

Spurgeon on 2 Thessalonians

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C H Spurgeon Sermons and Notes on 2 Thessalonians

2 Thessalonians 1:3 THE GROWTH OF FAITH

NO. 3250

A SERMON PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, MAY 18TH, 1911,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly.”-2 Thessalonians 1:3.

Beware of imagining that you have reached finality in religion. Just as some politicians have said, “We have gone as far in reform as we ever mean to go, so he we shall stop,” certain religious professors say, “We have gone as far in religion as there is any need to go; we are converted, we are saved, so here we shall remain.” Beware, I say, of such a spirit as that, but rather imitate the example of the apostle Paul, who wrote, “Forgetting these things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” We are not content with merely being alive, we wish to be in health as well as in life; and we ought not to be satisfied with being saved, we should desire to have our faith in full strength, and to have all our graces at the highest degree of development. The men of this world are not usually content with just bread to eat and raiment to put on, they are like those daughters of the horseleech that cry, “Give, give;” but when spiritual things are concerned, these insatiable cravings are not so manifest. Many are content to be wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked when they might buy of Christ all spiritual blessings without money and without price. Even there who have fled for refuge to, lay hold upon the hope set before them are often quite content to lie down just inside the City of Refuge as if they had

been sent into this world simply with the selfish end of being saved, and as if there were nothing for them to do in the way of serving God, and reflecting before other men that glory of God which, in his grace, has been made to shine upon them. So again I say, beware of that spirit of finality which would permit you to rest content with your present attainments; for if you are, I shall not be, able to shank God that your faith groweth exceedingly, and you will miss the joy that comes to the believer who is growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I am going to special to you, first, upon how Christians grow in faith; secondly, upon the signs of that growth; and then, thirdly, I hope to give you some reasons why we should not be satisfied without this growth in faith.

I. First, then, let us consider How Christians Grow In Faith.

There are many ways in which the Lord causes faith to grow. One is from the force of life itself; it is natural for life to grow until it has reached its maturity. Here is a living seed; if it, be put into the earth under proper circumstances, nothing can prevent it from bursting its shell. In due time, the green bade must be seen. You may conjure that green blade to remain at the same length as at present, but, if you pass that way in another month, you will find that it has disobeyed your command; for, because it lives, it must grow; and if you should continue to visit it, until it bends its head in the ripeness of autumn, you would see that it, must, by the very law of its nature: still keep on growing. It is the same with us; the anatomist will tell you that every part of the infant's body is so prepared that it can grow, there is provision for the growth of every organ and every limb so that, slowly and without difficulty, the whole shall be developed into a full-grown man. It is life that grows. Put a bar of iron into to best soil that you can find, water it, and manure it, and let the genial sun shine upon it, but never a leaf or a rootlet will you find upon it, for it is dead. It is not so with the Christian man; because of tine life that is in him, he must grow. Ye who are the living branches in the living Vine prove it by your growth. Ye who are the children of God should increase in wisdom, and stature, and go on from strength to strength until ye appear in Zion before God. If your faith is as feeble now as it was twenty years ago, if you have not made any spiritual advance during the last ten years, you ought very gravely to question whether you have any spiritual life at all. You may not be able to see the growth, but there must be growth if the is life. There are some plants in which the unseen growth is more valuable than that which is visible; the gardener prizes the potatoes that are underground more than the tops that everyone can see. But with the Christian there must be both the visible growth in zeal and good works and the hidden growth in his deep humility and communion with his Lord in secret. So the force of life within produces growth.

There are certain circumstances under which believers especially grow, and they grow in faith by the exercise of faith. See the blacksmith's boy when he first tries to swing his father's big hammer, how soon he gets tired, but, ask the smith whether his arms ache." Oh, no!" he says, "I have made too many horseshoes for that." Exercise has developed his muscles and strengthened his sinews to such an extent that the bringing down of that big hammer with a merry ring is but child's play to him. So the young Christian, when he begins to exercise faith, can perhaps only imitate him who said, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief;" but speak to him, some years later, when his faith has been much exercised, and then you will find that he has grown more like Abraham, who "staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was able also to perform." You know that, if you let your arm lie unused, in time you will be unable to use it, like the Indian fakir who holds up his hand in the air until he has lost all power of moving it. So a man may keep his faith unused until it can scarcely be called faith at all; therefore mind that your faith is kept in full exercise for so only will it grow.

Christians also grow in faith by holy walking. Living with Jesus,-and to live with him we must be consistent in holiness,-we, get to know him better, and to trust him more. It is said of some men that "the better they are known, the less, they are trusted," but it is not so with the Lord Jesus Christ. Two cannot walk together except they be agreed, but if there is an agreement between our life and the character of Christ, and we are, by grace, enabled to walk scrupulously in the path of integrity, our faith will grow stronger and stronger as we get to know more of Christ. Sinning is most injurious to faith. I think it is Brookes who says that "either sinning will kill our assurance or our assurance will kill our sinning." Sin indulged will prevent the full assurance of faith, and even a little sin will do this. Have you ever had a small stone in your boot? If so, and you have tried to walk, you have found it very uncomfortable, travelling. If you have tiny splinter of wood beneath your nail, you know how painful it is; you get it extracted as soon as you can, lest you should lose your finger, or even your hand. Beware of little sins, beloved, for they will keep all comfort out of your life, and effectually hinder the growth of your faith.

Another way of helping faith to grow is by a diligent use of gospel ordinances. There are some of you who are very lax in this respect; some who come to the Tabernacle twice on the Lord's-day do not come at all during the week. Your bodies would not grow strong if you only fed them once a week, and it is the same with your souls. Prayer-meetings are most, soul-fattening ordinances. Many of us can testify that, at such gatherings, we have often been able to say, "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." I do not expect to see you all at the prayer-meetings, for some of you have home and business duties requiring your attention, and these must not be neglected; still, there are many more of you who might come if you would. And while

In speaking of ordinances, I must not forget that very precious one, of the Lord's supper, nor its companion, believers' baptism. Both of these are exceedingly helpful to the Christian, and all the means of grace help the growth of faith and every other virtue. Of course I include the private as well as the public means of grace. Private prayer is like a conservatory in which Gads plants grow very rapidly. Christians need a temperature higher than this world can give them; they are rare exotics, plants of heavenly birth, and they need divine warmth, before they can bloom and bring forth fruit unto perfection, and this can only be obtained by private prayer, secret fellowship with Christ, and devout meditation upon the Scriptures.

I will only further say, upon this point, that a Christian may expect to grow in faith the more troubles he has. If you have ever been at sea in a storm, and noticed how unconcerned about it the weather-beaten sailors have been, you must have realized that is because they had been hardened in many a tempest that they could so calmly go on with their duties while you and other landsmen were in dread of sinking, or longing for the end of the voyage. Storms help to make the sailors sturdy, and trials help to make Christians strong in faith and in every other grace. Damascus blades have to be annealed, and those who are to be like sharp sword in the Lord's hand will have to pass through the fire. The mere the wind blows, the firmer will the oak's roots grip the soil.

“March winds and April showers

Bring forth May flowers”

and you, as Christians, must have your stormy times and your rainy days if you are to bring forth the flowers of grace and the fruit of the Spirit. You will probably grow more in the cloudy and dark day of adversity than you will while the sun of prosperity is shining brightly upon you; so be of good courage, beloved, under the most adverse circumstances, for they are working for your lasting good.

II. I will not say more about how Christians grow in faith; but, in the second place, I will try to point out Some Of The Marks And Evidences Of That Growth.

First, however, let me say that swelling is not necessarily growing. We know some people who seem to fancy that they have grown in grace because they have such big notions as to their own attainments. They evidently imagine that they are the people, and that wisdom will die with the. We never like to see a child with too big a head, for we fear it is only an indication of disease, and not a sign of health; and we fear that many professors of religion are suffering in a similar fashion. They know too much, for they are wise above what is written, and are not content to be teachable, and to sit as little children at the feet of Jesus, the great Teacher.

But there is such a thing as true growing, and this can be seen in various ways. First, if you are growing in faith, Christ becomes increasingly precious to you. Perhaps you walked by a park one day, and you said to yourself, “That is a very pretty place.” Possibly, the next time you went that way, somebody said to you, “I should not wonder if that estate should belong to you some day;” and that made you take a much more personal interest in it. By-and-by, the owner died, and you learned that he had left the estate to you; how greatly your interest in it increased then, and how much more you valued the mansion, the park, the gardens, and everything belonging to the estate! In like manner, Christ was precious to me when I first began to hope that he might one day be mine, he was more precious to me when I first realized that he really was mine, and the more fully I am assured of my interest in him, the more precious does he become to me. This is the best test I can give you, beloved, the most accurate thermometer by which you can ascertain the rise or fall of your spiritual temperature,—Is Christ Jesus more precious to you than he ever was before? If so, then I am bound to thank God always for you, brethren, because your faith groweth exceedingly.

