

## **A Chosen Vessel**

**“The Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me” (Acts 9: 15).**

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### **Chapter 1**

#### **The Vessel in The Potter: The Potter in The Vessel**

**Then I went down to the potter’s house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it (Jer. 18: 3, 4).**

**Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? (Rom. 9: 21).**

**It is of immense interest and profoundly instructive to us, to trace the history of souls in the word of God. Not only does this interest grow upon us in apprehending His dealings with “men of like passions as ourselves”; but in such a study we learn what God Himself is, in His unspeakable goodness and mercy: One who never withdraws His gifts, nor repents of His calling; and who never falters in His purpose until it is accomplished fully; in vessels “which he afore hath prepared unto glory, even us whom he hath called; not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.”**

**In all this work His sovereignty shines conspicuously. Nay, He would have us accord to Him His own place in this; who “works all things after the counsel of his own will.” He has a right to do as He pleases, which man has not. Man would seek to bind God to certain laws of his own, and so fetter His sovereign will, as to refuse that He should act outside them, but once we know that all our blessing hinges upon His absoluteness —**

and that this absoluteness is pleased to display itself in mercy, in which He delights — all is changed. In fact, beloved reader, we are shut up to this in God. We have no more right to *claim* our soul's salvation from Him, than we have power to change places with Him on His throne of glory! We may have grace given to *surrender* this supposed claim; to put ourselves before Him, conscious that He has a right to do just as it pleases Him. We may find, too — nay, we shall find, that our very title to mercy is the absence of any! and that rest of soul is found in His *nature* itself — which, had He not been pleased to reveal to us, in Christ, we never even would have known.

He was pleased to create a world, to set it revolving in space amongst the countless orbs which shine in the heavens around us. He was pleased to allow sin and death to enter that fair scene. Who can reply? He was pleased to choose and to call a people out of it, and to permit them to destroy themselves, while He, with long suffering, bore with them “till there was no remedy.” He was pleased to send His Son to endure the cross and bear His wrath. Who was before Him in all this? Not one! In all things He wrought He permitted; He ordered; and it is He who challenges the stubborn heart which would say “Why doth he yet find fault; for who hath resisted his will?” It is He who deigns to stoop to the reply, “Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?” (Rom. 9: 20).

Have we ever stood in the potter's house, and beheld him, as he wrought on the wheels? The workman takes the lump of clay; he presses it to the wheel ; the wheel revolves before his eye. Where now, (let me ask) is the vessel? It is in the mind of the potter, before it is formed: the design is there. His fingers shape the mass before him: gradually it grows up before his eye: gradually the thought in his mind is transferred to the clay, and it rises up before him, and the thoughts hitherto unexpressed, grow into the vessel which his fingers mold.

He sees a flaw; an imperfection in the clay. Others, beholding, have not detected it, as with the artist's eye. He crushes the clay, under his hand into a shapeless mass again. And again his fingers mold and fashion it into his design. Again, and again defects appear. Again and again the clay is reduced to a shapeless mass, until at last it rises, in perfection of design before him; his eye surveys it with satisfaction and pride; and he removes it from the wheel to take its place with the choice things of the earth around.

Where now is the potter? Where was the vessel before he began? It was in the potter! Where now is the potter? He is in the vessel All that his

mind designed and wrought is there seen. The vessel is fit for that which he had intended.

And this is the history of the soul. The clay is in the Potter's hand. His fingers fashion it, and it is marred; the clay needs more of His patient manipulation and skill. It is not yet smooth and even, nor pliable to His hand. He crushes it time after time. The perfect vessel stood before His mind and purpose ere His hand had taken the clay, and placed it on the wheel. But when all is done, He has transferred His thought with unerring skill to the clay; the Potter is now seen in His handiwork; and it is a vessel of mercy, which He afore has prepared for glory.

How important, as these crushings take place, is the need of the interpretation of these skillful workings of the hand of the Potter! How often are the lessons misunderstood; or not apprehended at all! In the history of souls in the Word these actions are seen; the results are reached. In them we read the history of His dealings with our own souls, and the handiwork of God. We look then for the lines of beauty, resulting from His hand; we yield ourselves to the things which happen; we see the end of the Lord: we know how it is that all things work together for good to them that love God, who are the called according to His purpose.

As a Potter (*Yatsar*) the Lord God took of the dust of the ground, in the first creation; and fashioned it into a man; and then "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." But the vessel was marred. Again the divine Potter takes of the same lump, and puts forth afresh His skill, and forms a vessel of mercy, for eternal glory: a new creation in "Christ."

## Chapter 2:

### The End of Man's History

"Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?"

There was but one man on earth, (once a child of Adam) who could say, "Be ye followers together of me" (Phil. 3: 17); and this without any qualifying word. This man was the apostle of the Gentiles — Saul of Tarsus; afterwards called Paul. In this he does not speak to us as an apostle, armed with the power and authority of Christ; but as a Christian-the leader or representative man, of the whole profession of Christianity; than whom none knew better when to assert and to prove his apostolic office, nor better how and when to lay it aside. He lays it aside here in this remarkable expression, as well as in the epistle generally, in which it is found.

There are other passages where he uses language apparently of like significance, but to which he adds some qualifying words: “Be ye followers of me, as I am also of Christ”\* (1 Cor. 11: 1, etc.). But the difference is very great, even without entering on the meaning of the words in the original tongue. In *this*, he is inculcating the *surrender* of all things for another’s wealth: this Christ ever did, and in this he followed Him. But in *that* (Phil. 3: 7-14) he runs the Christian race for the goal, casting all behind his back, and looking to “win Christ, and be found in him,” to be like Him in full conformity! He runs to *attain* all, at the end. This Christ never did. He surrendered all indeed; but never ran to attain, for He was always *Himself* — whether here or on high.

{\*This verse belongs more correctly to the close of ch. 10 and of the line of truth there spoken.}

I need not dwell on the fact, which is of course clear; that whether asserting his apostolate, or laying it aside, his writings have each and all the same authority, as the word of God. These fine and touching distinctions will only be the more valued, when apprehended by the spiritual mind.

Let us look then upon him as a Christian; a heavenly man; a vessel of mercy; a “chosen vessel unto me”; as the representative, or typical man, of the whole scheme of Christianity; a vessel filled with the Spirit, who can say, “Be ye followers together of me, and mark them which walk, so as ye have us for a type” (*typos*).

First of all, let us see the moment, in the history of the world, when the “chosen vessel” was called. This imparts great significance to the manner and method of his call; as well as to the state of mankind at that moment, out of which he is separated to Christ.

We will refer first to the parable of the fig tree, planted in the vineyard — used by the Lord Jesus in Luke 13. The hour of Israel’s judgment was fast approaching; yet their eyes were such as “see not.” They had made their Lord their “adversary” (Matt. 5: 55; Luke 12: 58) in rejecting Him, and He counsels them, if even so, to agree with their adversary “quickly, as thou art in the way,” lest when the end came the adversary would deliver them to the judge, and the judge to the officer, — the officer to the prison; from which there was no escape till the last mite was paid. Talking of judgment thus, some mentioned a *partial* one which had fallen on those Galileans who had been slain by Pilate. They spake of it as of the ordinary news of the day, and with the not uncommon thought, that a special visitation of such a kind from God’s hand, only marked those upon whom it fell, as deserving it beyond their fellows. They deemed that such was the sign of God’s outwardly and manifestly governing the world, so that

they could approve or understand. The Lord at once applies this to the conscience of all around; as also the case of the eighteen persons on whom the tower of Siloam fell; saying that judgment would now be universal, and not *partial*, and that unless they repented, they would *all* likewise perish, not merely those of their brethren whom they were bringing up for His judgment.

He then speaks the parable of the fig-tree, planted in the vineyard (Ch. 13: 6-9). This was a picture of what was passing around at the moment, and of its end. For three years the Lord had come, in His ministry, seeking fruit from His fig-tree — and finding none, He saith to the dresser of the vineyard, “Behold these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none; cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?” Here was the sentence in righteousness. The fig tree was not only fruitless, but mischievous, “a cumberer of the ground.” But grace said, “Let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it; and if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.” This extra period of trial was the fresh ministry of the Holy Ghost sent down at Pentecost; and ended with the martyrdom of Stephen, when they finally refused Christ in glory. This closed the history of Israel, as of man under the dealings of God.

This extra year of grace was marked by every sign and pleading of the Lord with His people, until refused. When we open the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1), we find the Lord Jesus in resurrection amongst His disciples. Their hearts still lingered over the hopes of Israel-uncertain as to the end. “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be my witnesses, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in the uttermost parts of the earth.”

In the enactment of the laws of a country-when a statute becomes obsolete — the circumstances having changed under which it was given-the legislature repeals the old law, and then enacts a new one adapted to the fresh condition of things.

When the Lord had sent out the twelve to preach the kingdom of heaven to Israel (Matt. 10), the mission was confined and narrow. He was “a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers” (Rom. 15: 8). All the promises to Israel were fulfilled in Himself. Their mission was “Go not into the way of the *Gentiles*,”-there was yet no word for them. “And into any city of the *Samaritans* enter ye not.” This mongrel race, half heathen, half Jew, had no promises from God any more than the Gentiles. But,” said the Lord,

**“Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of *Israel*.” They were the objects of this narrow, but necessary and preliminary mission. And yet it did not even embrace all Israel, “For they are not all Israel, who are of Israel” (Rom. 9: 6). Nay, “Into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, inquire *who in it is worthy*”! Narrowed up thus, was this mission, to the worthy ones — the godly remnant of the people. But the nation having refused Jesus, and His atoning work having been accomplished on that cross, where His own people had placed Him by Gentile hands, all was now over on the ground of promises to Israel.**

**But Christ had risen; triumphant over all His foes. The boundless grace of God was set free to bless all men in righteousness through His work on the cross. The old enactment of Matt. 10 must now be changed. The sphere was too narrow for this grace to flow out; and as His footfall grew lighter, as it were, as He neared the top of Olivet, He turns round to a lost and ruined world of sinners — giving His disciples in the breadth of His heart, their new and fresh enactment. They were to begin at Jerusalem, where faith was dead: they were to carry the mission onwards to Samaria, where faith was corrupted for centuries; and to the uttermost parts of the earth, where there was no faith at all! And the grand answer to every state of man would be found in a *risen Christ*, of whom they were witnesses.**

**May we not say that these three concentric circles give us the key to the Acts of the Apostles, in the twenty-seven chapters which follow? The mission began at Jerusalem (Acts 2-7); it went out to Samaria (Acts 8), and to the uttermost parts of the earth, in principle, as to the whole creation, with Paul, in the chapters which follow, to the end (cf. Col. 1: 23).**

**These were His last words on earth His farewell words. “When he had spoken these things while they beheld he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly (atenizo) toward heaven, as he went up, behold two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1: 9-11). The special year of grace was to be ministered to the fig-tree: the Lord would not therefore yet take them definitely out of their Jewish hopes. These “men of Galilee” have their eyes diverted from the heavens towards which they were gazing. They were to keep their eyes downwards on the earth: Jesus would “so” come again to them; outside the cloud He would be seen; and His feet would stand upon the mount of Olives (Zech. 14: 4), from which He had just ascended in their sight. This would be His coming to Israel, with the ensigns of the kingdom, and earthly glory.**

**They could not yet see (by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven) the inside of the cloud, which Stephen saw, when, filled with the Spirit, he saw the heavens opened, as he steadfastly gazed (atenizo) into it. All then was over finally, and instead of angels diverting his eyes from the heavens, as in Acts 1, the Holy Ghost directs his eyes to heaven, as the sphere to which he now belongs, and Jesus, first sustaining him in the hands of his murderers, receives his spirit, and all closes with man on that ground for ever.**

**In Paul we will see further still, how he takes his origin from the glory of God, now seen in the face of Jesus Christ.**

**The Holy Ghost was sent down from heaven in Acts 2. The witnesses — in Acts 3 — Peter and John, go up to the temple “at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.” A certain man was daily carried, and laid at the “Beautiful” gate: a cripple from his birth; who begged his bread. This was the picture of Israel. “Beautiful” as was the spot where they were, they were like this lame beggar, and had never really walked; and were bereft too, of Israel’s blessings of “basket and store,” of “silver and gold.” Their history now, as under probation had closed, for the man was “above forty years old” (Acts 4: 22). Once there lay a paralytic at the pool of Bethesda (John 5) for thirty and eight years (the time of Israel’s wandering in the wilderness, until the brazen serpent was uplifted for them, in Num. 21) — their history was not then fully told, as in John 5. But now all had closed (Acts 3) as far as they were concerned. Forty years spoke of their moral end as a people under the old state of things.**

