions and assurances; but I know no other to build faith on but the word of promise. The truth and faithfulness of God opened up His wisdom, and power, and goodness, as the stay of all those that, renouncing all other props, will venture on it, and lay all upon Him. "He who believes, sets to his seal that God is true:" and so he is sealed for God; his portion and interest secured. "If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established."

But it is the considering of the Lord's testimonies that draws out their staying support. The soul must be fixed upon them, as "tried words, purified seven times in the fire." And in this frame, I will, under all distresses, all circumstances of trial, or even of dismay, consider Your testimonies. I will consider the faithfulness of those blessed declarations, "There shall not an hair of your head perish. Touch not My anointed." "He who touches you, touches the apple of My eye." With this armor of defense, I shall not be afraid, even should I hear the "evil tidings," that the wicked have waited for me, to destroy me. Or even should I be destroyed, I know that Your testimonies cannot fail—that my rock is perfect, "that there is no unrighteousness in Him;" and therefore, "though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident." Whether, then, I am delivered from the wicked, and live, "I live unto the Lord;" or whether I fall into their snare, and "die—I die unto the Lord;" for I will consider Your testimonies, assured that all Your purposes shall be accomplished concerning me, as You have said, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You."

### **96. I have seen an end of all perfection; but Your commandment is exceeding broad.**

A deeper insight into the Lord's testimonies is the sure result of considering them. Weigh them in the balances against this world's excellency; the world and the word—each with all its fullness. Of the one perfection we see an end—of the other—none. This world is a matter of experience and observation. We have seen an end—not of some—but of all its perfection. It wants sufficiency. It stands us in no stead in the great emergencies of affliction—death—judgment—eternity. It wants solidity in its best substance. "In its wisdom is grief!" All its delicacies and indulgences—after having, like the King of Jerusalem, "not withheld the heart from any joy"—all end in the verdict of disappointment, "Behold! all was vanity and vexation of spirit!" Its continuance is but for a moment. The soul is born for eternity. Therefore it must have a portion to last as long as itself. But the world, with its lusts and fashions, passes away. All that it can offer is a bubble—a shadow. In its best riches, honors, and pleasures—in the utmost that its perfection can yield—in its height and prime of enjoyment—what is it in itself—what is it able to do for us? "All is vanity." And yet such is the alienation of the heart from God, that it is first tried to the very uttermost, before any desire to

return homeward is felt or expressed. And even then, nothing but the Almighty power of God can bring the sinner back. He would rather perish in his misery, than "return to his rest."

Now contrast with the emptiness of the world the fullness of the commandment of God. Our whole duty to our God, our neighbor, and ourselves, is here laid open before us—commanding without abatement, and forbidding without allowance—making no excuse for ignorance—frailty or forgetfulness—reaching not only to every species of crime, but to everything tending to it. This is perfection, of which we never see an end. Every fresh view opens—not the extent—but the immensity of the field; and compels us at length to shut up our inquiries with the adoring acknowledgment—Your commandment is exceeding broad. Its various parts form one seamless piece; so that no particle can be separated without injury to the whole. As all the curtains of the tabernacle connected by taches and loops, made but one covering for the ark, and the loosening or disjunction of the smallest point disannulled the fitness of the whole; so it belongs to the perfection of the commandment, that "whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." The spirituality of its requirements equally illustrates its Divine perfection. An angry look is murder; an unchaste desire is adultery; the "stumbling-block of iniquity" "covetousness"—in the heart is idolatry; the thought as well as the act—the first conception of sin, as well as the after-commission—brings in the verdict—Guilty—Death.

Can we, then, endure the sight of its exceeding breadth? Yes—for the commandment of the gospel is equally broad, and covers all. We know who has stood in our place—who has satisfied Sinai's unalterable requirements, and borne its awful curse. Broad as it may be, the love which has fulfilled it is immeasurable. As a covenant, therefore, it has now lost its terrors. As a rule, we love it for its extent, and for its purity; for the comprehensiveness of its obligations, and for the narrowness of its liberty for indulgence; nor would we wish to be subject to a less severe scrutiny, or a more lenient administration.