Further, if you are growing in faith, you want to be more like Christ, and you are more and more dissatisfied with yourself because you are so little like him. You are longing to be so completely conformed to his image that all the virtues of his character shall be reflected and reproduced in you. It is a sure proof of genuine faith in Christ, that it produces likeness to him, and growth in faith is good evidence of growth in likeness to him. Art thou more like Christ than thou wast years ago, or dost thou desire above everything else to be more and more like him? If so, my brother or sister, I feel confident that thou art growing in faith, and I thank God that it is so.

“Lord, if thou thy grace impart,

Poor in spirit, meek in heart,

I shall as my Master be, rooted in humility.”

Another evidence of growing in faith is that the promises become more consolatory to us, and our heart and mind, are kept more restful under their gracious influence. On board ship, though the vessel may rock and reel, and turn whichever way the helmsman may guide, the faithful needle always points to the pole; and it is the same with the true Christian.

Let cares like a wild deluge come,

And storms of sorrow fall

his faith still points to heaven, his trust is fixed on Jesus. Whatever else may move, he remains firm and steadfast, and he cries, as David did when he was hunted by Saul as a partridge upon the mountains, My heart is fixed, O God, my heart, is fixed: I will sing and give praise." I do not know whether your experience is similar to mine, but I find myself, on the whole, more equable in spiritual things than I used to be. When one has known the Lord for fourteen years, one can look back over a considerable period; and taking such a survey as that, I can discover certain times: when I had great bursts of exhilaration, great heights, of holy joy, followed by deep sinking of spirit, and utter prostration of soul. I have both those experiences still at times, but not often either of them now. On the whole, I find my soul calmly and quietly resting upon the promises of God, neither unduly delighted at the prospect of the joys of heaven nor too much depressed by the cares of the world, the responsibilities of my ministry, or the sin that still troubles me; but, just simply resting upon the rock Christ Jesus, having few doubts and fears, and comforting assurance of salvation, but not so much of the ecstatic rapture that was one of the characteristics of my early faith. I suppose that this is the condition of many Christians, and I am inclined to regard it as one of the evidences of growth in grace when we become more equable in our spiritual temperament. Children as very much excited over matters which a full-grown man scarcely notices; and the spiritual child is swayed hither and thither by many winds which have little or no effect upon one, who has come to the full stature of a man in Christ Jesus.

Love to the saints is another choice and clear proof of the growth of faith. In the verse from which our text is taken, Paul thanks God, "as it is meet," for the two graces which he perceives in the church of the Thessalonians "because that your faith, growth exceedingly, and the charity or, love of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." So love to the saints is thus linked with the growth of faith. We want far more true Christian love toward one another, though probably we have less cause for complaint in that respect than most other communities have, for we have learned the blessedness of dwelling together in unity. In some of our churches there is still far too much caste feeling, too much bowing down before rank and fashion. I met, the other day, with a pretty story concerning Philip Henry, the father of Matthew Henry, the commentator. He wanted to marry the daughter of a gentleman who was one of his hearers. The father of the young lady said to her, "I have no personal objection to Mr. Henry; he is a good man, a Christian gentleman, but I do not know where he came from, so I cannot consent, be your marriage with him." "Well, father," said the young lady, "though we don't know where he came from, we do know where he is going, and I would like to go there with him." When I meet a genuine Christian, I may not know where he came from; he may have sprung, as men say, from the dunghill, his parents may have been the poorest, of the poor but what does that matter? I know where he is going, and that is a much more important consideration; he is going to the upper house where there are many mansions; he is going to the palace of the great King eternal, immortal, invisible, where the princes of the blood royal are for ever to bask in the sunshine of the presence of the King of kings and Lord of lords, and I would like to go with him; that I may form one of the blessed company. Never mind the corduroy or the fustian that the man may wear, or the cotton or calico of the poor woman, I love them as brethren and sisters in Christ, and I want to go to the heaven whither they are bound. The real test of a man's nobility is not, "Whence did he come" but "Whither is he going?" If he is going where the people of God are going, if God is his Father, and Jesus Christ is his Savior, and the Holy Spirit is his Guide and Counsellor, if heaven is the haven whither he is bound, it will be one of the proofs that your faith is growing if you feel an intense love for him "and wish to share with him all the blessings" of the covenant of grace in time and throughout eternity.

Another sign of the growth of faith is the growth of zeal. I cannot see a man's faith, but I can see the evidences that it is growing when I perceive how zealous he is in all good works for his Lord. When a train travels at a very rapid rate, the axles grow hot; and the greater the speed, the greater is the heat that is generated by the friction; and, in like manner, the more rapidly a man travels in the path of a divine life by faith, the greater is the earnestness which he displays in the service of Christ. Dost thou care but little for the souls of those around thee? Art thou not doing all that thou canst to bring glory to God by the extension of the kingdom of Christ amongst the sons of men? Then we cannot thank God that thy faith is growing exceedingly. Indeed, there is grave cause to fear whether thou dost possess the faith of God's elect if this evidence is lacking. Remember that question of the apostle James, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he has faith, and have not works?" and his very emphatic answer, "Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone." I find it well often to adopt those lines of Dr. Watts, and would advise you to do the same,-

"Awake my zeal, awake my love,

To serve my Savior here below,

In works which perfect saints above,

And holy angels cannot do.

**"Awake my charity, to feed
The hungry soul, and clothe the poor:**

**In heaven are found no sons of need,
There all these duties are no more.”**

And the more faith you have, the more liberality will you display. I do not wonder that some people give so little to the cause of God; they give only as much or, as little as they believe. It is said that Dean Swift, preaching from that text, “He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto thee Lord and that which he hath given will he pay him again,” made this characteristic commencement to his sermon, “If you like the security, down with the dust!” It seems as if there were many people, nowadays, who do not like the security, for they keep their “sordid dust” to themselves, hoarding it up for those who come after them to scatter as they please. But the more a man believes in the security of godliness, the more will he give to, the poor, and to the cause of Christ, and to every worthy object that he can help. After all, the great stimulant, to Christian liberality is that which Paul used when he wrote to the Corinthians, “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich;” or that which the Master himself used with his disciples, “Freely ye have received, freely give.”

If I were to try to tell you all the good which growth in faith will do to us, I should need to keep you here all night. I was much struck with a remark that I read, the other day, to the effect that faith may be compared to the gastric juice in the stomach. When that solvent is in a healthy state, all the food that, is eaten is properly dissolved and digested, and then the entire man becomes healthy from head to foot; but if anything should be amiss with this necessary fluids then everything will go wrong. So, a growing faith is essential to a healthy spiritual life. Let faith be in increasingly vigorous exercise, then the whole life will benefit; but let faith become feeble and inactive, then the whole of your spiritual being will be weakened and injured. I will dare even to say that faith affects heaven, and earth, and hell. If you have but little faith, you cannot tread the world beneath your feet, nor laugh at its troubles, nor smile at its cares. If you have but little faith, you cannot open the windows of heaven, you cannot bring down a blessing from God. Even hell itself feels the influence of your faith. Satan trembles when he knows that your faith is firm and strong; but if it is tottering and trembling, then he sounds the note of triumph, and seeks to lead on his hosts to make a full end of you because you are beginning to relax your grip of your shield. It was not without good reason that Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked;” and to the Hebrews, “Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.” The Lord grant that we may have cause always to thank him because your faith groweth exceedingly!

III. I intended, before closing my discourse, to give you Some Reasons Why We Should Not Be Satisfied Without This Growth In Faith; but my time has almost gone, and I hope I have already said sufficient to prove to you the urgent need of an evergrowing faith.

For your own soul’s sake, for your own happiness and usefulness, for Christ’s sake, for sinners’ sake, for the Church’s sake, if you would adorn the doctrine of God your Savior in all things, if you would be a blessing to your day and generation, if you would bring into the fold of the good Shepherd the lost sheep and lambs that are wandering away from him, cry continually to him, “Lord, increase our faith.”