**But that “ninth hour” had witnessed another prayer, from the heart of Jesus on the cross, and darkness had covered the whole land, from the sixth to the ninth hour (Luke 23: 44) — the “hour of prayer” and of the “evening sacrifice” too (Dan. 9). At that hour Jesus had committed His spirit to His Father, and the veil was rent from the top to the bottom. Judaism was over; God was fully revealed; man’s sin had come to its fullest height, as he there stood face to face with God. But the sins of His people were borne at that moment, and the throne of righteousness eternally satisfied.**

**“Silver and gold have I none,” said Peter, “But such as I have I give thee; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” And immediately the “lame man leaped as an hart,” and he entered the temple “walking and leaping and praising God.” God was ready, through Jesus, to do this for the whole nation of Israel, had they then received His Son, and bowed in faith to His name.**

**Peter now addresses Israel (Acts 3: 12-26), offering them, on their repentance thus, that the Christ they had refused would return from the**

heavens, and that the times of restitution of all things of which the prophets had spoken, would come, and the nation would be fully blest. The answer to this is in the following chapters. In Acts 4, they put the two witnesses in prison — and in Acts 5, the whole twelve are also put there. Then in Acts 6, 7, Stephen, the last great witness, summed up their history as the rejecters of every deliverer God had ever sent. Joseph, they had sold into Egypt; Moses, they had asked “Who made thee a ruler and a judge?” They had slain the Just One, as their prophets had foretold; and now they resisted the Spirit of God! A broken law; stoned prophets; a slain Christ; and a resisted Spirit closed the tale. As they “stopped their ears and ran upon him,” they were like the “deaf adder, that stoppeth her ear” at the voice of “charmings, charming never so wisely” (Ps. 58). Stephen’s spirit passes away to Christ; and Christ, standing and ready to return, now sits down at God’s right hand, waiting till His enemies are made His footstool (Heb. 10).

Saul of Tarsus, then a young man, was present at Stephen’s death, and “kept the raiment of them that slew him.”

The Sanhedrim was becoming effete and old. Its energy, hitherto fiercely waged in vain against the cross, was growing feeble, when this young man came upon the scene. One of great learning and unspotted life — and probably of the highest caste amongst the Jews, excelling all amongst his people in the religion of the Pharisee; with perhaps the finest energy given to man — he had been welcomed by the great Sanhedrim of Israel, and entrusted with authority to extirpate the religion of the Nazarene! With a zeal for the God of his fathers beyond all others at that day, he stood by when the final stroke was put to the rejection of Jesus, in the stoning of the proto-martyr Stephen. And lest the murderers should be impeded, by their long Eastern garments, he “kept the raiment of them that slew him,” and “consented unto his death.”

The whole Christian assembly was then broken up in Jerusalem, and scattered everywhere, “except the apostles.” Saul must now carry out his commission elsewhere, and Damascus was to have been the next scene of his zeal.

But before I refer to this, I would note the touching grace which shines out in the eighth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

During the past history of Israel, God had sought to find a response in their heart, under the culture of His hand; whether, as under the law, or the prophets, the Baptist, or Christ. All had failed: there was no answer in their heart either to the thunderings of the law, or to the pleadings of the prophetic ministry; nor had the grace of Christ drawn forth other than the cry at the end, “Away with him; crucify him.” The final witness was seen

in the church, formed at Pentecost, and the voice of the Holy Ghost proclaimed the “wonderful works of God.” This followed, as we have seen, till the seventh chapter of the Acts closed the trial that sought for good out of Israel’s heart, or for an answer there to perfect goodness in the heart of God. Now the turning-point had come; and it would be no more sought to *produce* good from man’s heart; but to *put* good into it by a new ministry inaugurated in the conversion of Saul. But there was still something to be met which God would not pass over, and this we find in chapter eight of the Acts of the Apostles.

A child of Ham had traveled a toilsome journey across the deserts of Africa, from the abodes of Cush, and with a burdened heart, to “Judah, where God was known” (Ps. 76: 1, 2). He had heard of the God of Israel, and of the Holy city where He might be found. Up to this the stream of mercy from God’s throne had been poured forth upon Jerusalem. But Jerusalem, refusing the “sure mercies of David,” had diverted the stream. Still, it had not ceased to flow, though its course was changed. It turns its course now to unclean Samaria, and onward still, till it reached the deserts beyond. There, this Ethiopian was seen, returning to his own land, with his soul unsatisfied, for Jerusalem’s day had passed; she “knew not the day of her visitation.” But God is “a rewarder of those that diligently seek him,” and this seeking heart shall not have sought in vain. Philip draws near at the Spirit’s bidding, and hears this man read the prophet Esaias. Neither wealth nor learning, nor worldly place, had given him the riches he was about to find-treasured in the book which he had brought away from Jerusalem. Philip began at the same scripture which he read, and “evangelized to him Jesus.” The Person who alone could satisfy his soul was found, and he goes “on his way rejoicing.” Ethiopia had not stretched out her hand in vain to God! (Ps. 68). God did not change His governmental ways in placing the race of Ham under degradation (Gen. 9), in the blackened skin of the negro race: but while leaving all questions of government as they were, He makes — not the face — but the heart and conscience of the negro as white as snow, by the blood of the Lamb!

I read this chapter, in this light, as a parenthesis: thrown in between the first notice of Saul at Stephen’s death, and his journey to Damascus (Acts 9). It is, beloved, as if God would say, even when this solemn scene of martyrdom had closed for ever the ground on which He would have dealt with Israel; and when He was about to “cast them out of his lap,” and to inaugurate a new order of things — as if He would say, if there be a seeking soul in the wide earth, even the child of a cursed race, that soul shall not seek Me in vain. I am a rewarder of all that diligently seek Me.

But when I come to Saul I find the other side, illustrative of this new departure from the old ways; and in him is exemplified the word —

afterwards written by his own pen — “I am found of them that sought me not” (Rom. 10).

### Chapter 3:

#### The Vessel Called: The New Man

“He is a chosen vessel unto me” (Acts 9: 15).

We thus see the moment in the history of the people and of the world at which we have now arrived. All had closed up for ever in the way of grace presented to be received by Israel, and of Israel’s testing to prove what man is.

We must now see more than this in Saul, who comes in, not as a member of the chosen race, the seed of Abraham, but on the common ground of man, “dead in trespasses and sins.” Therefore in him we find embodied the sin of man as a race, in all its varied answers to the dealings of God.

We may possibly know that after God had tested man in paradise, and man had fallen, He tested him out of paradise as a sinner (whose back had been turned against God) for four thousand years. These trials, in broad lines, were first, by his *conscience* which he received when he fell, and he became lawless and unclean. Then under the *Law* — and he became a law-breaker; then by the ministry of Jesus in *grace*, whom he had crucified and slain; and lastly, by the *Spirit* of God sent down from heaven – whom he resisted. This was, with many details, the history of the probation of man.

If we now turn to a passage in 1 Tim. 1: 15, 16, we read,

This is a faithful [or trustworthy] saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth the whole [tihv Tcetoav makrothumianv] long-suffering for a pattern [or delineation] of them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.

Here he plainly occupies the first place, as “chief of sinners”; as the man, too, in whom the whole long-suffering of God was displayed; and as the pattern for all who should follow in the faith of Christ. This is worthy of our marked attention. Mark well the expression — “the whole long-suffering!” This embraces that great period between the fall of man-his departure from God at the first, when driven out of paradise — until that

**long-suffering absolutely closed in the rejected ministry of the Holy Ghost (Acts 7).**

**God's long-suffering since then is on other grounds (2 Peter 3: 9, 15). He has not counseled (μη me boulomenos) that any should perish; but that all should come (or be afforded a place) for repentance. And again, "The long-suffering of our Lord is salvation."**

**But, in Saul, outwardly spotless in life, we behold the man who could say:**

**1st, "I have lived in all good conscience unto this day."**

**2nd, "Touching the righteousness in the law [I am] blameless."**

**3rd, "I verily thought I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." And,**

**4th, when the martyr Stephen charged the Jews, saying, "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost, as your fathers did, so do ye," Saul was there, and Stephen's murderers placed their clothes at his feet, while he, consenting unto Stephen's death, kept the garments of them that slew him!**

**Here then we see the embodiment of the whole long-suffering of God in a man, immaculate, outwardly, as he was. Yet, while, with conscience inviolate, and the law's righteousness fulfilled, as far as he himself knew — he persecuted Christ, and with murderous zeal, resisted the Spirit of God: yea, more, a man who could claim, by the Spirit of God, to be, in a superlative manner, the chief of sinners. Because, in his mighty energy, he had undertaken a task, never surpassed in purpose by another, to wipe out the name of the Nazarene from the earth, as a man wipes a dish and turns it upside down!**

**Armed with the powers of the Sanhedrim, such as they were, and breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," this "cumberer of the ground," this fruitless Pharisee, doing evil on every hand, proceeds on his way to Damascus, and God's hand laid hold of the axe, and with one stroke cut down the tree! It had cumbered the ground too long — doing mischief to all around.**

**But now, let us, with retracing steps, examine the grounds of the attitude of Christ to him as presented in this scene.**

**His cross was "the judgment of the world: " man had placed Jesus there with wicked hands. It was the reply of his heart to the perfection of**

goodness in God. It was that in which “the thoughts of many hearts were revealed.” The heart of man was there; and the heart of God. The heart of Christ was there; and that of the poor convicted sinner; as well, too, as were the hearts of those who truly loved their Master; but who, when Satan’s power — the power of darkness — was over the minds of men, forsook Him and fled away.

But the moment Christ expired, the veil of the temple was rent in twain, as if God was waiting until that moment arrived, to shew that the judgment was so fully borne—that the distance between Him and a world of sinners was gone—that He could now come forth and kiss the prodigal in righteousness; and impart new life to the tree which He had cut down, while yet it cumbered the ground. Three days afterwards the tomb where Jesus had lain was rent, to shew that He who had removed this distance was also gone. But now (Acts 9), He rends the heavens and comes forth, proclaiming afresh His true and God-given name of “Jesus” — Jehovah the Savior: “I am Jesus,” the Nazarene, the Savior of My people from their sins.

Saul, and those that were with him, were journeying onwards to Damascus, with letters to the synagogues, that if he found any of “the way” (tip q 66ou) he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. At this time Christianity had no name. It had come into the world, but was not of it, nor of its ways. It was not Judaism with its ceremonies, instituted of God, though now corrupted by man. It was not heathenism, with its orgies of uncleanness and abomination. It was a strange and heavenly thing, governed by no principle that governed the world. And it had no name; but was termed “the way.” Several times in the Acts do we find it so named.\*

{\* Acts 9: 2; 19: 9, 23; 22: 4; 24: 22.}

Of one heart and one soul, and with great grace upon all, there was, in the hearts of those who had been cast out of all on earth, a heavenly purpose, a courage and joy which was not of man. The martyr Stephen, when being crushed to death by the stones of the multitude, could kneel down, and with yearning of soul for his slayers, and without one thought but for their blessing, pray for them, and looking up steadfastly to heaven, commit his spirit to Christ and pass away. Let its disciples be scourged by the rods, and with their feet fast in the stocks, and their bleeding backs on the cold ground of the innermost prison—they would sing praises to the Lord at midnight, instead of murmuring at their lot. Others could count it all joy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus. What name then could be found for such a creed? There was none! And therefore it was called “the way.” And indeed, we may add that it never got its name, till the mocking and witty Antiochians named the disciples “Christians” first, in their city.

Called such in sarcasm by man, it was accepted by the Spirit of God from that day. Still, as yet it had no name; and Saul, with his company, bent upon its extermination, turned towards Damascus to find out any there that were of “the way.”

In a moment all was changed. “At midday O King,” said the apostle, long afterwards, “I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me, and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest” (Acts 26: 13-15).

Here was the solemn end for his conscience, the terrible reply. Christ and Saul were face to face! Saul, in the full flush of energy, in enmity and violence against the Lord; and He, with the calm and touching reply of One whose very answer speaks of mercy. “I,” and “Thou!” Personally, individually, alone, and face to face, were Christ and this persecuting and injurious man: this “cumberer of the ground”; the dread devaster and waster of the church of God. “I am Jesus”: His mission fulfilled on earth; and in the brightness of the glory above, only seeking such objects as Saul, to display the virtues of salvation! Speak, Saul; let thy voice be heard; the day has not come, when those who refuse to answer now will be “speechless!”