Reader! if you have learned the exceeding breadth and spirituality of the law (the first lesson that is taught and learned in the school of Christ), your views of yourself and your state before God will be totally changed. Before, you were "thanking God" in your heart, "that you were not as other men are." Now you will be "smiting upon your bosom, saying—God be merciful to me a sinner!" Before, perhaps, you might have thought yourself, "touching the righteousness which is of the law, blameless." Now you will glory in your new and more enlightened choice, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." Once you considered yourself "alive," when you were really dead. Now that "the commandment is come" in its heart-searching spirituality and conviction to your soul, you "die" that you may live. Blessed change from the law to the gospel, "from death to life!" "I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God."

Such is the effect of the transition from a legal to an evangelical ground. Before, we were reckless of sin, and therefore reckless of the gospel. As the one fell lightly upon our conscience, the other held a light estimation in our judgment. While we had no disturbance from the law, we had no delight in the gospel. But now that we see in the true mirror, we are at once alarmed and enlightened. Praised be God! we now take the true estimate—we degrade to the uttermost righteousness by works—we exalt to the uttermost righteousness by faith. In the one we see pollution—in the other perfection.

## **PART 13.**

### **97. O how love I Your law! it is my meditation all the day.**

Mark the man of God giving utterance to his feelings of heavenly delight—expressing most, by intimating that he cannot adequately express what he desires. He seems unable to restrain his acknowledgments of Divine influence springing up in his heart—O how love I Your law! This experience is most distinctive of a spiritual character. The professor may read, and understand, and even externally obey the law; but the believer only loves it; and he lives in it, as if he could not live without it. To the professor it is a task imposed to satisfy conscience; "the veil upon the heart" darkens all his spiritual apprehension, and consequently excludes spiritual delight. To the child of God, it is food and medicine, light and comfort—yes, "life from the dead." The law of precept in the word is a "law of liberty"—a law of love—in his heart. His former obedience was the bondage of fear. But how different is the effect of constraining love! He now delights to view it in every lineament. He dwells upon every feature with intense enjoyment. Before, it was his confinement—his chain. Now, it is his liberty—his ornament. He is not what he was, "Old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new."

Think what good reason there is to love the law. It is the epistle of our most beloved friend—not to be slighted, but to be placed in our bosom, nearest our hearts. It sets out that relief, without which the conscience would have been tortured by the never-dying worm. There is more of glory—more of God—in this, than in any other manifestation of His name. It has ever been the mirror, that has reflected Christ to His church. The spiritual eye discerns Him in every part. Now—Reader—do you search for Him in His law? Do you love His law, because it "testifies of Him?" Do you pray for His Spirit, that His law may guide you to Him? This is the evidence that you have "turned unto the Lord, when the veil is taken away," and you "with unveiled face behold in this glass the glory of the Lord." Then if you do love His law, you will love the whole of it—its obligations as well as its privileges. You will love it at all times, even when it is thwarting your own will and way. The whole law is light and love—wisdom and faithfulness.

But love of the law fastens the soul to the beloved object, It is my meditation all

the day. When you cannot have it in your hand, it will be found, if indeed your soul is in a prosperous state, "hid in your heart." There it is kept as your most precious treasure; while you live upon it with unwearied appetite as your daily bread, and exercise yourself in it as your daily rule. Oh, how worthy is it of all the love of the warmest heart! The deepest students are most humbled for their want of suitable enlargement.

But this heavenly spirit can only be grounded upon a sense of reconciliation. Can an unreconciled sinner be interested in the law, in every page of which he reads his own condemnation? This explains the enmity of the ungodly. But the cultivation of this spirit upon the ground of the gospel is a most important principle of the Christian steadfastness, the want of which has been the source of fearful delusion; and in the exercise of which we shall realize a deeper insight and more spiritual discernment of Scriptural truth. Warm affections will be far more influential than talent, or mere external knowledge.