I have only time for just a word or two with you who have no faith at all. Sad must be the resections of there of you here who are not believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. What can you mean by such sinful folly? The Son of God has come from heaven to earth seeking the lost, and yet, you do not believe in him though you are amongst the lost! A proclamation of liberty is made to you who are slaves to sin and Satan, yet you will not accept the emancipation which would be so great a blessing to you! Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; and you have been told, over and over again, that if you will but trust him, you shall be saved even though you are among the chief of sinners; yet you will not believe in him! O soul, why wilt thou not trust in Jesus? Is he not worthy of thy confidence? Where will you find anyone else in all the world who so richly deserves to be trusted? No happy or miserable feelings are needed to fit you for believing in him; no meritorious deeds, no gifts of alms are required as a preparation for faith in him. Jesus Christ can save you just as you are if you will but trust him, so trust him now with your whole heart, and you shall be saved. Trust to him as completely as the drowning man trusts to the lifeboat or the lifebuoy; if he tried to swim to land, he would be lost, his only hope of being saved is in trusting to a power greater than his own. It is just so with thee, sinner; thou art powerless to save thyself, but all power in heaven and in earth has been committed to Christ, he is mighty to save, therefore trust him to save thee. Rest wholly upon what he is as the Christ of God, the anointed and appointed Savior, and upon what he has done upon Calvary’s cross to save all who believe in him, and thou shalt be saved this very hour. Trust Jesus here and now, and thou shalt be saved here and now, and to God shall be all the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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THE NECESSITY OF GROWING FAITH

NO. 1857

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 30TH, 1885,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.” — 2 Thessalonians 1:3.

Last Lord's-day I tried to say cheering and encouraging words to “Little-faith.” I trust that the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, did thereby strengthen some to whom the Savior said, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” But none of us would desire to remain among the Little-faiths; we long to press forward in our march to the better land. If we have just started in the heavenly race, it is well; there are grounds of comfort about the first steps in the right way; but we are not going to stop at the starting-point; our desire is towards the winning-post and the crown. My prayer at the commencement of this discourse is, that we may each of us rise out of our little faith into the loftier region of assurance, so that those who love us best may be able to say, “We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly.”

The church of Jesus Christ at Thessalonica did not commence under very propitious circumstances. Remember that oft-quoted text about the Bereans: “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they searched the scriptures daily whether those things were so.” That record does not relate to the converts in Thessalonica, but to those Jews who heard Paul preach in the synagogue, and refused to test his teaching by a reference to the Old Testament. They were not a noble sort of people, and yet from among them there were taken by almighty grace a certain company who were led to believe in the true Messiah. Thus they became more noble than even the Bereans; for we do not hear of a church in Berea, neither was an epistle written to the Bereans. Thessalonica received two epistles, bright with hearty commendations. Paul praised the Philippians, but the Thessalonians he praised yet more, thanking God at every remembrance of them, and glorying in them among the churches of God for their patience and faith.

I shall ask you, with your Bibles open, to see whether we cannot account in smile measure for this remarkable condition of things. The verse before us is full of thanksgiving to God for the growth of the Thessalonians in faith and in love; and to my mind it sounds like an echo of the First Epistle to the Thessalonians. The First Epistle is the key and the cause of the Second. Very often a man's success in this place, or in that, will tally with his own condition of heart in relation to that place. As we sow we reap. The grace of God enabled Paul to sow toward the Thessalonians with great hopefulness, and trust, and prayerfulness, and consequently he reaped plentifully.

Observe how (1 Thess. 1:2, 3) Paul began by distinctly recognising the existence of faith and love in that Church. “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.” Recognise the root, and then look for the flower. See that faith is in the soul, smile upon it and foster it, and then you may expect that the faith will steadily increase. In our text Paul mentions faith as growing, and love as abounding, while in the next verse he mentions patience, which is the outgrowth of hope — “the patience of hope.” He noticed in the Thessalonians the birth of those three divine sisters — faith, hope, and charity. That which he recognised with pleasure he afterwards saw growing exceedingly: those who cherish the seed shall rejoice in the plant. Observe in the children under your care the first blossoms of any good thing, and you shall observe its increase. Despise not the day of small things. When you have learned to recognize faith in its buds, you shall find see faith in its flowers, and faith in its fruits. Do not overlook feeble grace, or criticize it because it is as yet imperfect; but mark its beginnings with thankfulness, and you shall behold its advance with delight.

In addition to recognising the beginnings of faith, Paul labored hard to promote it. Look in the second chapter, and read verses 7, 8, 11, 12: — “But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.” He threw his whole strength into the work of upbuilding that church, toiling night and day for it; and consequently he obtained his desire; for still it is true in the husbandry of God, that those who sow, and steep their seed in the tears of earnestness, shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them.

Paul had accompanied his public labors with his private prayers. See how 1 Thessalonians 3:12 tallies with our text: — “And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you.” This was his prayer — and he received exactly what he prayed for. He saw abounding love in each one towards every other. The Lord seemed

to have noted the wording of Paul's prayer, and to have answered him according to the letter of his request. If we open our mouth wide, the Lord will fill it. Brethren, what we comfortably recognize in its gracious beginnings, what we labor to increase and what we earnestly guard with prayer, shall in due time be granted to us!

More than this: Paul had gone on to exhort them to abound in love and faith. Look at Chapter 4 verse 9: "As touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more." Paul did not only quietly pray for the church, but he added his earnest admonitions. He bids them increase more and more; and in response they do increase, so that he says, "Your faith groweth exceedingly." When a man says, "more and more" it is only another way of saying "exceedingly": is it not so? There was a big heart in Paul towards the Thessalonians. He wanted them to grow in faith and love "more," and then to take another step, and add another "more" to it. The exhortation being given out of a full heart, behold, God has fulfilled it to his servant, and the people have willingly followed up the apostolic precept.

But Paul had added faith to his prayers and his exhortations. Look at chapter 5:23, 24, and see if it is not so. "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." When we are sure that God will do it, it will surely be done. We miss many a blessing because we ask without faith. The apostle believed that he had the petition which he had sought of the Lord; and he received according to his faith. He who can firmly believe shall ere long fervently pour out thanksgiving. The church at Thessalonica, the child of Paul's prayers, the child of his labors, and at last the child of his faith, obtained a remarkable degree of faith, and a singular warmth of love. The Lord give to us who are workers. The mind and spirit of Paul, and lead us to follow him in our conduct to others, and then I do not doubt that our good wishes shall be realized. If we are right ourselves, we shall see prosperity in the churches, or classes, or families whose good we seek; and as we feel bound to pray about them, we shall also feel bound to thank God concerning them.

Before I plunge into the sermon, I should like to pause, and ask whether we as Christian men and women are such that Paul could say of us, "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." What think you? Could your pastor bless God for you? Could your nearest and dearest Christian friend feel that he was bound to thank God always for you? If not, why not? Oh that we may rise into such a happy state that we shall be the cause of gratitude in others! It ought to be so; we ought to glorify God, causing men to see our good works, and praise our Father in heaven.

One more question: Do you think we are in such a condition that it would be safe for anybody to praise us? Would it be safe to ourselves for us to be thus commended, and made subjects of thankfulness? It takes a great deal of grace to be able to bear praise. Censure seldom does us much hurt. A man struggles up against slander, and the discouragement which comes of it may not be an unmixed evil; but praise soon suggests pride, and is therefore not an unmixed good. "As the fining-pot for silver, and the furnace for gold, so is a man to his praise." Would it be safe if Paul were here to say good things about you as he did about the Thessalonians? Did it not prove that the brethren there were sober, well-established believers?

Once more, do you ever feel it in your heart to talk like this about your fellow-Christians? Paul himself was in a fine condition when he could thus extol his brethren. Few men are ready with hearty commendations of others. We are greedy in receiving praise, and niggardly in dispensing it. We seldom speak too kindly of one another. Now and then you hear a person say, "There is no such thing as love in the church at all." I know that gentleman very well, and I never saw any excess of love in him. I heard one say, "Brotherly love is all a mockery; there is no reality in Christian charity" — and truly he measured his own corn very accurately. Most men would see others better if their own eyes were clearer. When a man honestly feels that his fellow-Christians are for the most part much better than himself, and that he would willingly sit at the feet of many of them, then he is himself in a healthy state. I admire the grace of God in many around me. I see their imperfections as though I did not see them. I am not looking for the thorns, but for the roses; and I see so many of them that my heart is glad, and in spirit I bless the name of the Lord.

The man who can commend the work of the Lord in others without saying a word about himself, has, by that fact, given himself a good character; his eyes must have been washed in the fountains of love; they must have been cleansed from the dust of pride, envy, and self, or he would not have so seen or so spoken. I love the text because it is an instance of a man of great grace, of a man under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, who yet delighted to speak enthusiastically of a church which certainly was far from perfect. I delight in that eye which can be a little blind to faults while it exercises a clear vision in seeing all that is good and praiseworthy towards God.

So, then, we come to our text, and the subject runs thus: for us to grow in faith is a subject for devout thanksgiving; and in the second place, it is an object for diligent endeavor. Thirdly, if we greatly grow in faith it will be the source of other growths: for as faith increases, love, patience, and every other virtue, will flourish.