“And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” It is not now the answer of another who knew not his own heart yet — “ Lord, *I will* go with thee,” etc. Nay, that was the will of man. It is rather, “Lord, what *wilt thou* have me to do?” This soul was converted to Christ. Here was the will of man broken; the will of God alone allowed. This was the instinct and out-speaking of obedience—the first characteristic of the new man. The old tree was cut down to its roots; new life was implanted, through the quickening voice of the Son of God — and at once it struggles for action, even before his conscience was at rest: nay, even while his soul was in an agony.

Blind for days, with the glory of that light; blind to all around, that he may see only what was within his own heart, no food nor drink passed his lips for three days: his soul in anguish might say, “Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord.” All this was produced in one little moment, and now to be made good in his soul by a gospel, dating from the throne of God; a gospel by which is declared the Father’s estimate of what His Son has done, when He had died, and risen, and ascended on high: the gospel of the glory of Christ. This son of Benjamin — ravening “like a wolf,” at midday-soon shall “divide the spoil.”

**“They led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.” There, in the isolation of repentance, in the house of Judas, in the street called “Straight,” upon his knees in prayer—so real, that the Lord calls attention to it in that touching interview with Ananias, in the words “Behold, he prayeth” — this was the second characteristic of the new man. Here was prayer — the expression of dependence, at once heard: this, too, as well as the desire of obedience, before his soul had found rest, or peace with God.**

**But Ananias — is he prepared for this full expression of mercy to such as Saul? Could he understand the new wine of this gospel of the glory, which could come forth and lay hold of such as he? Nay; he remonstrates, “Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints in Jerusalem, and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call upon thy name.” He cannot but suppose that all was a mistake. Impossible that one like this could be thus laid hold of, as a suited vessel to display the fulness of mercy. Saul himself is astonished. Even he would plead, “Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee and when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him” (Acts 22: 19).**

**The Lord’s reply to Ananias was this: “Go thy way, for he is a chosen vessel unto me . . . for I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.” And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house, and putting his hand— upon him, said, Brother Saul, the Lord has sent me, (Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest) that thou mightest look up, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.**

**Here we have the gospel, carried by Ananias, from the Lord to Saul, removing the fear of God which had filled his soul; speaking peace to his troubled conscience; withdrawing with a tender hand the barbed arrow of conviction; and the Spirit of God is now received by Saul as a seal of this message of mercy. His eyes, which had hitherto been blinded to all but the darkness within, are now enabled to “look up” (anablepses) to the source from which all had come — to the very face of Jesus Christ in glory.**

**Ananias then receives him by baptism: “And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.” This was a true conversion: the turning round of the whole man: the breaking of his will. The features, too, of the new life, the new man, are at once expressed: peace with God learned, and the Holy Ghost, sealing all home to his soul; and he could say, as more fully afterwards, “I believed, and therefore have I spoken,” as his voice is heard preaching Christ in the synagogues of Damascus.**

**This was the call of this “chosen vessel unto me.” Separated from the people of Israel, as well as from the Gentiles (Acts 26: 6), by his conversion from the glory of God on high, where Christ was; he is sent forth to be “a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee “to make known on earth, as sent from Christ in glory, all that he knew of Him who was there. Heavenly in his birth, and heavenly in his testimony, he is the pattern of all who should believe on Jesus afterwards, even from that moment, to life everlasting. Every believer since that day, has taken his birthplace from that glory. The condition of Christ at any moment, determines that of all who belong to Him; whether as incarnate; or risen; or ascended to the glory of God. Such have to bear witness that they belong to that scene, and to Him who is there; they have to witness that they have been taken out from the people or from the Gentiles, as neither of one, nor of the other, but as heavenly men, who have, like him, to be shown what they must suffer for His name’s sake, while living in, and passing through a world which rejected Him.**

**What a wondrous thought, that it is no good that God is seeking from man! He seeks rather those, who may be the more fitted to display that mercy in which He delights. To “make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us whom he hath called, not out of the Jews only, but also out of the Gentiles.”**

#### **Chapter 4:**

##### **The Vessel Set Free**

**“The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8: 2).**

**The guilt of a lifetime is often learned by the convicted soul, in an incredibly short space of time. Drowning men, who have been recovered, have said, that like a flash of light, their lives stood out before them; and the forgotten sins, which years before have been committed, seemed in one moment to rise before them, in their terrible category. As the language of “Moses, the man of God,” it would be: “Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance” (Ps. 90). The dead conscience awakes, quickened under the convicting rays of God’s light, and in a moment we stand before One who told us all things that ever we did.**

**When this is so, excuses are of no avail: no palliation is offered now. A man finds his soul laid bare, in the presence of infinite holiness. Hitherto, the conscience may have been asleep, with no thought of guilt, unless the vague sense that all is not well. Or the conscience may hitherto**

have been uneasy, yet no defined sense of guilt be there. Doubtless, Saul of Tarsus quailed before the words, “It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” The natural conscience of man feels this pricking and goading at times: its zeal and ardor is forced and unreal. There are compunctions in that principle which sits in judgment upon men’s actions (which conscience does), and though it be sought to silence its voice with freshened zeal, it never rests.

Were there no prickings of the natural conscience in Saul of Tarsus, when with upturned face, shining like an angel, the martyr Stephen gazed into the heavens, his body shattered by the stones of the multitude, and commended his spirit to Jesus? Were there none, when those pale faces of some who loved their Lord and Master—to save themselves, and those they loved, from prison and from death — blasphemed His name, compelled to it by this violent man? (Acts 26: 11). Ah, “the way of transgressors is hard,” and it was so with Saul. Yet, while natural conscience takes knowledge of these things., it does not follow that the soul is converted to God. Nay, rather, natural conscience drives a man away from Him. It drove Saul to greater excesses than before. It drove Adam away from God to hide under the trees of the garden; until his conscience felt the power of the word — “Adam, where art thou?” Then it was awakened, and he stood before God a convicted sinner. It drove Saul to seek to hide his real state under the religious zeal which hitherto filled his soul.

But when the voice of Jesus reached him in his mad career, his guilt stood forth in its terrible intensity, as he was brought to bay. And when he was allowed to read his own soul’s guilt in the presence of God, where no excuse could avail, then his conscience was purged and set at rest. But with him at this time, there may have been no question of his *nature* raised. This is not the question which comes foremost in the history of souls. The efforts to avoid the evil, and perform the good, to be well pleasing to the Lord, which follow true conversion, bring out this in its true and terrible depths. Saul has now to pass through this stage of the soul’s history, for his own deliverance, as a saint; I do not dwell here on the fact of its necessity afterwards for helping others — but as a vessel of mercy, which, from such a state, must be set free.

Probably during the three years, in which he “went down into Arabia, and abode at Damascus,” it was, when this took place. On this I do not dogmatize: but it was a needful process, whenever it occurred; and the result of it we find in the experimental learning of his nature, through the bitter anguish and exercises detailed in Rom. 7, much of which doubtless he had to learn experimentally for himself, as also the many lessons which he learned for the sake of other souls.

Here I would remark, that the experience of the closing verses of this well-known chapter (Rom. 7: 14-26) have a wider and larger significance, than perhaps many may be aware of. It is so framed by the Spirit of God, that no exercised soul, however deep may be its experience, and under whatsoever dealings and dispensations it is found, but may find expression in some way for that which it is passing through. In some cry or other there recorded, it will find what answers to that which it endures; though doubtless its *full* pressure could not be known until the light of Christianity had shone. I do not enter upon its details. Many have done this: some with lasting profit for many more. But I judge that it reaches far behind the exercises of a soul under the law, as expressed in the “ten words.”

The natural man may have lived — “touching the righteous that is in the law, blameless,” yet with his soul still unawakened. In overt acts its prohibitions had never been broken. But they never touched the tree — the root of “sin” within! There was one of its commands which reached his inmost soul at last: the command which said, “Thou shalt not lust,” and when that commandment came, expressing the holiness of the law, “sin revived, and I died.” “Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of lust, for without law, sin was dead”; it lay dormant; or unprovoked within his soul; until its unholiness was thus revealed.

Human nature fallen, too plainly speaks on every hand, not to have discovered to us the fact, that the moment a prohibition comes home to us — from the earliest childhood to our latest breath — at once is kindled within us the desire for the very thing which it forbade. A thousand instances and examples might be presented to prove this.

But there was “Law” in Paradise — before man fell, and man was a responsible creature before he broke away from God: he was responsible to obey the law-prohibiting his eating the fruits of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil — before he became a “transgressor.” God had revealed His ways to him, as a Giver, in the largest and widest munificence. Nothing was withheld from man. The ten thousand tributary streams which contributed to his happiness in Eden, spoke of a God who would withhold no good thing. “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat”; proclaimed the freeness and fullness of no niggard Hand. The man was to enjoy it all freely. One small interdict prohibited the eating of the fruit of one tree: a tree which marked a responsibility which, when accepted, would only entail evil: “In the day that thou eatest thereof, dying, thou shalt die.” It was that, in observing which, he expressed that his will was subject to God who had placed him there, and surrounded him with every creature blessing.

This is the principle of law. An interdict will always prove a will in the person addressed, either subject or insubject to another. The smallest interdict is sufficient for this. It is the way to discover whether another is subject to you or not. If insubject, the authority of that other is refused, and as a consequence two wills are opposed, the one to the other: while the man that is tested, owns in conscience, that God has a right to be obeyed.

Now Satan did not begin by calling attention to the blessedness with which the man had been surrounded: nor to the character of God as “giving all things richly to enjoy.” Rather does he seize upon the prohibition calling attention to the interdict alone — “Yea, hath God said, Ye *shall not* eat of every tree of the garden?” whereas, God had said, “Ye *shall* eat of every tree.” The grand master-stroke of the serpent was, to instil lust into the soul, and distrust of God; to cast a suspicion on the fulness and freeness of His nature to bestow. This was the poison of the serpent, which has permeated humanity ever since that day. It was done before ever there was a sin committed. The devil had stepped in, and sown distrust in man’s heart; creating a suspicion in the soul; and separating man and his Creator by the loss of faith in Him.

This is what men do between each other now-a-days, to reach some end they have in view. I dare say they may not perhaps think so: but the largest portion of the sorrows between men, or even between brethren, are caused by some hint, behind backs; or some whispered story, to which the heart of others is ready to lend an ear; which causes distrust to spring up between souls. Distrust engendered, dislike follows, but more especially in the one who has wronged the other. *It is exceedingly hard to trust a heart you have wronged.* “A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it”; and “He that repeateth a matter, separateth very friends”; and “He that did his neighbor wrong, thrust him away,” etc. These passages (kindred in their character) are but the workings of this principle of evil. Hence the true saying, “The injured may forget; the injurer, never!”

To restore man to perfect confidence in God: and to meet the outrage on His nature, was the work of Christ at the “end of the world.”

Man, then, was a responsible creature before he fell. Distrust of God and lust were instilled into the soul of the woman. Will was put forth against: God — and in the case of Adam, high-handed will (for “*he was not deceived*” (1 Tim. 2: 12); and man fell. A breach, as wide as the poles, came in at once between God and man; an abyss, impossible to repair, or to recross. Man became as “one of us,” said the Lord, “to know good and evil” (Gen. 3: 22). This he never can unlearn. He never returns to innocence again.

What, then, is “to know good and evil”? It is something which is said of Godhead too; “as one of us,” we read “to know good and evil”! It is to sit in judgment, and pass sentence, on good or evil which we find in our own souls. Of David the king, it was said, by the wise woman of Tekoah, “as an angel of God, so is my Lord the king, to discern good and bad” (2 Sam. 14: 17). This in reference to the decisions of judgment. So of Solomon in 1 Kings 3: 9; so of Israel, Deut. 1: 39; see also Heb. 5: 14.