This habit of love and holy meditation will spread its influence over our whole character. It will fill our hearts with heavenly matter for prayer, diffuse a sweet savor over our earthly employments, sanctify the common bounties of Providence, realize the presence of God throughout the day, command prosperity upon our lawful undertakings, and enlarge our usefulness in the church. Thus the man of God is formed in his completeness, symmetry, and attraction—such as the world is often constrained secretly to admire, even where the heart is unready to follow.

Lord! implant in my heart a supreme love to Your law. Write it upon my heart—even that new law, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." May I love it so, that I may be always meditating upon it, and by continual meditation yet more enlarging my love and delight in it! So let it prove an ever-springing source of heavenly enjoyment and holy conversation!

**98. You through Your commandments have made me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me. 99. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for Your testimonies are my meditation. 100. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts.**

What a fruitful harvest did David reap from his glowing love, and "daily meditation on the law of God!" He became wiser than his enemies in "subtlety"—than all his teachers in doctrine—than the ancients in experience. Yet he is not speaking of his extraordinary gifts as a prophet, but of his knowledge gained by ordinary means. Nor is he here boasting of his own attainments: but commending the grace of God in and towards him—You through Your commandments have made me wiser. How much more wisdom does the persecuted believer draw from the word of God, than his persecutors have ever acquired from the learning of this world! Those, however, who have been effectually taught of God, need to be

daily taught of Him. While they rest upon their God, and seek counsel in His word, they are wise indeed; yet when they trust to their own wisdom, and turn to their own counsel, they become a bye-word and occasion of offence by their own folly. Was David wiser than his enemies or his teachers, when he dissembled himself before Achish—or when he yielded to the indulgence of lust—or when in the pride of his heart he numbered the people? Alas! how often do even God's children befool themselves in the ways of sin!

But how did David attain this Divine wisdom? Not by habits of extensive reading—not by natural intelligence—but by a diligent meditation in the testimonies. In order to avail ourselves, however, of this means—a simple reception of the Divine testimony is of absolute importance. We can never obtain that assurance of the certainty of our faith, which is indispensable to our peace, or resist the influence of unenlightened teachers, or the long-established worldly maxims of the ancients, except by entire submission to the supreme authority of Scripture. Many sincere Christians—especially at the outset of their course—are much hindered—either by the skepticism of others, or of their own minds; or from their previous habit of studying the Bible in the light of carnal wisdom, or in dependence upon human teaching. Such need special prayer for humility of mind and simplicity of faith. Under this gracious influence they will discern that path to glory, which in infinite condescension is made so plain, that "the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein," and the unlearned believer, who has the word before his eyes, in his heart, and in his life, shall become "perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

In our Christian progress, David's habit of scriptural meditation will prove of essential service. For while those who "confer with flesh and blood" cannot have their counselors always at hand; we, seeking our wisdom from the word of God, have the best Counselor ever with us, teaching us what to do, and what to expect. Obedience also, as well as meditation, directs our way. David found understanding, because he kept the precepts. And David's Lord has pointed out the same path of light: "If any man will do God's will, he shall know of the doctrine." "You meet him who rejoices, and works righteousness—those that remember You in Your ways." Your ways truly are ways of light, joy, and love!

Now let us turn in, and inquire—What is our daily use of the word of God? Are we satisfied with a slight looking, or do we seek an intimate acquaintance with it! Is its influence ever present—ever practical? Do we prize it as a welcome guest? Is it our delightful companion and guide? Oh! meditate in this blessed book. "Eat the word," when you "have found it; and it will be unto you the joy and rejoicing of your heart." The name of Jesus—its great subject—will be more precious—your love will be inflamed—your perseverance established—and your heart enlivened in the spirit of praise. Thus bringing your mind into close and continual contact with the testimonies of God, and pressing out the sweetness from the precious volume, it will drop as from the honeycomb, daily comfort and refreshment upon your heart.

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