I. For us to grow and increase in faith is A Subject For Devout Thanksgiving.

Paul gives a commendation of the Thessalonian church which is exceedingly warm and hearty. One critic says the words may be regarded as somewhat extravagant, after the mode of the Apostle when he wishes to be emphatic. He writes fervidly: "Your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." It is an intense and unreserved commendation. As I have already said, this church was not absolutely perfect; for, because of the love of every one towards another, and their great kindness towards the poor, certain unworthy persons encroached upon their liberality. To use a very rough word, cadgers were multiplied among them, as they always are where generosity abounds. Shame that it should be so. Read chapter 3 verse 11: "For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies." There had been also among them here and there a person of loose life and of sharp business dealings, and to such he spoke in the First Epistle; but these flies in the pot of ointment did not destroy its sweetness. They were so few comparatively that Paul speaks of the whole body with approbation. When our faith shall grow and our love abound, it may be proper for a pastor to speak with unrestricted admiration of what the Lord has done.

The blessing of increased faith is of unspeakable value, and therefore praise should be largely rendered for it. Little faith will save, but strong faith is that which building up the church, which overcomes the world, which wins sinners, and which glorifies God. Little-faith is slow and feeble, and to suit his pace the whole flock travel softly. Little-faith is a wounded soldier, and has to be carried in an ambulance by the armies of the Lord; but faith which grows exceedingly, lifts the banner aloft, leads the van, meets hand to hand the foes of our Prince, and puts them to the rout. If we were invoking blessings upon a church we could scarcely ask for a larger boon than that all the brethren might be strong in faith, giving glory to God. Strong faith ventures into large endeavors for Christ, and hence missions are projected: Strong-faith carries out the projects of holy zeal, and hence daring ideals are turned into facts: Strong-faith is a shield against the darts of error, and hence she is the object of the contempt and hatred of heresy. Strong-faith builds the walls of Zion, and casts down the walls of Jericho. Strong-faith smites the Philistines hip and thigh, and makes Israel to dwell in peace. Oh that the night of Little-faith were over, and that the day of glorious faith would come! Soon would our young men see visions, and our old men dream dreams, if faith were more among us. When the Son of man cometh shall he find faith in the earth? At the revival of faith we shall see another Pentecost, with its rosining mighty wind, and its tongues of flame; but during our lack of faith we still abide in weakness, and the enemy will exact upon us. O God, we beseech thee, make thy face to shine upon us, cause our faith to grow exceedingly, and our love to abound yet more and more; then shall there be times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.

Paul thus fervently gave thanks to God because the blessing came to the church at a remarkably seasonable time. The people of Thessalonica had risen against the church and persecuted it; thus, without without were fightings, but within there were no fears; for the brethren were firm in faith and fervent in love. The church was subject to constant tribulation; but its faith grew exceedingly. Has it not often been so with the Lord's people? Times of cloud and rain have been growing times. Pharaoh dealt hardly with Israel; but the more he oppressed them, the more they multiplied. The more the church of God is down-trodden, the more it rises into power and influence. The bush burns and is not consumed; nay, rather, it flourishes in the flame. I say not that this increase of faith is the immediate effect of persecution, but it is singularly the attendant put upon it. God knew that when his poor servants were haled to prison, when they were brought before rulers and kings for his name's sake, when they were spoiled of their goods, they wanted increased strength, and therefore he gave it to them by grow in faith. As the persecution rose upon them like the deluge, their confidence in God rose above it, like Noah's ark, which rose the higher the deeper the waters became. They stood fast in the day of trial, and became an example to all other churches, whether persecuted or not; and this because their faith grew exceedingly. Beloved, I pray for each member of this church that your confidence in God may rise from ebb to flood. We need it much just now. This is a time of depression in trade, when many are suffering want, and almost all find their means decreased. We need to be rich in faith, for we are growing poor in pocket. Many children of God cannot find employment wherewith to earn their bread. This is, moreover, a time of abounding vice. Perhaps never in our memories were any of us so shocked as we have been of late by the discoveries of unspeakable abominations. We need that our faith should grow exceedingly, for sin runs down our streets in torrents. It is also a period of grievous departure from the faith once delivered to the saints. Looking back to our younger days, we are amazed at the progress of error. We mourned in those days that men trifled with the doctrines of the gospel; but what shall we now say, when men deride those doctrines, and mock at them as antiquated fables? The foundations of the earth are removed, and only here and there will you find a man who beareth up the pillars thereof; therefore do we need that our faith should be exceeding steadfast. I charge you, brethren, to be rooted and grounded in faith, seeing the times are evil! I cannot speak emphatically enough upon the abounding dangers of the times: they demand of us that we be not of doubtful mind, but that we take firm hold of infallible truth, and endure as seeing him who is invisible. He that cannot say, "I believe, and am sure," is one born out of due time.

The apostle's commendation was meet and fit, since, if there be any growth in faith, it is the work of God's Spirit. Faith is the gift of God in its beginnings, and it is equally the gift of God in its increase. If thou hast faith as a grain of mustard seed, God gave it thee; and if thou hast faith as a spreading tree, God has given the increase. The infancy of faith is of God, and so is its perfect manhood.

In the natural world we ought as much to admire God's hand in growth as in creation; for, indeed, the outbursting of spring, the advance of summer, and the maturity of autumn, are all a sort of creation, seen in detail. Even thus the progress of faith reveals the same power as the commencement of faith. If thou dost not look to God for more faith, thou wilt never have more faith: great faith in its strong broad current flows as much from the fountainhead of grace as in its first trickling streamlet of hope in Christ. Let God have all the glory of faith from its Alpha to its Omega. If thou be a strong man in Christ Jesus take heed that thou do not sacrifice to thine own net, nor burn incense to thine own drag, and glorify thine own experience as if thou madest thyself strong and rich in the things of God. We are bound to render all the thanks giving unto God; it is meet that it should be so. Look how the apostle puts it: "We are bound to thank God always for you." I like the modesty of that. He does not so much say that he did thank God, though he did do so; but in deep humility he admits the debt which he could not fully pay. He did not judge his thanksgivings to be sufficient, but owned that he was still under bonds to render more praise. I rejoice to be bound with these bonds, to be bound to thank God every day, and all the day. I wear these golden fetters and count them my best ornaments. "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even with cords to the horns of the altar." I would be bound over, not to keep the peace, but to keep praise for ever. Let the altar of incense be always burning, yea, flaming higher and higher with the sweet spices of love and gratitude. Blessed be God for what he is doing for his people, when he causes their faith to grow; for it is a blessing so immense, so incalculable, that our praises ought to rise to the height and glory of loud-sounding hallelujahs. Brethren, let us bless God for every good man we know whose faith has grown, for every holy woman whose love in the church is manifest unto all; and when we have done so, let us turn our eye to God, and say, "Lord, make me such a one that others may glorify God in me also, I am as yet sadly weak and undeveloped; make me to grow till all thy image shall be seen in me, and my fellow-Christians shall bless God concerning me." Thus have I set growth in faith before you as a subject for thanksgiving. It is indeed a jewel worth more than both the Indies.

II. In the second place, it is worthy to be An Object For Diligent Endeavor.

If you have it not, labor speedily to attain it. As the merchantman seeketh goodly pearls, so seek a growing faith. Covet earnestly the best gifts and the noblest graces. Never be self-satisfied, but cry with Jabez, "Oh that the Lord would bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast."

Why? Because the proof of faith lies in the growth of faith. If thou hast a dead faith, it will always be the same; but if thou hast the faith of God's elect, it must grow. If I heard of a child that was born some years ago, and had never grown, I should begin to guess that my friend was entrapping me, and that the child was dead from the birth. Life in its earliest stages is ever attended with growth. Brother, thou must have more faith, or we shall fear that thou hast no faith; thou must have more love, or else for sure thou hast no love at all. That which does not grow unto God does not live unto God.

We ought to have more faith because God's truth deserves it. It ought to be the easiest thing in the world for us to trust God; to believe every word of the Lord should be an act to which we need not to be exhorted; it should be as natural as for the lungs to heave, or the heart to beat. We ought, as children of God, to believe our Father by instinct, even as young eaglets hide under the mother's wing. We ought to exercise faith even as the eye sees, and the ear hears, because thereunto we were created by the Holy Spirit. It should be a necessity of our spiritual existence, that we must and will trust the Lord Jesus Christ yet more and more. I pray that it maybe so; for unbelief is a horrible crime. Have you doubted God? Have you in any sense mistrusted him? Have you limited the Holy One of Israel? Then continue not the slave of such a sin, but give unto God your heart's confidence from this time henceforth, and for ever.

Moreover, we ought to grow in faith, because it will be so much for our own spiritual health, and strength, and joy. Does Little-faith know what it might be, and do, and enjoy if it could only quit its littleness? There are many ways of being a Christian, as there are many ways of being an Englishman; but all are not equally desirable. I may be an Englishman in banishment, or in the workhouse, or in prison; but I prefer to be an Englishman at home, in health, and at liberty. So you may be a Christian, and be weak, timorous, and sad; but this is not desirable; it is better to be a happy, holy, vigorous, useful Christian. As your being an Englishman does not depend on your health or wealth, so neither does your salvation turn upon the strength or joy of your faith; yet much does depend on it. Why not glorify God on the road to heaven? Why not have foretastes of it now? It is not my desire to go through the world in miserable style, singing always —

"Do I love the Lord or no?"