This is the work of conscience: to take know-ledge of the evil practiced by a will opposed to God; to sit in judgment upon it, and to condemn: and, alas! to apprehend the good, while opposed to it; to approve of it, without the power to perform. This was fallen man with a conscience. Responsible before he fell; distrusting God; and transgressing in will His command. An ability, even when fallen, to pass sentence upon his own actions, by the knowledge of good and evil: good that he had not the power nor desire to practice, and evil that he was not able to avoid! Then, at last, he is driven out of the presence of God; for he had lost his place on such a ground for ever. These three things marked his state. Distrust of God; sin committed in that distrust; and his place irrecoverably lost. These three things are reversed by the gospel. His confidence is restored by faith in Him as a Savior; his sins removed, which had been committed in distrust; and he is brought into a new place in Christ before Him.

The soul when thus awakened, finds these great primal enmities which separated between God and man, wrought upon, in deep and solemn exercises. The sense of responsibility as a sinner who had eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, at enmity in his mind by wicked works; the knowledge of good unfulfilled, and of the evil of his nature exposed; powerless, too, for all but evil ; the sense, in some measure, differing according to circumstances, of good in God Himself; and a responsibility to set itself, as it supposes, right with Him. These things are forced on the soul in terribly bitter lessons.

Nothing in man’s words can equal those of the soul’s anguish in Rom. 7.

I am carnal,\* sold under sin; for that which I do, I allow not: for that I would, that do I not; but what I hate that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law, that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

{\*There are two words in the original tongue for “carnal” (sdrkivos and sarkiko ) the only difference being one letter. They are found in 1 Cor. 3: 3 and Rom. 7: 14, and elsewhere. One word is applied to the *standing* of an awakened [quicken] man, still “in the flesh,” that is, having the

sense of his responsibility, as a child of Adam, and no deliverance before God. This is Rom. 7. The other is applied to saints, whose practical *state* was not spiritual: they “walked as men” (1 Cor. 3). This latter is opposed to the normal state of a saint as a “spiritual” man. We find in the context (1 Cor. 2, 3) the “natural,” the “spiritual,” and “the carnal man.” The first a man merely with a natural soul unquickened: the second, the normal state of the saint; and the third, the saint walking after the flesh.

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh), dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good, I find not. For the good which I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do, that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God, after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members.

Mark, reader, this struggle between “good “ and “evil,” by a soul under the sense of responsibility, or, “in the flesh.” Yet it is not his guilt which troubles, but his state. The deep anguish not only takes in all this, but goes back to the first spring of departure of man from God. All the roots of its being are laid naked, and open, before Him with whom it has to do. How varied are the ways of God to lead the soul into this struggle; that it may learn to struggle no more ; that it may learn that every effort, every trial, every struggle, as long as they continue, are only the more distinct proofs that it is not yet arrived at that point where, when ceasing to struggle, it surrenders; and then only finds, that this surrender; is liberty. It is then set free.

I forbear here, to deduce examples of these exercises and their end, as found in the word. Many are to be found there; many, too, may be interpreted every day by scripture, as they are seen in the people of God.

The discovery of an evil nature, by a saint, suggests at once, that it should be subdued. The desires and longings of his renewed soul, when felt by him, suggest at once, that they should be gratified; and that God had implanted it there to that end. The sense, too, of responsibility, that both these suggestions should find their answer somehow, lays the ground of this painful struggle. It is not conflict, properly so called, at all. It is the effort which only ends in defeat, more painful still. It leads into captivity, but does not set free. But when deliverance comes — not victory (victory would be my own meritorious act, deliverance that of Another), it comes as a double deliverance — answering to the “good” which it found itself incapable of producing, and to the evil which it was impossible to avoid. The soul must be able to look up, rejoicing in liberty with God, and it must be able to look down into its own heart, and be able to produce the

good which it longed to perform, and have power over the working of a sinful nature, the flesh," within.

Here it is that we find a defect in our souls. Many *have* got that liberty which enables them to look up to God: they can say, "All there is well." But are we all free from the power of the evil within, when we examine our own hearts? Nay; the very joy and thankfulness which the soul experiences in being free in looking up, makes too often careless, alas! about the other. This may be through ignorance; indeed, it may frequently be so. We need to be taught that there is a freedom of the soul, which is filled with the Spirit, in which it may walk each day absolutely apart from all the workings of the flesh, or the desires of the mind: such a liberty, indeed, as if there was no evil to combat there at all—a freedom which brings forth fruit to God.

It is not that there will not be conflict to the end of our pathway here; it is not that "the flesh" will cease to be an occasion of constant watchfulness. Nor is it that "sin in the flesh" can ever cease to exist, while we are here on earth, though "condemned" when Christ died. But let us remember Paul's path as a saint, a vessel chosen to God; one who walked in such a way (and in this he would join others also), saying, "It is God that worketh in you, both *to will* and *to do* according to his good pleasure!" It is no more *then*, "the good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do." Nay, the "willing" and the "doing" are accomplished by souls set free; vessels in whom God can work, and wield according to His good pleasure.

For what, beloved reader, is a vessel? Suppose you placed one on the table at your side, have you not two thoughts in your mind as to its use? You place it there to *hold* what you put in it; this is one thought. Then the other is, that it may be held by the hand of another. Had it a will or a motion, these uses would be hindered.

And so with God's vessels of mercy; they must be will-less, and motionless too; they are to be filled with that which He puts in them, and to be held and used by His hand. It is only in the measure that our wills, our motions, our thoughts, are set aside, that we are really vessels; and, as such, fitted and meet for the Master's use.

But this is not our present subject. Here we are discussing the deliverance of the vessel, so that it may be free in soul with God, and free, too, from the workings of the will of the flesh, and have power to bring forth fruit to God; that on the one hand it may realize its place "in Christ," and on the other, that "Christ liveth in me."

I remember, years since, visiting at the bedside of an aged saint. We spoke for some time on general things as Christians. I asked her if she had ever thought of Christ who was in glory, 'living' in her weak body, on its bed of suffering? I have not forgotten the strange look she gave, as the thought flashed upon her mind, for the first time, as it appeared to me. "Ah," she said, "Christ living in me!" It seemed a wonderful revelation to her soul: the body, as the vessel — so much in the power of this, that Christ, not self, lived. "Nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. Is not this even a greater thought, though the converse of that word of Paul, "To me to live is Christ"? The latter was the motive of his life—the spring in his soul; the former, the result of this, " Christ liveth in me."

This is freedom indeed. "The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free." We speak of the law of gravitation, the law of nature. We mean the natural tendency of each which governs its actions; as the apple falls to the ground: it does not rise when disengaged from the tree. This thought in its own character, is here. That "law," — the tendency in which it must move — "of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, hath made me free." It lifts the soul out of that other law of sin, that which governs the nature of the flesh; and also, that law of death. *It* has become the law — the natural issue, of *life*, which He breathed on His own when He arose — a quickening Spirit — the second Man — the risen Lord.

Thus, may we not say, the soul finding its responsibility — "under law," as having eaten of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil," — passes through these deep lessons, that it may discover experimentally, the depths of a ruined nature — "the flesh" — which sprang up in man's heart when he broke away from God. But now set free, it finds too, that it has reached in Christ, the "Tree of life": the "law of the spirit of life" in Him, setting it wholly "free from the law of sin and death." Free, too, in that two-fold way which we have in measure discussed. Namely, free in soul in looking upward at God; free to enjoy in the present, and in hope, all that He is. And free from the workings of "the flesh" within. Self is ignored, and the life lived in the flesh is lived by the faith of the Son of God: that is, faith in Him as object, and power, and all. The springs and motives of such a life do not spring from self, but from "Christ"; and thus only bring forth fruit to God: being filled with the fruit of righteousness, which is by Jesus Christ, to His praise and glory.

## Chapter 5:

### Why Did God Permit the Entrance of Evil?

"By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin" (Rom. 5: 12).

Before examining God's ways further with "a chosen vessel," it will be profitable to examine the testimonies of the word as to the "new man, God's "new creation," in Christ Jesus, which is thus being developed in the vessel of mercy.

The terms "old man" and "new man" are very definitely used in scripture. I judge that neither term can be used of an individual *as such*. That is, an individual could not say, "I am the old man"; nor, "I am the new." The terms are generic and comprehensive, embracing — the first — all that we were "in Adam"; and the second — all that believers are "in Christ." Nor do I find that scripture will allow us to say that we have the "old man" in us — while it teaches most fully, that we have "the flesh" in us to the end; if it works, we read "with the flesh (we serve) the law of sin" (Rom. 7: 25). These terms will come out more fully, as we proceed with the examination of the truths now before us.

One great and important question here arises, reverting to the condition of man as first created of God. That is, the solemn question of the entrance of moral evil into this world. How frequently is such mooted by the sceptic; and as frequently found without reply, in the mind even of the believer in Christ! The question is Why did God permit the entrance of sin? Why leave it a possibility? And in this is embraced the entrance of death by sin.

How immensely important to possess clearly an answer to this stupendous question; one that will leave the infidel without excuse, and, at the same time, settle firmly in divine truth the minds of those who believe. I do not here go further than its entrance into *this present world* on which we live. For we know from scripture that *sin* had already entered the universe, possibly through Satan's rebellious fall, once an "anointed cherub" (Ezek. 28). Nor do I comprehend the fall of the angels that had sinned, and who are reserved in Tartarus (2 Peter 2: 4), until the judgment of the great day. I confine the question to the entrance of sin into *this world*; and that of death — its consequence — having passed upon man — the race of Adam alone. Death may have been, and was possibly, there — even in *this world*, in its previous periods of change, during the ages and cycles which had passed prior to its having been shaped by God's hand, in the six days' work, into an abode for man.

I accept what is now pretty well known by the student of the word, that in the term which opens the book of Genesis — "In the beginning," as well as in the next clause of the verse, God has left it open for the possibility of millions of years to have elapsed since that "beginning" was, when God created the heavens and the earth; and thus time sufficient was allowed, to form the strata of the earth, as it is now found, before the work of the six days was accomplished, in the varied ages

which had passed, and through the many catastrophes which had probably taken place. For we read in the next clause of the verse, that the earth (not the heavens), was without form and *waste (tohu)*, having probably fallen into chaos. God had not created it in this state, as Isaiah testifies (Isa. 45: 18). “He created it *not waste*” — the same Hebrew word as used in Gen. 1.

We are aware that there are traces of death to be found in the fossils and petrifications of extinct animals, of species now unknown, in the strata formed by the ages gone by. This is admitted most fully; but it does not interfere with our present question in any wise.

I take therefore, the statement of Rom. 5: 13, as the basis of the great question now before us: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered *the world*, and death by sin; and so death passed upon *all men*, for that all have sinned.” The first part of this important passage confines the entrance of *sin to this world*; and the second limits the passing of *death*, as a consequence of sin on man; without noticing, in the former case, the possible entrance of sin into other spheres; and, in the latter, the fact of death passing upon other than the human family.

Let us now turn to Gen. 1, 2, where we have the account of the creation of man,

And Elohim saith, we will make man [Adam] in our image, after our likeness, and they shall have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the heavens, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every reptile that is creeping on the earth.

So Elohim created the man [Adam] in his own image, in the image of Elohim created he him; male and female, created he them.”\*

{\*Translation of Gen. 1 from the Hebrew, by G. V. Wigram.}

There are two distinct words used here by God, very different in their signification; they are “image” and “likeness.” Another has given valued thoughts on the use assigned to each, to which I would add some remarks. How accurately this usage is maintained throughout the word of God, is amongst the wonders of its perfections.

The word “image” is sometimes, in human language, used to signify the likeness in one for another; as one would say, ‘such an one is the very image of his father’ — meaning that he is an exact likeness; but this is not the way it is used in general, in scripture. There it is used, rather in speaking of that which is set to *represent* another, without having any reference to its being like or unlike, in features, or otherwise, to the

person represented. As we read of Christ being “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1: 15). And man being “the image and glory of God” (1 Cor. 11: 7), etc.; the word image being here used, as fully representing another, as the image of Jupiter, of Caesar, etc. Now “likeness” is different from this: its meaning is simple and readily understood, as describing a person being like another, that is, having the same traits of character and features, etc.

The man was created then in both these ways. He was set as the great center of an immense system, fully to represent God, as His *image*. The dominion of the vast system was his. All created things were under him. All intelligences, his wife included, were to look up to him as God’s representative in that sphere. God alone was over him; all else being subject to man. But he was also in the likeness of God. He was pure as his Creator made him, he was very good: he was sinless too, absolutely without evil: he was from God, to be for God, and thus like Him, and fit, therefore, to be His image — to represent Him; and to be the center to which all should look up; and with an intelligent will; his choice also was free.