Am I his, or am I not?"

Infinitely do I prefer so to trust God that my peace may be like a river and my righteousness like the waves of the sea. Look at the difference between Abraham, the Father of the faithful, and his nephew Lot. Lot was righteous, but he was by no means so strong in faith as Abraham, neither was he so great or so happy. Abraham is calm, bold, royal; Lot is greedy, timid, trembling. Lot, in Sodom, is with difficulty made to run for his life, while Abraham alone with God is interceding for others. Lot escapes from a

burning city with the loss of all things, while Abraham dwells peacefully with the Lord who is the possessor of heaven and earth. Abraham's faith makes him rise like some lone Alp till he touches the very heaven of God. It is well to be Lot, but it is infinitely better to be Abraham. Do seek the utmost degree of faith; for if this be in you and abound, you shall not be barren or unfruitful. Heaven lies that way. More faith, more rest of heart. To grow heavenly we must grow more believing.

The question is, How is this to be done? How is my faith to be made to grow exceedingly? I have already told you it is the work of the Holy Spirit: but still he uses us for the increase of our own faith. If we are to grow in faith certain evils are to be avoided with scrupulous care. Avoid continual change of doctrine. If you have a tree in your garden and you transplant it often, it will yield you scanty fruit. Those who are everything by turns, and nothing long, are "ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." Unstable as water, they shall not excel. Those brethren who believe this to-day, and that tomorrow, and the other thing the next day, do not believe anything in downright earnest. They cannot grow; they are not rooted and grounded. Like the moon, they are always changing, and what light they have is cold and sickly. He who can change his religion has none to change. Those who prefer philosophy to Christ never knew him.

Then, again, if you had a tree, and did not transplant it, but began to dig away the earth from it, removing the ground in which it stood, you would impoverish it, and prevent its fruitfulness. I know certain professors who are giving up the ground which their souls should grow in. One doctrine after another is forsaken, till nothing is held to be important. They do not believe much now, and they are on the line to believe nothing at all. The experiment of the Frenchman who had just brought his horse to live on a straw a day when it died, is being repeated among us, faith being literally starved to death. What low diet do some men prescribe for their souls! Marrow and fatness they do not even smell at! How can your faith grow when vital truths are abandoned, or held with feeble grasp? Oh for a band of Puritan believers! Oh for a troop of spiritual Ironsides!

Next, a tree cannot grow if it is shut out from sun, and rain, and dew. Without heavenly influences we must be barren. Plant a little tree right under a great oak so that it is always in the shade, and it cannot grow; clear the big tree away, or the sapling will dwindle to death. Some men's faith cannot grow because it is overshadowed by worldliness, by tolerated sin, by love of riches, by the pride of life, by cares of lower things. The pursuit of Christ crucified must be all-absorbing, or it will be ineffectual. To know what you believe, and to abide steadfast in it, is the way to be robust in faith. Men whose hearts are not in their trades, men who chop and change — these are the men whose names appear in the Gazette; are not many spiritual bankruptcies due to the same cause?

There are methods which the spiritual husbandman uses to cause faith to grow. First, faith grows by an increase of knowledge. Many persons doubt because they are not instructed. Some doubt whether they shall hold on to the end; they are ignorant of the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints. Some are in despair because they find evil desires arising in their hearts; they do not know the teaching of Scripture as to the two natures and the warfare between flesh and spirit. Many think themselves condemned because they cannot wholly keep the law; they forget that they are justified by faith. A great deal of unbelief vanishes when knowledge, like the morning sun, drives away the mists. Unbelief is an owl of the night, and when the sun arises, it hides away in a dark corner. Study the Word of God: give your heart to searching it; seek to get at the inner teaching, and learn the analogy of faith; practice deep sea-fishery, and you will reach those mysterious truths which are the secret riches of the soul. These truths are much despised now; but those who rejoice in them will find their faith growing exceedingly.

Better still than mere knowledge, which atone would puff you up, faith grows by experience. When a man has tried and proved a thing, then his confidence in it is largely increased. Take a promise and test it, and then you will say, "I know that is so." When you have tested it again, and again, and again, nobody will be able to shake you, for you will say, "I have tasted and handled of this good word; I have made it my own, and I am not to be driven from it." The experienced Christian is the established Christian. The man who proved all things is the man who holds fast that which is good. God give grace to increase our faith by knowledge and by experience!

Faith also grows by much meditation and walking with God. If you want to believe in a man, you must know him. Half the disputes between Christian people arise from their not knowing one another. There is a hymn of Mr. Sankey's which I venture to alter thus:

"When we know each other better

The mists will roll away."

When we know each other, our suspicions, prejudices, and dislikes will speedily disappear. I am sure it is so with our God. When you walk with him, when your communion with him is close and constant, your faith in him will grow exceedingly. Some of you, I am afraid, do not give five minutes in the day to meditation. You are in too great a hurry for that. In London life men get up in a hurry even as they went to bed in a hurry and slept in a hurry. They swallow their breakfast in a hurry; they have no time to digest it; the bell is ringing at the station, and they must hurry to catch the train; they reach business in a hurry they hurry through it, and they hurry to get back from it. Men cannot think, for they have barely time to wink their eyes. As to an hour's meditation and reading the Scriptures, and communing with God, many professors nowadays would think they committed robbery against the god of this world

if they took half-an-hour out of his service to give it to fellowship with the world to come. If our faith is to grow exceedingly, we must maintain constant intercourse with God.

Another way of increasing faith is by much prayer. Pray for faith and pray with faith, thus shall thy soul become firm in its reliance on the promises. It is while we wrestle with the angel that we find out our weakness, as the sinew of our thigh shrinks; but at the same time we prove our God-given strength, since as princes we wrestle with God and prevail. Power from prayer as well as power in prayer is what we want. On our knees we gather strength, till doubting and fearing disappear.

We must be careful to render obedience to God. A man cannot trust God while he lives in sin: every act of disobedience weakens confidence in God. Faith and obedience are bound up in the same bundle. He that obeys God, trusts God, and he that trusts God, obeys God. He that is without faith is without works; and he that is without works is without faith. Do not oppose faith and good works to one another, for there is a blessed relationship between them; and if you abound in obedience your faith shall grow exceedingly.

Again, faith grows by exercise. The man who uses little faith he has will get more faith; but he that says, "I have not enough faith for such and such work," and therefore shrinks back, shall become more and more timid, till at last, like a coward, he runs away. Go forward with thy little faith, and to thy surprise it shall have grown as thou hast advanced. Accomplish much, and then endeavor something more, and something more. I have often used an illustration taken from a person who teaches the art of growing taller. I do not believe in that art: we shall not add a cubit to our stature just yet. But part of this professor's exercise is, that in the morning, when you get up, you are to reach as high as ever you can, and aim a little higher every morning, though it be only the hundredth part of an inch. By that means you are to grow. This is so with faith. Do all you can, and then do a little more; and when you can do that, then do a little more than you can. Always have something in hand that is greater than your present capacity. Grow up to it, and when you have grown up to it, grow more. By many little additions a great house is built. Brick by brick up rose the pyramid. Believe and yet believe. Trust and have further trust. Hope shall become faith and faith shall ripen to full assurance and perfect confidence in God Most High.

This then, brethren, is what I commend to you. May God the Holy Ghost help you all to go from faith to faith.

III. Finally, this growing faith becomes The Centre Of Other Christian Graces.

"Your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." A firm faith in gospel verities will make us love one another for each doctrine of truth is an argument for love. If you believe in God as having chosen his people, you will love his elect; if you believe in Christ as having made atonement for his people, you will love his redeemed, and see: their peace. If you believe in the doctrine of regeneration, and know that we must be born again, you will love the regenerate. Whatever doctrine it is that is true, it ministereth toward the love of the heart. I am sure you will find a deep, firm, fervent unity with one another in those that hold the truth in the love of it. If you are not filled with brotherly love, it must be because you are not firmly believing that truth which worketh toward love.

Firmness in the faith ministers toward the unity of the church. The church at Thessalonica did not have a secession, or a split, as some call it: the church at Thessalonica did not divide under the pressure of persecution: they adhered closely to one another, all the more they were hammered, the more they were consolidated. They were welded into one solid mass by the hammer of persecution and the fire of love, and the reason was because they each one held the truth with all firmness. I am always afraid of a church that is made up of mixed elements, when some are Calvinistic, some Arminian, some Baptist and some Paedobaptist. When the minister who holds them together dies, they will disintegrate. When certain reasons that now make them cohere cease to exist, the church will divide like quicksilver, each little bit breaking into smaller bits, and so they will go rolling about in innumerable factions. But given a church that holds the truth firmly, with deep and strong faith, then if the pastor dies, or twenty pastors die, they believe in a Pastor who lives for ever, and whoever comes or does not come, the truth they hold, holds them in living unity. I cannot imagine a greater blessing for you as a church in years to come than for each man and woman to be intelligently established in the truth you have received. Who shall separate the men who are one in Christ by the grip of mighty faith? I commend firm faith to you with all my heart, as the source of love and the means of unity in years to come.