But again we ask, Why did God leave moral evil a possibility? Or, in other words, why permit the entrance of sin? Could He not have created a being, which could not fall? One who could only do what was good and right?

The answer is plain. Because, if He would create a glorious creature — man, after His own image, and in His likeness, free to choose either good or evil, and not a creature governed by a mere chain of instinct, as the birds and beasts around him — He must leave the entrance to him of evil, a possibility, though not a necessity.

If man, as God created him, could not choose evil, then he had no choice at all: and he would be no more virtuous in doing good, than the mere animal which follows the instincts of its nature. And because, in such a case, he *must* do good, he would be no more virtuous in doing so than they.

Either God *must refrain*, — we write the words with reverence — from creating such a being, of this high and glorious order of existence, with a free choice and will; or He must leave the question of evil a possibility to him. Alas, for the result! of which a fallen race speaks with such terrible reality. He chose the evil and refused the good; and the moment he exercised his choice he became a sinner. Man, created in the image of God, fell from that pinnacle of eminence, never to be restored to it again. Fallen Adam begets a son in his *own* likeness after *his* image (Gen. 5: 3), while unfallen Adam had been created “in the likeness of God” (Gen. 5: 1).

Observe, in all this there was no thought of man being *holy*: nor could it have been said as afterwards of the “new man,” that he of Him, was “created in righteousness and holiness of truth” (Eph. 4: 24). God is holy — absolutely so. But holiness is relative, inasmuch as it supposes evil to exist, and implies absolute separation from it. This could not be said of man, as God created him. He was pure, and perfectly good, but evil was not for him in existence, until he chose evil, when presented in the form of a temptation, and thus he threw aside the authority and will of God, who had given it to him. So of righteousness, which also presupposes the existence of evil.

How everything in the sinner now depends on his will, in having to do with God; his salvation and all, depend upon the surrender of his will to Him. “Ye *will* not come unto me, that ye might have life” (John 5: 40). And “Whosoever *will*, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22: 17). Now Christ is said to be the “image of the invisible God” (Col. 1: 15); the “image of God” Himself. (2 Cor. 4: 4). This is because he fully represents God; but He is never said to be in His “likeness”; simply because He is God Himself, therefore not merely *like* Him. But it is said that He came in the “*likeness* of sinful flesh,” and rightly so; because He was *not* sinful flesh at all. See Rom. 8: 3.

He too, had His own perfect will; and while tested to the uttermost in life and in death, it was always subject to God’s. “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work” (John 4: 34).

This obedience and subjection found its perfection fully in death. He “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2: 8). Mark, He was not subject to death, as the first man, through his sin. With him it was the penalty of disobedience, and the ending, by God’s sentence, in death, of will in him to the uttermost. But it was there that the perfection of Christ’s surrender of a perfect will in obedience, shone out most fully. Or rather, may we not say? the perfect blending of a perfect will in Him with that of God, in obedience unto death itself.

## Chapter 6:

### The New Man

“Created in righteousness and holiness of truth” (Eph. 4: 24).

We now come to the New Testament, where we find a gradual unfolding of God’s ways as to the new man”; indeed, we may say a new kind of man altogether from the first man. I would just draw attention to some of the salient points which are found there in the three great epistles, which, taken together, would give us the completeness of God’s

thoughts, and His purposes in the new creation in Christ. I refer to Romans, Colossians, and Ephesians.

The first of these epistles unfolds in detail, the moral closing up of the history of the first man, as fallen, under every advantage, and after every trial from God whether without law, as being proved lawless; or under law, as a law breaker, and this, subsequent to the possession of privileges and advantages, which were before the special dealings of God took place in a separate people. The end of the trial and time of testing was, when Christ came and was refused. "All (now) had sinned," in looking back, and "come short of the glory of God" — the measure now, and standard by which all would be judged. Man had been set up in perfection as a creature, and had fallen; could he now meet the burning rays of God's glory? On this, as on all other grounds, all was now over, with the old man for ever. God must now either end that man, whose will was set up against Him, by judgment in righteousness: or reveal Himself in sovereign grace through righteousness, in virtue of the work of Christ. I do not here, of course, enter upon this work of the cross, and the death, and resurrection of Christ; only looking at it, as the means, whereby God would close morally for faith the history of man in righteousness, and begin His new creation in His Son — as head of a new race.

The section of the epistle in which God first shows how the race was all under judgment, and guilty before Him, ends in verse 19 of chapter 3. We then find, immediately following, in Rom. 3: 20, etc., how the righteousness of God is now manifested *for* the sinner, in God's raising up His Son from death and setting Him on high; and not *against* him, as standing in his own responsibility. And this, too, "by faith in Jesus Christ," personally; and "by faith in his blood," as the means by which the righteousness of God was vindicated against sin. He thus stands in perfect justification from all his *guilt*.

But his *state* as a sinner in the first Adam is not thus ended. When we pass that section which deals in all details with his guilt, and which ends at Rom. 5: 11, we are introduced to the manner, in which our whole state is dealt with, and closed in the death of Christ. We read in Rom. 6,

Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

There is nothing in the Romans about the "new man" in any wise. But there is the crucifixion of "our old man" fully set forth, in order that the body, or totality, of sin might be set aside. The nearest approach to anything positive on this head is found in the expression of Rom. 7. "I delight in the law of God after the *inner man*," but it goes no further. While fully closing up the questions of our guilt and state, it goes no

further, but while showing *Christ* risen, the believer is not said to be risen with Him. For this, we must have the next step, in the Epistle to the Colossians.

There is in Romans a new will shown as either struggling against the old — the flesh, in Rom. 7; or else, when the soul is set free, walking in “newness of spirit,” and “newness of life.” Romans gives us therefore, the crucifixion of “our old man” with Christ.

Now Colossians stands between Romans and Ephesians in doctrine. In the former, man is seen as alive in sins; the heart is going out after all its lusts unhindered. What then, must be done? He must be brought down into death — the death of Christ — to have his history closed: “Knowing this, that our old man is co-crucified with him.”

In Ephesians, we have man “dead in trespasses and sins,” and consequently another kind of dealing must come in. Unlike the Romans, where he must be brought down into death, because alive in sins, life must come in positively to quicken a dead soul in that condition, and to raise him up out of it; and all must be a new creation in Christ Jesus, who is in heavenly places.

Colossians, therefore, as we might suppose, would take in both sides—dead in sins, and alive in them. This it does, looking back on our Romans condition, and looking forward to our Ephesians condition in Christ Jesus. Therefore we read, “In the which (sins, etc.) ye walked when ye *lived* in them” (Col. 3: 7). And we also read, “And you, being *dead* in your sins,” etc. (Col. 2: 13). The saint therefore, is looked upon as “dead with Christ” from the elements of the world, as well as dead to sin, and dead to the law; and also risen with Christ, and though not sitting in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, he is seeking those things “above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.” He is, therefore, down here on earth.

This being so, he has not reached his new place with God in Colossians, though he is suited to the place as in life, and as risen with Christ. He has a new status, but not a new place. We would not therefore find, here in the epistle, the “new man” spoken of as in Ephesians. Indeed it is remarkable, that when it is apparently spoken of in Eph. 3, it falls far short of the full thoughts of Eph. 4: 24; different words being used in the Greek original; and the word man (—<2DTB@H) being omitted altogether (Eph. 3: 9).

We have, therefore, a different word for “new,” used in Colossians, as compared with Ephesians. In the former it is <X@H; in the latter 6"4<`H: the latter signifying what I may term familiarly by the graphic

expression 'brand new!' a kind of man never seen or heard of before;<sup>23</sup> while the former would be entirely new, but does not imply a new kind or genus, as the latter would.

We find, however, that the knitting up of both scriptures, Eph. 4 and Col. 3 is done by the Spirit of God in remarkable wisdom, by the use of these two words, being found in the construction of the verbs, "renewed" in Eph. 4: 23, and Col. 3: 10; that in Ephesians being compounded with the "new" of Colossians; and that in Colossians with the new of Ephesians.<sup>24</sup> Wondrously wise are the scriptures of our God!

We may also here notice what is still the more striking and instructive, namely, that the word "putting off" is quite different in each epistle; in fact, there is no affinity at all between the words in Greek. In Colossians we have a word which signifies "passing out from under," or, "being divested of" something; as a garment. In Ephesians we have not this, but its being absolutely "laid aside," or "laid down." I might take off my garment in one action; and I may also, by another action, lay it aside when I have taken it off. We shall presently understand the reason why it should be thus in each epistle, coupled with what we have seen already.

There is an illustration of the use of these two words in the LXX of Lev. 16: 23, where Aaron, having finished the work of the great day of atonement, clothed in the white linen garments, first "cuts off" those garments, and then leaves them in the tabernacle of the congregation. I would also refer the English reader to Acts 7: 58, here the verb of Eph. 4: 24 and translated "putting off" — which should be, more correctly, "laying aside" — is used by Stephen's murderers, who "laid down" their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul; and also to Heb. 12: 1, where the same word is translated "lay aside," as to "every weight," etc.

In fact, while Colossians gives us the *subjective* side of the "new man" (what is practical life in which the saint lives here while walking on earth), Ephesians gives us the *objective* side of the "new man," as showing us what he is on high. Colossians being rather Christ in us.

In Romans, therefore, we find "our old man *crucified*": in Colossians the "old man parted with," and the *subjective* side of the "new man." While in Ephesians we have the old man wholly "laid aside," where we are seen as all that we are in Christ — the objective presentation of the full 'brand-new' man: an absolutely new creation in Christ.

It is not Adam innocent, nor Adam fallen, and righteousness under law, but a positively new creation.

It has been noted that the  $\epsilon$  of Eph. 4: 24, and the  $\chi$  of Col. 3: 10, are characteristic of each epistle. In Ephesians it is a new creation in *contrast* with an old; in Colossians it is a *practical* new life in which we live; though the care is taken to show that it is a new thing entirely, formed of God.

We may read vv 21-23, thus: "If so be ye have heard him, and in him have been instructed, as is truth in Jesus (namely) your having laid aside, according to the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the lusts of deceit. But be made new [that is, absolutely new] in the spirit of your mind. And your having been invested with the new man [that is, the brand-new thing] which is after God, [or, according to God] having been created in righteousness [not innocence] and holiness of the truth."

This "holiness of the truth," stands in contrast with the "lusts of deceit" of v. 22. The deceit of the serpent having produced the lusts of the heart at the beginning; and righteousness being the basis of God's new creation, he is formed — created — in it, and in holiness (absolute separation from evil) of the truth, which has begotten him.

As to the passage in Colossians corresponding and filling up on the practical side, we may read: "Your having been invested with the new" ( $\chi$ ) he does not write "man" ( $\alpha$  —  $\beta$  — this word only being used of the full absolute thing in Eph. 4 — "which is continuously being made new toward perfect knowledge, according to the image of the Creator of him."

Now remark again, that in Colossians we have "*Christ*" as the example of all for the new (man). Your life is hid with him in God (v. 3). The *characters* of Christ as the elect of God, presented as forming and practiced (vv. 12 and 13). The *word* of Christ is to dwell in him richly (v. 16). In fact, as v. 11 states, "Christ is all, and in all." While in Ephesians it is "*God*," and the nature of God is presented as the standard of all. The "new man" there is created after God (v. 24). He is to be an imitator of God (Eph. 5: 1). To walk in *love* (which Christ showed fully) and walk as children of *light* — God's two essential characteristics, what He is (Eph. 5: 2 and 8).

Again, we have more: we have in Colossians the "*image* of him that created him." In Ephesians we have rather "*likeness*" to God Himself pressed ( $\epsilon$   $\nu$  2,  $\chi$ ).

Here, therefore, we come back to these words as at the first, "likeness" and "image"; the new man of Ephesians being morally like God — seen in his true place as in Christ in heaven and as objectively

presented to us there in Him. Therefore, when we come into the practical life — the subjective side, in Col. 3 we have “image,” because there he walks on earth at the present, but is morally to represent God, who was fully represented in Christ Himself, and who is “all.”

Then again, as to the exhortation of each epistle connected with the “new man.” We find in Col. 3: 9, “Lie not one to another.” There it is the practical life. But in Eph. 4: 25 we have, “Wherefore having laid aside lying, speak truth” to each other. Here, with the old man who has been laid aside, goes the thing itself-lying. Not merely is the exhortation, as in Colossians, to refuse the practice of it; but the thing is looked upon as gone here, and the exhortation takes the positive side, exhorting to speak the truth, etc., as in the other parts of the context in the epistle. There alone, too, have we the conflict of the saint in its true and only measure. Satan is again on the scene in a special way, to oppose this man of a new creation, as at the first he did in the old. On this I do not enter here.

## Chapter 7:

### The Vessel Emptied of Human Strength

“Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cor. 12).

In another connection, which we may hope to refer to again, the apostle Paul writes thus: “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not from us” (see Greek). I cite this now with reference to the end of the verse. God never gives intrinsic power to His saints. “God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God” (Ps. 62: 11). If this is important in the lives of the saints, how much more, if I may draw a distinction, is it for those who are called upon to serve in the word. Yet in every service and in every action in the lives of God’s people, the power of God is needful, that they may walk and serve and work and toil in the energy of the Spirit, and in the expression of the life of Jesus in their mortal flesh.

For this end, another character of discipline takes place after deliverance is known. This may be more or less spread across their lives, but one absolutely needful to produce that condition in which the power of Christ works: which is, as we read, “made perfect in weakness.”

The object of this discipline is not easily distinguished at first by the majority of saints. It is more often divined and felt by those who serve outwardly in the word, than in the ordinary pathways of the people of God. It frequently happens, too, that it mixes itself up with exercises before deliverance is known, and is not easily separated from these, in the

analysis of the soul's history. However, although we may confound them experimentally in ourselves, scripture distinguishes them most clearly. It is only as we grow in the apprehension of the word, and of the mind of the Spirit there, that we are able to give to each its place and its true interpretation. We only know in part, at best, while here; but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away; and then shall we know even as also we are known.

Saul had served amongst the saints for some years, before he was separated to the work to which he had been called. This took place formally and definitely at Antioch (Acts 13), where he was sent forth by the Holy Ghost on his first mission amongst the Gentiles; but going, as he always did, "to the Jew first." We find this mission described at length in chs. 13 and 14 of the Acts of the Apostles. The vessel had been prepared in quiet, and now in going forth into that wider harvest field, he needed special dealings of the Lord to strip him finally and fully from every thought of *quasi* strength in man. The very success of the work, and the power of God manifested towards souls, needed corresponding dealings to countervail the tendencies of the flesh. It ever seeks to intrude, and hinder the work of God. Often, in apparently insignificant ways, its intrusion is felt by one's self or by others: like the "dead flies" which "cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savor."

It is therefore to be expected that special dealings of God should be discerned distinctly at the opening of this great world-wide service of the apostle, commencing here. After the early part of the work is described, and that at Antioch in Pisidia took place (Acts 13: 14, etc.); he now leads the band of servants, first to Iconium (Acts 14: 1, etc.), and from thence to Derbe and to Lystra. Here he was stoned, and drawn out of the city, as they supposed him to be dead. I refer to this to connect this moment with what he reveals of his life in 2 Cor. 12.

Having no visible proof of his being called to serve the Lord, like Peter and the rest, who were appointed by Him in life; he must prove, as all true ministry must from that day, its divine origin by the effect of it upon souls. Consequently his ministry was constantly called in question. The servant must expect this now-a-days also, as a consequence, when he seeks to serve according to God's mind, and as following in the line of those gifted from Christ in glory.

This took place in a very painful manner at Corinth. The jealousies of others so wrought against him there, where the chiefest of his work had been accomplished, that he was forced to speak of himself very prominently (always a painful and trying subject), and to tell of services, of toils, and of sorrows, seldom (perhaps never) equaled by those of any other man. The folly of others gives us here a glimpse of an unparalleled

life of devotedness to Christ and the church. “Are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool, I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness” etc. (2 Cor. 11: 23-27).

This is what he had done for the Lord! But what had the Lord done for Paul? “It is not expedient for me, doubtless, to glory, for [yap] I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord” (2 Cor. 12: 1). And here he discloses what had happened to him “above fourteen years ago.” The scene at Lystra, when he was left for dead, was more than probably the moment when what is recorded here took place.\*

{\*I see no reason to question the chronology of the Authorized Version here.}

If 2 Cor. 11 gives a history which might clothe Paul with honors, and give grounds for him to boast: ch. 12 gives us a dealing of the Lord which reduced him to “nothing.” No doubt it was necessary that the leading man in the Christian course should be introduced into things which it was not lawful to reveal. It was needful, too, to strengthen him in a special way — giving him to realize, above others, what was the portion of all: the possible state for every saint to enjoy, though, in the state of things, unspeakable also. But to follow this, and consequent upon it, the discipline came which had the effect of emptying Paul of every vestige of human strength, reducing him to the condition of a will-less, powerless vessel, so that he might be fitted thus to be wielded and used by the hand of the Lord who did so.

“It is not,” said he, “expedient for me, doubt-less to glory, for I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew [hoida] a man in Christ, above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body I cannot tell ; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man . . . how that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not possible for man to utter. Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in my weaknesses.”

Here was the realization given him of all that he was, both as a man in Christ, and of the sphere of blessing where his portion lay; and of those

things which he heard there, which human language could not express. The measure of this common portion of all His saints, may be realized variously by each; but the portion is the same for all. Upon this I do not enter. Each, too, may minister in part of that which he consciously possesses. But if so, the special dealings of God ensue to check the evil of the flesh, which according to the measure of the revelation rises *pari passu* with its abundance.

This discipline is suited and adapted to each several soul. This is the reason why, I doubt not, that all speculations as to what was the nature of Paul's thorn in the flesh, end in nothing. God has wisely seen fit to leave it untold. Were it made known, we would have perhaps settled that it was not ours, and then have left it there. To have left it untold, gives us to see that there was a great principle of God's dealings, seen in this man's case, but applicable to all. Each would have his suited "thorn": the very thing that would counteract his natural tendency; and so act as to strip him of every pretension to power, and break any fancied strength of man.

We see this on every hand, we see it better in our own soul's history. For it is not always that another is permitted to know the secret thorn which rankles in the breast, such as that we would give the world to remove, ere we know the "end of the Lord." He presses home the "stake" (ax6.Xo\*) which pins us to the earth, as it were, in very powerlessness. You see this at times, for instance, in incongruous marriages. The soul is worn away, especially in a sensitive, spiritual mind ; and there is no earthly power which can change the sorrow, and heavenly deliverance is withheld. Again, there is a child whose conduct breaks the heart of a parent: every measure fails to deal with him, and the "thorn" rankles deeply in the wounded heart. It may be that some disgrace is permitted, as to which the soul feels that death were easier to bear. It may be that slander has stung the soul with deeper pain. There may be, too, some human weakness, which renders the afflicted one an object of pain to those who love him, or of ridicule to others. Such as these, and the many sorrows of the way are used of God as the "thorn" to curb the energy, to break the strength of "man." Circumstances, friends, relations, health, good name, all are touched by Wisdom in this holy discipline of the soul. These things in the hand of God are like the river banks which on either side guide the stream of waters which flow between them; rendering the waters useful and fructifying, which, if flowing onwards without these guides, would devastate all around, in-stead of bearing a blessing on their bosom. How often have we not thought what good Christians we might have been if circumstances were different; in short, if the banks which carry the river were broken down. Nay, these are the wise dealings of our God to *keep us just* in the channel and path where we are, to shine and glorify Him.

Like Paul of old, when the “stake” was driven home, we may cry to God, even thrice, as he: Take away this thorn, this terrible hindrance to the work of Christ, this feebleness of the vessel, this sapping of energy, this hindrance to service, this cruel “stake” from which the soul struggles in vain to be free. But no; there it remains, until we find, in the acceptance of its bitterness, the occasion of a strength which is not of man, but the emptying us of fancied human power. We learn our powerlessness, we feel that struggling is but in vain. Yet here the secret of strength is found: but not of man, not our own. The Lord comes in. He finds the vessel bereft of strength; prepared for that power with which He can wield it. He finds that condition which it is His to use. “ And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; for power is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather boast in my weaknesses,\* that the power of Christ may rest [“tabernacle over”] upon me.” “The surpassingness of the power is of God, and not from us.”

Those who serve the Lord outwardly in the word, know in measure these things. They know well, much as they may be blessed, and valued too; what bitter lessons they have to learn in secret with the Lord. Never could they be explained to another ; yet they are but the emptying of fancied strength in man. No true servant but will find this out for himself; he will recall those moments, when death was working in the fragile vessel, that life might work in those to whom he ministered. Yea, he begins to find how good these lessons are, that made room for a power working which he is conscious is not himself, not of man; and that when, outwardly calm, he felt the abject weakness of his own heart, his Lord might step in and give him victory.

It shows that the stoning occurred first at that time.

{\*It is not “infirmities” but “weaknesses” in which he glories.}

Thus, then, is the vessel brought by the hand of the potter, often through bruising and breaking and crushings on the wheel, to its true and blessed form in which God can work Himself alone. When the vessel would say, “not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God”: and again, “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not from us. Forcible and striking this is: he does not allow that the power would be ‘*from*’ God, as something apart from Him, and conferred or imparted to us. Nay, but it is divine, and yet inseparable from Him who works; it is “of God” — and yet not ‘*of us,*’ as not only negating the thought that it might be so; but the word he uses still more strongly emphasizes this: that the power is *of* God and not *from* us.

There is a “threefold cord” which must be found in the saint if he would serve his Lord aright: the *motive*, the *energy* and the *end*.

At times the *motive* may be right and the *end* also, but the *energy* may be but the human vessel working out (as it supposes) the things of the Lord. All three must go together, and this is the object of this disciplinary process that all may be of God, and not of man.

## Chapter 8:

### The Purpose of God in the Vessel

“For the shining forth of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4: 6).

Because [it is] God who spoke light to shine out of darkness who hath shined [or ‘lit a lamp’] in our hearts for the shining forth of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassingness of the power may be of God, and not from us (2 Cor. 4: 6, 7).

Marvelous purpose in God! To light a lamp within us, and so deal with us, that He may reduce the vessel to a *transparency* in His hands, in order that the glory of God shining in Jesus on high, should shine out so that His people may be God’s lanterns in a dark and Christ-rejecting world.

Some have referred to Gideon’s lamps and pitchers (Judg. 7), as if there was an analogy here to that scene; but there the lamps shone out only when the pitcher was broken: not so here. The vessel is rendered *transparent*, if I may so say; all the hindering element of flesh is so attenuated that the “treasure” possessed by the vessel may shine forth undimmed.

The circumstances through which the vessel was passing at this moment, all working to this end, are worthy of our deep consideration. They enter into all the texture of the teaching which flows from God to us in this epistle. Indeed this is ever so in the ministry of the New Testament times. The vessel is passed through the trial or exercise, whatever that may be, and the heart thus trained; the affections formed by these things; the man himself so sustained and supported of God in the sorrows of the way, that “Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” He has drunk the living stream at the fountain head of all, in the eighth day of heavenly power and blessedness in Christ. His thirst has been quenched by Christ. And so his inner man — the mind, the heart, the soul, the whole vessel, becomes the medium of those streams of refreshment to others, which

have consoled his own soul in its sorrow. The Father of mercies has filled it with all His consolation in Christ—so full, so blessedly full, that it overflows and the stream passes on in living power, fructifying those in the desert sands of the world where his path lies.

Fourteen years, after what we have already spoken of, had passed: scene after scene of his labors had been traversed; and during the successful work at Ephesus (Acts 19), news had come of the sorrows and sins of those in Corinth, who had been the objects of the labors of Paul. He had written to them a letter (1 Cor.), his heart full of anxiety, but teaching, largely too, what was needful there. The mighty energy of God's Spirit had sustained the vessel for this service, and, then it was despatched by the hand of Titus.

At this moment the enemy had come in, in terrible power at Ephesus (Acts 19), and the infuriated mob, moved by the spirit of idolatry, had made the insurrection which we learn of there. Paul, after the manner of men, might have said he had "fought with beasts" there. He had like to be torn limb from limb by those whom Satan led at that moment in terrible power. So terrible was the moment that hope was gone, the jaws of death were all but reached, and his spirit passed into the state of one who had "the sentence of death" in himself, and he "despaired even of life." (2 Cor. 1: 8).

Here was a moment for the soul! A living man, whose life was so real before God that God, as it were, might have said: Such a real man as Paul must learn all in power himself; his purpose is to bear about in his body the dying of Jesus; well, then, he shall be helped in this. He shall be delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus may be manifest in his mortal flesh. This is ever God's reward to those who seek to live in the power of what they teach and know.