This faith breeds patience in men, and patience assists love. Truth to tell, God's people are, some of them, a singular tribe. A countryman was accustomed to say that if God had not chosen his people before they were born, he would never have done so afterwards. There is truth in that saying. Therefore if a man loves his fellow-Christians as an act of mere nature, he will often feel himself baffled; he will say, "They acted very unkindly to me. Who can love people that are so ill-mannered, so ungrateful?" But when faith is strong, you will say, "What is that to me? I love them for Christ's-sake. If I am to have a reward, it shall come from my Lord Christ. As for God's people, I love them despite their faults; over the head of the mistaken judgments they form of me, I love all my brethren." The way to make men better is not to be always censuring them, but to love them better. The quickest way to win

a sinner, is to love him to Christ; the quickest way to sanctify a believer is to love him into purity and holiness Only faith can do this. May faith, therefore, grow exceedingly; for faith by working patience helps us to bear with others. If there be anything grand, and good, and desirable, anything Christ-like, anything God-like, the way to it is to let your faith grow exceedingly. If this church is to become a missionary church more and more, as I pray God it may, your faith must grow exceedingly. If you are to stand fast as a break-water in these times of departure from the faith once delivered to the saints, your faith must grow exceedingly. If you are to be made a blessing to this wicked city, and shine like a lighthouse over this sea of London, your faith must grow exceedingly: If God has brought you as a church, together with other churches, to the kingdom for such a time as this; if you are to achieve your destiny, and work for God and glorify his name, your faith must grow exceedingly. The man who is timorous and faint-hearted, let him go home; he is not fit for the day of battle. The age requires heroes. The chicken-hearted are out of their place in this perilous century. You that know what you know, and believe what you believe, whose tramp is that of fearless warriors, you have a high calling; fulfill it. You shall see what God will do for you and with you; and it shall be written in the pages of eternity that at such a time the church grew in its faith, and therefore God used it for his glory. May it be so. May those among us who have no faith be led to Jesus. O believers, try your own faith by speaking to unbelievers as they go away this morning: this afternoon in the Sunday-school, prove your faith by winning your dear children for Christ: try your faith every day in the week by airing sinners no rest until they come to Christ. God bless you each one for his name's sake. Amen.

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2 Thessalonians. 2:13: TITLES OF HONOR

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ON THURSDAY EVENING, APRIL 5TH, 1886.

Brethren beloved of the Lord.” — 2 Thessalonians. 2:13.

THE verse from which my text is taken begins thus, “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord,” so I will commence my discourse by saying that we might often find comfort and relief from gloomy apprehensions by associating with those who are “beloved of the Lord.” If you read the chapter through, you will perceive that Paul’s mind was greatly exercised concerning the perilous times which were to come to the Church of Christ. He wrote to warn the Thessalonians concerning the coming of antichrist, and then said that there were some to whom God would send “strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteous.” The apostle’s heart was so heavily burdened with that sorrowful theme that he was glad to turn his pen to quite a different subject, and therefore he wrote, “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord.” Just now, there is a general opinion that the growth of Popery in this land is most alarming, and that the declension of vital godliness is very serious; and while we do not fully agree with the alarmists, we are obliged to admit that these are times of peculiar peril. The tendency of those who look only at the black side of the question is to fret and worry, and to feel that God’s Church is in danger. Brethren, I would not have you shut your eyes to the dangers by which we are surrounded, but I would not have you dispirited by them. There are still many saints left in the world; there are still are who, like those in Sardis, have not defiled their garments; there are still some who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth; there are still many earnest and faithful testifiers to the truth as it is in Jesus; so, although you may mourn over the evils of the times, you are bound to give thanks always to God that there are some “brethren beloved of the Lord” still left upon the face of the earth. David spoke of the saints that were on the earth in his day as “the excellent, in whom is all my delight;” and David’s Lord, our blessed Master, no doubt found no small solace, as a man, in associating with Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus, for he seems to have withdrawn from the multitude who mocked and scoffed, and to have retired into the privacy of domestic piety, and there to have found joy and comfort in the midst of the happy family that was so closely attached to him. There are still in the world many of the precious sons of Zion who are comparable to fine gold, and concerning whom the Lord says, “They shall be mine in that day when I make up my jewels.” Be wise, my brethren, and let it be said of you as it was said of them of old, “They that feared the Lord spake often one to another,” for there is comfort to be found in the society of God’s saints, let the times be never so perilous’ and dark.

But I would advance a step beyond this preliminary observation, and remark that, when things are outwardly not as the children of God would like them to be, and when there is much within them that is not as it should be, they may often derive much solace by

reflecting upon their true condition in the sight of God in connection with the Lord Jesus Christ. Brethren and sisters in Christ, I know that many of you have grievous trials to endure; and I am well aware that, if you look within, you will see much that will distress you. You will perceive that the old Adam still lurks within you, and that notwithstanding all the force that has been brought against him by divine grace, he is still far too vigorous. It is true that some of you have also to suffer from poverty, and that your lot is a very hard one; yet we are bound to, give thanks alway to God for you, and you are yourselves bound to give thanks on your own behalf because notwithstanding your poverty, and notwithstanding your infirmity, and notwithstanding even the sin of which you have such cause to mourn, you are still “beloved of the Lord,” and in the person of Jesus Christ you are “without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. When faith recognizes the vital union which exists between Christ and the soul, and realizes the consequent blessedness and security of the saint, then it cries, “I am bound to give thanks alway unto God, for I am still beloved of the Lord notwithstanding and that cause me often to weep and mourn.”

It is my purpose, this evening, to invite all of you who are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ to contemplate your true standing in the sight of God, that you may be uplifted from the dunghills of your complainings, shake off the ashes of your doubts, unwind the sackcloth of your fears, put on your beautiful garments of holy rejoicing, and sing aloud unto him through whose grace you are made worthy to be called “brethren beloved of the Lord.” There are two topics on which I have to speak; first, the titles mentioned in the text; and, secondly, the wearers of those titles.

I. First, then, let us think for a while of The Titles Mentioned In The Text: “Brethren” and “beloved of the Lord.”

“Brethren” is a very special word, the utterance of it awakens an echo in every believer’s heart. It is naturally a silver word, but spiritually God has transmuted it into gold. I do not wonder that a certain sect has appropriated this title, yet we equally claim the name of “brethren” as our own, and we share it with all who are the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. The title “brethren” is very hallowed and very precious to us; let us try to find out what it implies.

First, it indicates a common nature. Whatever opinions any may hold concerning the unity of the human race, there can be no difference of opinion about the unity of nature in those who are born of the same parents. Where should I expect to find a person more in sympathy with myself than; my own brother? Where should I expect to find, beneath the cope of heaven, another soul that should be more akin to mine than the soul of my brother? If there be not peace and love between us, where, can they be found? However much we may differ from one another in some respects, there must be certain lineaments of feature or traits of character in which we are alike. But even if this is not so naturally, it certainly is so spiritually. All believers are alike partakers of the diving nature; we are all equally begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The inner life of all true Christians is the same; there is not a Baptist life and a Methodist life, or a Nonconformist life and a Church of England life. The diving life is one wherever it is bestowed. The life of my hand and the life of my foot are one and the same, pulsating from the same central source, and maintained by the same power; and the life of God is the same in all the members of the mystical body of Christ. This is something more than brotherhood that idea does not cover the whole truth although it includes much of it. There is a distinct unity of nature in all the saints of the living God. Hence, brethren, I never can tolerate any attempts to limit communion between those who, are really one in Christ. It always seems to me that it would be an infraction of the divine law if I were to say to a brother in Christ that I could not commune with him because of certain minor matters in which we do not quite agree. Besides, whether I am willing to do so or not, I cannot help communing with him, for he is a, part of Christ’s mystical body of which I also am a part; so that, unless I could myself get out of that body, or he could get out of it, which is impossible for either of us, I must remain in spiritual communion with him whatever I may do concerning the outward and visible symbols of that communion. Nay, more than that, if I could go to heaven, and that brother still tarried here upon the earth, our communion would not be broken, for Dr. Watts was right when he sang, —

**“The saints on earth, and all the dead,
But one communion make;
All join in Christ, their living Head,
And of his grace partake.”**

The term “brethren” also implies a common experience. The brethren in an earthly family have the same parents, they live in the same house, they partake of the same food, they share all the privileges and varied experiences of the same household. So is it with those who are of the household of faith, the family of God. Their experiences may vary even as one child in the home differs from another, but there is much more similarity than there is diversity in the experiences of the living children of the living God. We have all been broken in pieces, we have all been bound up, we have all been emptied, we have all been brought to the cross, we have all been led by one Spirit to drink of the same precious truth. We have not all subscribed to the same creed, yet in substance and in effect the doctrine of all the children of God is to a large extent identical. They rely for salvation upon the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and therein they are all one. Their pilgrim path is through the same wilderness, they eat the same manna, they drink of the same Rock, they are led by the same cloudy-fiery pillar, and they come at last to the same heavenly Canaan, and go no more out

for ever. They are and they must be one, not only because they are one in nature, but because the various processes through which that nature has to pass are so largely the same.