But at that same moment a deeper anguish filled his soul. The energy of the Spirit had waned, in which he had been sustained when he wrote to the Corinthians. A reaction came. Titus was gone. There was no recalling what was past. We love those to whom we have ministered in the church of God more deeply than others. There is a link formed between their souls and ours, which even the glory will not efface (cp. 1 Thess. 2: 19, 20). What bitter pangs does the heart feel when, in any way, the enemy's power comes in to sever this bond. We look upon them as lost to us; the joys of fellowship with them destroyed. He wrote in the greatness of his service, and with the truth of the Spirit from his pen. But now the reaction came. He feared he had lost the beloved Corinthians. How will they receive his letter? Was it too hard, too severe? In deep exercise he repented having written it. "I did repent," said he, speaking of his tried heart's exercise (2 Cor. 7: 8). A greater death than that of the body, which

seemed to have impended, was now felt; his soul died within him, as it were, in the bitterness of his sorrow. Some have passed through this kind of death: it must be known in measure to be understood. He could not rest in his spirit at a great and prosperous work at Troas, but went in search of Titus, that his soul might be relieved (2 Cor. 2: 13).

Pressure after pressure at the hand of the potter, for he was but the clay upon the wheel; growing up under the skillful eye and hand of the Master. All these varied trials fell at one moment of crushing soul-death on this vessel. God was attenuating the opaqueness which still remained, that the light might shine forth with brighter power; that the Treasure of his heart might be more clearly seen, that His purpose in the vessel might be unhinderedly manifested.

At last — God which comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus” (2 Cor. 7: 6). God “delivered us from as great a death” — as from the fury of man at Ephesus. What a moment of soul-comfort which now followed! “We were comforted in your comfort; yea, and exceedingly the more joyed we for the joy of Titus, because his spirit was refreshed by you all” (2 Cor. 7: 13). Well can he say, “O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged.” He can pour forth his heart’s teaching. He is unhindered in his joy.

What a moment for the true servant! What a moment for the people of God! Little do they know how the servant’s heart is hindered in the ministry at times: how the springs of God are dry to them because of their state: then the servant has to learn fresh lessons of death working in himself; and his brightest words become dull, because the Spirit of God is grieved, and hearts are dull of hearing. He must be a rebuker to both servant and people, instead of rivers of refreshment in a thirsty land.

But what was this Treasure which he possessed? Strange casket was he for such, also one which would not *conceal* but permit its full *display*. The context will explain. It does so, first by recalling a moment in Israel’s history which laid the ground of it in the nature of God there first made known — in sovereignty, displayed in mercy.

Israel’s history had run on under pure and living grace, from the day when God called Moses to be a deliverer of His people, at the backside of the desert in Midian, until, as a delivered people purchased and redeemed, they drank the waters from the smitten rock at Rephidim. Many a time did they abuse this living stream of grace, and murmur against Him who poured it forth.

Then came the giving of the law to Israel, which was only accepted to be broken. Thus all relations, whether of grace or law, were destroyed,

grace was abused, and the golden calf was the answer to their word, “All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.” Moses goes up from that scene saying, “Peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin.” He returns, and separates himself from the guilty camp of Israel. Then, in the touching interview which followed, and at his cry, “I beseech thee, shew me thy glory,” the Lord retires into Himself — He stands upon a sovereignty which can do as it pleases. He alone can say, “I will,” and none can hinder. “I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy.” This is the manner in which His sovereignty will be displayed, “Because he delighteth in mercy.”

And Moses comes down from the mount, with the second table of the law in his hand, the skin of his face shining with the brightness of this fresh and suited name: “The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth.” Sovereign mercy was the foundation of this relationship of God with Israel. But now we come to Paul in 2 Corinthians, and there we find that *sovereign mercy is the basis of the gospel of the glory*, which in a special way he names as “Our Gospel.” (2 Cor. 5: 3).

What, then, was the gospel? Was it different from that of the other apostles? For by it was communicated “this Treasure” to Paul, who stands here as the representative man — the pattern to all coming after. Mercy, sovereign and free, shines in this man’s case more fully than all, as we have already seen. He would tell us so, saying, “Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received *mercy*, we faint not.”

Christ had died: God had “made him sin for us, who knew no sin.” God had abandoned Him who had trusted in His God. He who had taught others to trust in Him was Himself forsaken, and the cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” attested this; and was the mocking taunt of His foes, “He trusted in God, let him deliver him now if he will have him” (Matt. 27: 43). We see no righteousness in this. But we see that “The righteous Lord . . . hateth iniquity” — and His Son having taken that place must take all its consequences. It was God’s righteous judgment *against sin* which we see there.

He was taken from the cross and placed in the grave. The soldiers sleep as they guard the tomb: they became as dead when the angel of God descended to roll back the stone where the dead had been laid. But Christ had risen. He was not there. The tomb unsealed, the grave-clothes unmoved, pointed to the mighty fact that no grave could hold the Son of God.

Some days elapse, when we see another sight. On the Mount of Olives, perhaps some five hundred disciples stood, and from their midst a

Man ascends to heaven, out of their sight. He is saluted there by God in righteousness as the Author of eternal salvation; the Establisher of righteousness against sin, for “the righteous Lord loveth righteousness.” The Father gives Him the Holy Ghost afresh for others-and out from the glory comes the message, which afterwards arrested Saul of Tarsus, that this righteousness of God was so vindicated by the Son, that God set Him on His throne, and the news is sent forth from the heavens that God’s righteousness could now be displayed *for man, a sinner, in salvation-and not against him in judgment*: that all who submitted to Jesus, the Nazarene, should become God’s righteousness in Him.

“Our Gospel” dates from the glory of God. It comes forth as a ministration of righteousness, and of the Spirit (2 Cor.3: 8, 9): no more the ministration of “condemnation” and “death.” It shines out from His face who accomplished the work, and whom God seated on His throne — the witness of His estimate of the work which He had accomplished. The “Treasure “was this. It was all that was thus brought forth from the glory of God, as found in Christ there; and as possessed by the vessel of clay.

Then came the attenuating process, by which the vessel would be made the medium through which it should shine. The light was taken in through exercises of conscience; and shone out through the exercises of his heart. The “*life of Jesus*” must be made manifest in the earthen vessel (2 Cor. 4: 10); out of it the *faith* of Jesus (2 Cor. 4: 13 and cp. Ps. 116: 10) must be expressed; and the *hope* of Jesus (2 Cor. 4: 14) must actuate the heart. And the momentary lightness of the affliction, through which it passed, only worked to enlarge the capacity and give in result a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. The eye was fixed on the unseen and the eternal: the seen and temporal was passing away; and even if the earthly tabernacle — suited to the present passing stage — were dissolved, a building of God, a house not made with hands, was sure; and if Jesus came — all that was mortal which remained would be swallowed up of life (cp. 2 Cor 4, 5).

This, then, was the purpose of God with the earthen vessel; this the process to reduce it to all that He desired. The light of the glory in the face of Jesus shone in the holiest on high, and on earth the light of the lamps shone over against the candlestick to cause its beauty to be seen.

Chapter 9:

God in the Vessel.

“The sentence of death” (1 Cor. 1: 10).

“The power of his resurrection” (Phil. 3: 10).

The passages at the head of this chapter present two principles which the vessel of God's choice must practically learn. They are not confined to the Christian interval alone; but have been the lessons, variously taught, and more or less intelligently learned by the elect, at all times, and in all dispensations; though the clear, doctrinal meaning was not known until New Testament times.

They are, as we may speak, in a certain sense, correlative. The vessel is taught experimentally the *first* of these; and in the same way he finds the *second* working in him. What has "the power of his resurrection" to do with aught but a dead man? Surely nothing! Therefore if death works in him, life works also in him in the power of resurrection. This power is of God alone.

These are the great lessons set for every saint while here. The measure in which they are learned is quite another matter: as is also the soul's apprehension of the lesson. But oh, what conscious power is found, as the soul learns to hold the cross, to every motion of human life which works in his body! to bear about in himself the sentence of death, morally or physically, that he should not trust in himself, but in God who raises the dead. Then death works in him, and life towards others.

The former principle — "we have the sentence of death in ourselves" — is preparatory to the desire "That I may know him and the power of his resurrection." And this will be seen as we examine other cases in scripture, "written for our learning."

The history of the "father of the faithful" will help to this end. In Abraham's path we are introduced to one, and the dealings of God with him, in whom we see the gradual unfolding of God's lessons for the soul, before the doctrine of these things is developed to us in the New Testament scripture.

Like ourselves in our measure, he had to pass through all in an experimental way, to reach the perfect end. With the saint in the New Testament, did he but accept what is there taught, it would be with him that the place where others ended he would begin. But the state of soul, and the power of the flesh, and the deceivableness of our own hearts, are such that we must, alas! learn, too, all the lessons in an experimental way.

In Paul we see one who learned these things practically, but with much difference from ourselves. Speaking for oneself, and perhaps for others, we learn them through failure, in which we experience (more like Peter) the extricating ministry of Christ. Paul's case differed much, for in him we see rather the true heart taught, the singleness of eye met, so that he had more of the preventive or preserving ministry of Christ, rather than

the restorative or extricating, while, at the same time, he was passed through circumstances of varied kinds that the lesson might be experienced in his own soul. We see failures in his life, but they were few.

We all experience, in a sense, the threefold way in which God revealed Himself to Abraham. He was called by the “*God of glory*” (Acts 7: 2). He was sustained by the “*Almighty God,*” and all was provided by “*Jehovah Jireh.*” This was his history as a saint. But all was not revealed to him at first: the flesh had to be broken, fallen nature exposed, law had to be tried and found fruitless for faith, promise had to be rested upon, and then the fruit of accomplished promise had to be surrendered for the power of resurrection on Mount Moriah. Until this came he never was really and fully a worshiper, nor did he ever know God by that new name, “*Jehovah-Jireh.*” I do not dwell much upon his earlier history. He did what true children of God do also, until they learn otherwise. He saw, when called of God at first, that which it was God’s will should be done or possessed, and he assayed to realize and accomplish it in the strength of man. All fails, and then at last God *does by him* what he assayed *to do himself*. The end in view was right and the motive was right, but the energy put forth was of “man.” He had not yet taken “the sentence of death” to himself, nor had he learned “the power of his resurrection.”

Was not this so with Moses when he assayed to deliver Israel? With David at Ziklag? With Peter in the judgment hall? Each was tried, each sought to do that which was right and of God; but the energy was of man, and God did, at the end, by each one the same things which each had assayed to do themselves. We see this every day around in the history of saints. We know it in our own. Often, too, we have seen, in the first freshness of soul in a young saint apprehending the truth, a deeper and more spiritual recognition of the will of the Lord than at later times in his life. He may have turned aside from the performance of it, or he may have sought to do it in the power of man, thinking that because it was right and of God *he* should do so. Years after the thing is done (if there was no failure or turning aside) by God Himself in him. Or, if failure supervened and — turning aside, it was forced upon him through sorrows and trials and breakings of the flesh, and of the will of man which had come in to hinder.

You see it, too, in those that have assayed to serve in the gospel or in the church. The energy of the heart which pushed forth the young man as a servant, fails, he breaks down, he is coldly received, or the like. If there is gift from Christ, the thing was right and of God; but the energy was self — unbroken. Painful lessons followed (than which there are few more so), but if we watch that man’s after history, if he walk with God, he will come forth brightly in useful service to the Lord: *God* doing by *him* what *he* assayed to do *himself* in vain.

In Abraham's case we will examine the moment when he was enabled to take home "the sentence of death" to himself in the "sign of circumcision" (Gen. 17), thus learning the fruitlessness of flesh, and to be cut off from himself in the things of God.

Nearly fourteen years had passed since the birth of Ishmael, this son of the bondwoman: this effort of the energy of man to accomplish the thoughts of God. He was born and was brought up in Abraham's house for twice seven years. All seemed outwardly promising for the time; but Abraham had trodden for those fourteen years a path which was self-devised. These years are passed over as a blank in his history — utterly unrecognized. And oh, how many histories of God's saints will be found a blank by-and-by! The power of man was seeking to further the things of God. But this he must discover, in one short interview, in which his whole path and his Ishmael are totally ignored; not by words, indeed, but by the simple revelation of God Himself — the almighty One who was *all-powerful*, in contrast with *quasi*-power in man.