More than this, the title "brethren" implies that we love one another. It is said that there is a lack of love in certain churches that profess to be Christian. Well, perhaps there is; I am not gain" to be an accuser of the brethren in that respect; but I believe there is a great deal more love existing among Christians than many persons imagine. Possibly, those who say there is a lack of love in our midst judge by the state of their own hearts, while those who really love the saints find that the saints also love them. Do not suppose, dear friends, because the preacher has sometimes to proclaim very unpalatable truths, and because he sometimes delivers his message in stern tones, that therefore he has not a tender heart. Fidelity to the truth requires that it should be spoken in such a fashion as to secure public attention, and this involves the use of great plainness of speech, and a manner of delivery which some may resent; and the man who honestly and fearlessly acts thus is more acceptable to God, and has far greater and truer love in his heart than the one who says, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. As I hate Satan and all his works, so my soul hates every false doctrine in this church and in every church; but as I love God and all that God loves, so am I desirous to love every child of the loving God; and I will further say that, not only do I desire to love every child of God, but I think I really do so. Do you not feel, beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, whenever you meet a believer in Jesus, and begin to talk of the things that belong to his kingdom, you have fellowship with him in heart and spirit even though you had never seen him before? When we talk of Jesus, our love to one another soon begins to flow. The true basis of our communion with one another is that we are there in Christ Jesus, and that union manifests itself in love to all who are, as our text puts it, "brethren beloved of the Lord."

This word "brethren" is a far-reaching word, for it further implies that all Christians have a common Father. Let all believers rejoice that they can unite in saying, "Our Father, who art in heaven." There is a straight line from my heart to the heart of God, and so there is from your heart, my brother or my sister in Christ, so our Father's heart is our common meeting place. We were there in purpose before this world was created, we are there by faith at this moment, and we shall be there by blessed experience when this world has passed away, and time shall be no more. Having the same Father, we share equally in that Father's love. We may not always feel the same love to all our brethren and sisters in Christ, but God's love to us and his love to them knows no variation. I trust you all realize that our Father is quite impartial in his love to all his children, and that all who are truly members of his family through their union to Christ shall have an equal share of it. Hence the tie of Christian brotherhood become a very solemn and a very precious thing, for it not only binds us fast to our Father in heaven, but it also binds us closely to one another. I pray that the members of this church may always act toward each other as brethren in Christ. I wish that amongst all the saints there might be a sort of spiritual free-masonry so that, whenever we might meet, we should recognize one another by the holy grip of Christian love. There are certain sacred passwords that are common to all the saints, and I will defy the hypocrite or the worldling to pronounce them aright; or if he should be able to utter them with his lips, he can never really know their meaning in his heart. There are certain experiences that cannot be learned without the teaching of the Holy Spirit. There is a certain way of speaking about Christ that can never be acquired as a parrot learns to talk. There is a certain ring which God gives to his gold which is never bestowed upon baser metal, and there is a certain something about a true child of God which enables him to recognize others of the same family, and which also enable; them to recognize him; so that, when they come together, their hearts leap up at the thought that they are "brethren beloved of the Lord."

Perhaps I have lingered too long over that first title, so now I must turn to the second one, "beloved of the Lord." You do need my explanations here, for the Holy Spirit inspired the apostle to give the divine explanation of this title of honour. Turn to the verse from which our text is taken, and you will see, that the first thought concerning the Lord's love to you is, that of its antiquity: "We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you." You always were "beloved of the Lord." He did not begin to love you when you first repented and turned to him. He saw you in the glass of his eternal purpose, and he loved you then. That love he proved many centuries before you knew anything about it, for his beloved Son, Jesus Christ your Lord and Saviour, had redeemed you eighteen hundred years before you were born; he gave the fullest proof of his affection for you in laying down his life for you. There was nothing in you to merit this wondrous self-sacrifice on the part of Christ; on the contrary, you were his enemies, you profaned his holy name, and despised his sacrifice after you learned who he had done. But he gave himself for you because from eternity he had loved you with a love that would not be turned from its purpose by anything that, he foresaw would be done by you.

In addition to the antiquity of the Lord's love to you, think also of its richness. The apostle says, "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation." Have you grasped the full meaning of that word salvation, beloved? It does not merely mean salvation from hell, though that is included in it; but it means salvation from sin, salvation from the guilt and power of sin, salvation from your doubts, your fears, your troubles, salvation from that besetting infirmity of yours, salvation from the devil's dominion over you, starvation in all its fulness from first to last. To all this "God hath from the beginning chosen you" who are "brethren beloved of the Lord." This is no mean inheritance, no slender portion, no slight boon; indeed, it is not easy to find words in which adequately to describe all that God has done for you in choosing you "to salvation." It will need all eternity to fully explain the meaning of that great word. You are indeed "beloved of the Lord" in having such a priceless portion as this bestowed upon you.

Notice, next, the wisdom, of the Lord's love to you: "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." Had it been possible for you to have had salvation without sanctification, it would have been a curse to you instead of a blessing. If such a thing were possible, I cannot conceive of a more lamentable condition than for a man to, have the happiness of salvation without the holiness of it; happily, it is not possible. If you could be saved from the consequences of sin, but not from the sin itself, and its power and pollution, it would be no blessing to you. But the salvation to which God has from the beginning chosen you is inseparably linked with the cleansing and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, who operates within you through the instrumentality of faith. Your belief of the truth has a purifying influence upon your whole life, and makes you desire to follow in the footprints of your dear Lord and Saviour. Thus God shows his wisdom in the choice of the means which he blesses to your salvation, blessing you as much by the means as by the salvation itself, blessing you as much in the road as in the end to which it leads. You are indeed "beloved of the Lord" in having the Spirit of God thus dwelling in you, and bestowing upon you that precious gift of faith by which you are enabled to believe the truth.

Observe, too, in order to increase your joy in the Lord, the signs of this love. In the next verse, the apostle goes on to say, "whereunto he called you by our gospel." Do you not remember, you who are "beloved of the Lord," when you were called by the gospel ? Then was the eternal purpose of God fulfilled in your experience. Go back in thought to the time of your espousal to Christ. Recall the sound of the silver trumpet that then brought you into gospel liberty. You had been to the house of God hundreds of times before when that same trumpet was ringing out the glad refrain, —

"The year of jubilee is come;

Return, ye ransomed sinners, home;" —

but your ears and heart had been sealed to the message. But that day the Lord opened your heart, and unstopped your ears, so that you were numbered among the happy people who heard the joyful sound. Your calling proved your election, and it stands to you still as gracious evidence of God's eternal love to you. Happy are we, too, if we can say, with the apostle, "whereunto he called you by our gospel." I know that, however many may preach the gospel better than I do, there is no one who can preach a better gospel than the one I preach, for it is that gospel which "is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." "Our gospel" is the best of gospels, the richest of gospels, it cannot be excelled, it cannot be equalled; in fact, it is the only gospel that is worthy of the name. You remember how Paul wrote to the Galatians, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from, him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; " that is to say, it is not another gospel, and it brings only a curse both upon him who preaches it and those who receive it; but blessed are ye who have been called unto, salvation by "our gospel."

There is yet one, more sign of God's eternal love which is to be seen by us in the future: "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." We who believe in Jesus are so "beloved of the Lord" that he will never be satisfied until we share his glory. So be glad in the Lord, and rejoice in the glorious prospect that he has set before you. God was not content to choose you to happiness here, but he has also chosen you to happiness hereafter; he was not satisfied with making a little heaven for you here believe, but he has made a great heaven for you up above. He has not appointed an earthly paradise where he, might sometimes come to you as he came to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, but he has prepared a place for you in his own home in glory, that you may dwell for ever in your Father's house where there are many abiding places. Rejoice, then, "beloved of the Lord," that he hath "called you by our gospel to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Of course it is not in my power to enable every Christian here to suck all the sweet out of this title, but it is in the power of the Holy Spirit to enable you to do, and by the exercise of faith you may draw much of it out. I claim this title for myself: "beloved of the Lord;" and each brother or sister in Christ may claim it for himself or herself. "O man greatly beloved" was the title given to Daniel, and that is the title that is given to every believer in Jesus. "That disciple whom Jesus loved" was the distinguishing title of one of his followers when Christ was here in the flesh; and now that after the flesh we know Christ no more, we are his in such a special sense that every child of God is "that disciple whom Jesus loves." May you get a firm grip of that truth, beloved, and realize that Jesus loves you. You cannot obtain this assurance except by faith; but when you have believed, joy and peace will quickly follow upon the heels of faith; nay, they come hand in hand, for we have joy and peace in believing.