Let me ask my reader has he ever known cases analogous to this? Has he not seen with an enlightened eye lives of apparent usefulness — and this, too, in ways supposed to be of God — blown upon in one moment by some truth flashing upon the soul, which judges all? How multitudinous are the paths that would fade into a mist as one flash of divine light is shed upon them! Yea, even those which are based upon the word of God and His known will in the truth, not to speak of the ten thousand paths and ways of supposed service, which have no warrant from it at all: the former done in the strength of man and worthless, the latter I care not to analyze, so worthless are they.

And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God [El-Shaddai] walk before me, and be thou perfect. And Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him" (Gen. 17). What a moment was this! To discover in that interview that he had never yet touched the pathway of the Lord. He had walked by the light of his own eyes. All was worthless, all was ignored, he has but to listen as he lay on his face before God, until the whole unfolding of God's mind, thus far known, is heard, and the previous fourteen years is treated as a blank in his history. One sentence alone passes his lips in this whole chapter, one cry from his heart is heard. It is the struggle of one who now feels that nothing of God was in those many years of hope, that he must now step off this self-devised pathway on to the path of God, leaving all behind as a mistake, as the effort of man to accomplish the things of God.

What a moment for the soul! Have there not been such-like soul-awakenings in God's saints at times? Moments when all was fading away

which had delighted the eye, and the heart's cry was heard: "O that Ishmael may live before thee!" Must all then go? Is there not some remnant of former days which may be spared? Has *all* been a mistake? Is all to be thus ignored? God may pity the soul in this — though not His purpose. He may say, as it were: "And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee." And the link may be spared and blessed in an earthly way, but it never enters the path which is divine: "But my covenant will I establish with Isaac."

Seven times do we now hear the utterances of God in His unchallengeable "I will" (vv. 2-8). Those purposes are announced, into which man could never enter as co-worker with God. "*I will* make my covenant with thee"; and I "*will* multiply thee exceedingly"; "*I will* make thee exceeding fruitful"; "*I will* make nations of thee"; "*I will* establish my covenant between me and thee, and to thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (cp. Gal. 3: 29; Phil. 4: 19). "*I will* give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land whereon thou art a stranger"; and "*I will* be their God."

Abram has but to hearken, to receive, to hear, all that God Himself would do by him. Abram's strength was but that of man, it could but mar the power of God in resurrection. He must accept the seal of this new creation, he must take "the sentence of death" home to his own soul in the "sign of circumcision" — the seal of the righteousness that he had by faith, being yet uncircumcised.

Mark the significance of all this, expressed in the changing of his name at this time. Rather, let us say, in God imparting to that name the breathings of His own. Instead of Abram he would now be Abraham. The breathings of the name of Jehovah, the self-existing God, are imparted to his; he is made, as it were, a "partaker of the divine nature" (Cp. 2 Peter 1: 2). He belongs to the new creation of God. \*

{\*See also how Oshea is turned to Jehoshua, and many other cases in the word (Num. 13).}

This was the sign of "the sentence of death" upon man, and the entrance into that where "all things are of God" — of which circumcision was the seal. The work of God would be done in the vessel by Himself alone. The human vessel must bow. It must take this sentence home to itself. In spirit it must enter into the new creation with a new and divinely-breathed name.

The vessel must be will-less and powerless in His hand. But more: "The power of his resurrection" must be known, for it alone can avail in a

dead man, to lift him out of the dead and into this new sphere. (“He considered 28 his own body now dead.” “He hesitated not at the promise of God through unbelief.”) This power now comes in: “As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be.” She, too, must be made partaker, as it were, of the divine nature; she must, like him, have the breathing of God’s name put to hers, that she may in figure be of the new creation also. “And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her and she shall be the mother of nations, kings and people shall be of her.” Again he falls on his face — now as *Abraham*. He “found strength in faith, giving glory to God.” Abram once had fallen on his face and *listened*; but now *Abraham* fell on his face and *laughed*, and said in his heart, “Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old: and shall Sarah that is ninety years old bear? . . . And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee *a son indeed*; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: 29 and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.”

This was “the power of resurrection,” now the resource of God. Human strength and human hopes were dead in Abraham and Sarah, the “sentence of death” taken home to their souls, that they “should not trust in themselves, but in God that raiseth the dead.” “Against hope he believed with hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be” (Rom. 4: 18).

But there was more taught here. God had said, at the moment when he first appeared to Abraham as the Almighty, “Walk before *me*, and be thou *perfect*.”

Hitherto the Lord had been his shield and his exceeding great reward. His guardian care had marked his path — his shelter from his foes. Now more was asked: God’s new name would bring fresh responsibility. El-Shaddai had been revealed Himself, who could do all things, who only needed an empty vessel under “the sentence of death,” to use. “Perfection” must now be found. This was the answer of the soul to the revelation of God, the soul responding, as face answers to face in the glass, to all that God is — as thus known.

We have then:

Circumcision first brought in, the sign of the sentence of death and the cutting off from ourselves;

the power of His resurrection follows, as that of God, who would work in a dead man;

we have perfection required in those in whom the other two are seen.

Thus were the roots of these things learned in practical power by the vessel of promise, afterwards to be known in their spiritual significance in New Testament times.

The omission of the “not” here is very probably right, and in keeping with the subject.

Which signifies “laughter” or “joy”: he makes melody in his heart to the Lord; realizing this heavenly joy: this “eighth day” of creation power.

When therefore we turn to Paul in Philippians we find all there. The vessel is there in its moral beauty and perfection, as far as this can be reached below. The workings of flesh are not there, nor sin, nor the weakness of man, as a vessel of mercy upon the potter’s wheel. No flaw is here. The vessel is not now marred in the hands of the potter. True, it is not yet transformed into the potter’s image in glory; but it is attenuated to its utmost on earth, rendered as transparent as it may yet be; and the “Treasure” shining out in every phase. Christ is motive, Christ is energy, Christ is end. The potter is now seen in the vessel.

We find those great principles which we saw in Gen. 17, in Phil. 3. Paul has gone through the prefatory work. Four years in prison, chained to a soldier, had wrought its work. The soul had been stripped of all its “desirable things.” The labor for Christ which was his life was now arrested, as to outward warfare in the work. Brighter lessons were in store: lessons for the church of God, in all ages of her sojourn here on earth, were to come forth from the Roman capitol, where he wore his chain.

He takes the conscious place — not now merely as learning the fact of *death* to all the energy of man, as Abraham — but of accepting it. “*We are*”; said he, “*the circumcision.*” The painful lesson is past. Christ had passed away from the earth: He had died to the scene, and died out of it, to rise into that new place, now fully taken, as “the beginning of the creation of God.” Head of that new order of things, associated with Him, “circumcised with the circumcision not made with hands,” we partake of all that into which He as Man had entered. We are circumcised in Him, as Sarah was in Abraham. “We are the circumcision, who worship God by the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh: ” the “sentence of death” to all that savored of the energy of man, even at his best, and the flesh only to be ignored, even in its best phase.

There all that savored of this, all that of which man could boast, is cast aside. Of all men he had that of which he could boast as to the flesh. Not the “flesh of sin” here, but that which looked fair in man’s eyes, and was the best fruit that man could produce, as such, in divine things. By

birth, by religious zeal, by righteousness of the law which applied to man in the flesh, all was surrendered in that moral death, of which circumcision was the seal.

But more: “all things” were counted loss, they but stood in the way of that which was “all his desire.” “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection.” Here was another of those striking points found in Gen. 17: the desire in gazing at Christ in glory, to know Him there — gone up to that scene where all His glory shone. And here on earth, as a vessel indeed, will-less, powerless, empty, finding that power which raised up the Son, out of every sorrow and grief by the way — and by which, at last, He rose from the grave — working in the vessel, wielding it and using it for the purposes which alone were His, to work, while here, for His glory.

How did this power work in Paul? Look at the man who above all on earth was filled with such mighty energy in the service of Christ in the gospel: shut up as a malefactor in prison, suspected by his brethren, shunned by all for a time, cut off from the work which was more than life to him. His great heart had swelled with the hope that, as he had evangelized the eastern world — “From Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum,” he had fully preached “the gospel of Christ” — he would now go forth to the western world, as far as Spain — carrying the word of life.

Caught in the toils of a prison, the great vessel learns, after four years of exercise, to say: “I would have you understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.” God was doing greater things when the great vessel to whom the gospel of the glory of Christ was committed was set aside from its active work. Most of the brethren were waxing confident now (as in quietness of heart, his case in God’s hands, he waited on His vindicating love), his bonds were known to be for Christ; others were the more bold to speak the word without fear.

But God was *making* the vessel for His use. It was on the potter’s wheel. There were greater things to be done by him than his heart had devised. It was a light thing to evangelize the western world compared with the writing of those epistles which came from his prison in Rome, to instruct and comfort and rejoice the hearts of millions of His saints for well-nigh two thousand years. To this end “the power of his resurrection” alone could work. And if the fellowship of his sufferings” reached even to “conformity to his death,” it was but the path by which he would arrive at “the resurrection out from among the dead,” and thus be more like Christ.

There again we have “perfection” seen in the vessel, as far as such can be reached while here on earth. This “perfection “ is always dispensational in its character, and answering to the revelation of Himself

which God has been pleased to make from time to time: as *Almighty*, or *Jehovah*, or the *Father of the Lord Jesus Christ*.\*

{\*Compare Gen. 17: 1; Deut. 18: 8; Matt. 5: 48; Phil. 3: 15.}

It is important for us that we understand the different ways that perfection is looked at in the word.

We have *positional* perfection, as we may term it, which every soul that belongs to Christ possesses in Him; the *standing* of the saint as set free under the gospel now set forth. This positional perfection is in contrast with what a Jew under the law could possess; because “the law made nothing perfect.” Under the gospel—the conscience of the believer is perfected by the precious blood of Christ. When “once purged,” no charge of sin can ever press itself on the worshiper. By one offering, Christ has perfected continuously the sanctified ones, that is, those separated to God by His blood.

But more: he has died with Christ out of the old status, which he possessed as a child of Adam. He is risen with Christ into a new sphere, too; he has been quickened together with Christ, and raised up together (Jew and Gentile) and seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Every soul who is in union with Christ stands in this “perfection” before God. I do not speak here of their realization of such. Paul labored that he might present every man perfect in Christ (Col.1: 28). In this there is no intrinsic perfection in the saint, it is his dispensational standing. He is complete in Him who is the Head of all principality and power. He is circumcised (positionally) in Him by the passing out, in the circumcision of Christ, into that new order of things, that eighth day, to which circumcision belonged. (It must be performed in the type on that eighth day.)

There is a *moral* perfection which is attainable here below on earth, to which Paul exhorts and in which he walked himself (Phil. 3: 15). This is what the Spirit of God wrought in the vessel, in the condition found in Philippians producing in it a reflex and an answer here to all that Christ on high is with the hope filling the soul, to be conformed to Him in His path on earth, reaching even to the grave, and out of which the power of His resurrection would raise it if it reach “conformity unto his death.” “All things” were dross and dung in see king for such perfection; but it was attained by the setting aside of all that man could glory in, and it was wrought by the Holy Ghost in an empty, will-less vessel, hastening on to the goal. “Let as many as be perfect, be thus minded: ” attainable, indeed, by all, though perhaps few really attain it, for want of a single eye.

But “*perfection*” *itself* could never be reached on earth. True, the *positional* perfection, all who are Christ’s possess in Him. *Moral*

perfection would be attained by the true-hearted saint who yielded himself to the workings of the Spirit of God. But the end would not be reached while here. Nor until the mighty power of Christ would be put forth, and “mortality would be swallowed up of life,” and He would change our vile body that it might be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the power whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself. Of this Paul would say: “Not that I had already attained, either were already perfect, but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which I am also apprehended of Christ.”

Thus the father of all that believe learned his threefold lesson experimentally in his path of old; and the leader of the people of God, in New Testament days, learned it in his. He was a man of like passions as ourselves, but a man with a single eye, a single motive, an undivided heart. He waits on high with Christ for the fruit of all that the potter’s hand had skillfully wrought, not a flaw remains, no more crushings are now required. He enjoys the “far better” thing meanwhile. By-and-by “This corruptible shall have put on incorruption; and this mortal shall have put on immortality,” and the Master’s handiwork will shine in him, as a “vessel of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory.”

He will have then received the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge will give him at that day, and not to him only, but unto all those that love His appearing (2 Tim. 4: 8).