II. I have taken so long in speaking of these titles of honour that I have very little time left for speaking of The Wearers Of These Titles.

Suppose, dear friends, you had all heard the gospel preached, and that you understood the dignity and happiness of a Christian, what sort of a person would you suppose him to be? If I try to picture him for you, you will see how far your ideas and mine agree. I should think you would so imagine that a man who is "beloved of the Lord" would be the happiest man in the world. You naturally suppose that, if the eternal God has loved him, if the infinite heart of the Most High has been set upon him from all eternity, he must

experience the greatest imaginable delight in such a belief, and he must feel that, whatever else he may or may not possess, he is rich to the fairest possible extent in having the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost who is given unto him. I know that a sorrowful friend over yonder is saying, "If I really could say that Jesus is mine, I would be quite content to be poor; if I were 'beloved of the Lord,' I would not mind if I had to lie in a dungeon or even to be burned to death for his sake;" so I conceive that those who are "beloved of like Lord" must be the most happy and joyful people to be found anywhere upon the face of the earth.

I suppose, too, that the influence of this love upon them would make them very careful not to offend their loving Lord. Naturally, the love of Christ would exercise such a constraining influence upon them that they would feel that men so highly favoured as they are ought not to live as other men do; but that, being distinguished by such peculiar privileges, they should be "a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Without violating the proprieties of conjecture, I can conceive that the "beloved of the Lord" would be most heavenly-minded people. Having such treasure in heaven, they would naturally not care about the things of earth, but would set their affection on things above so that where their treasure is there would their heart be also. Methinks the believer would be longing and panting to get a peep through the pearly gates, and that, until he could be there with his loving Lord, he would often be singing, —

"My heart is with him on his throne,

And ill can brook delay,

Each moment listening for the voice,

'Rise up, and come away.'"

Further, I can suppose that the "beloved of the Lord" are so grateful for their Lord's love that they are constantly telling to others the story of that love; and that, when they meet their fellow-Christians, their constant theme of conversation is the riches of divine grace. I can suppose that these people are so different from others that, wherever they go, they are looked upon with astonishment. Difficulties I suppose they have, but being "beloved of the Lord" they take their difficulties to him, and he enables them to overcome them by his grace. Trials I suppose they have, but they are sure to go to God about them, and he either removes them or gives the necessary strength to endure that. I suppose they are people who compass sea and land, not to make proselytes to their particular sect, but by holy self-denial and consecrated service to glorify God and extend the Redeemer's kingdom on earth.

Is not this what you are longing to do, beloved? Well, it is a good thing to have high aspirations, but it is an even better thing to turn those aspirations to practical account. Is there not something that we can do for Christ to-night, The Israelites found the manna in the wilderness, not by looking up to heaven, but by looking down on the ground; and instead of looking up to heaven for means of glorifying God, we may find opportunities of doing so all around our daily path. Let us each one ask ourselves these questions, and answer them as in, the sight of God, — What can I do for God in my own family circle? What can I say about Jesus to my friends? How can I bring most glory to God in my own spiritual life? What choice gift can I bring to my Saviour as Mary brought the costly ointment of spikenard, and anointed the feet of Jesus? What tears of penitence can I weep before his marred visage? What holy faith can I now exercise in his risen and glorified person? Let me, as the "beloved of the Lord," with my largest ideas concerning his glory and the coming of his kingdom, see what I can practically do to show that I truly love him by whom I am so, greatly beloved.

I wish, brethren, that the portrait of the happiest man in the world that I tried to draw a few minutes ago might prove to be your own likeness. Some of you are sad and despondent, yet you are the "beloved of the Lord;" then why are you so dispirited? You are heavy of heart to-night; but, since you are the "beloved of the Lord," you should rejoice in him whatever there may be to cause you present heaviness of spirit. You have been struggling with inbred sin, and the fight has been so fierce that you have feared that you would be defeated; but, as you are the "beloved of the Lord," you must be more than conquerors through him who hath loved you. Some of you have come here to-night from the workshop where you have been laughed at and mocked, and you have most painful recollections of the scorn with which you were assailed this very afternoon; but, since you are the "beloved of the Lord," the day will come when them things will be reckoned among your highest honours. "Take that, John Bunyan," said one to a certain Christian as he pushed him into the gutter. "Oh!" said the other, "you may push me into the gutter again if you can only prove my right to bear that noble name." So may you say to those who persecute you for Christ's sake, "You may do it again if it pleases you for it would be an honour to me to be spit upon because I belong to Christ." Cultivate that spirit, brethren and sisters in Christ, and: let the thought that that you are the "beloved of the Lord" make amends for every cruel act or word on the part of his enemies. When the last trumpet sounds, and the innumerable hosts of the redeemed are gathered together unto Christ, and you whom God hath from the beginning chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, you whom he hath called by our gospel, obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, you will forget the little suffering that you have ever borne on his account, and rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory that you are for ever to be numbered amongst the "beloved of the Lord."

2 Thessalonians 2:16, 17

COMFORT AND CONSTANCY

NO. 2363

A SERMON INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S DAY JUNE 3RD, 1894,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.
ON THURSDAY EVENING, MARCH 15TH, 1888.

“Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work.”, — 2 Thessalonians 2:16, 17.

THE Thessalonians had been a good deal flattered by certain persons who had said that the coming of the Lord was immediately at hand. Paul therefore bade them be steadfast, and not be worried and perplexed by any such teaching; and then he presented this prayer to God for them, that they might have these two things, comfort and constancy, that God would comfort their hearts, and establish them “in every good word and work.” It is a very blessed and comprehensive prayer; and while we are thinking of it, let us be praying it for ourselves, and for one another, that the Lord may comfort our hearts, and establish us “in every good word and work.”

I. The first enquiry to be answered is this, Why Is There The Conjunction Of These Two Things In This Remarkable Prayer?

Why is it put thus, “Our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father,... comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work”?

I answer, first, the two things, comfort and constancy, are put together because comfort by itself is not enough. We do not desire first and above all things that Christian men should have comfort. It is a very great privilege to be comforted, especially by the Comforter, for such comfort is sound, and safe, and holy; but, at the same time, they err who think that the first and chief reason for knowing God is that you may feel comforted and happy. I fear that there are many who are under that notion. They expect every sermon to comfort them; otherwise, they think it is a wasted opportunity. Even when they are alone in prayer, their chief thought is that they want to be comforted by their own devotion. But, sometimes, rebuke is better than comfort; and spiritual quickening, and especially true sanctification, are more greatly to be valued than any measure of comfort whatsoever. If we were to confine ourselves to prayer for the Lord only to comfort his people, we should have a very imperfect form of intercession. No; it needs that we should not only be comforted by our religion, but that we should be led by it into holy activity, so as to abound in every good word and work, and be established therein.

I give another answer to the question, Why is there this conjunction between comfort and constancy? Because establishment in every good word and work is not enough if it is alone. We need to be comforted as well as to serve the Lord. Our God is not like Pharaoh, who would not give to the children of Israel even a day in which they might have rest, and worship God. Pharaoh “aid, “Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let (or hinder) the people from their works? Get you unto your burdens;” but God doth not speak go to us. The service which his children render to him is quite compatible with rest. We are like certain birds that are said to rest on the wing; we never have a better rest than when every faculty is occupied in the service of our Lord. But work by itself, establishment in every good word and work alone, might tend to weariness; we might be jaded, if God did not minister to us divine consolation while we served him. Moreover, I am sure that we should never do the work well if God did not comfort us, for unhappy workers, those who do not love their work, and are not at home in it, those who feel no comfort of religion themselves, are generally very poor and unsuccessful workers. The second blessing mentioned in our text is certainly a very necessary one, this establishing in every good word and work; but you also need the first one, that God may “comfort your hearts.” When you get the two together, when you are up to your necks in holy service, and up to your hearts in divine comfort, then these two things cause you not to be barren or unfruitful, and at the same time they help you not to be weary in well-doing. You are made to be “steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord,” because you are comforted with the belief that “your labor is not in vain in

the Lord." I see those two reasons for the conjunction of comfort and constancy in the text; first, because comfort alone is not sufficient; and, secondly, because constancy without comfort will not suffice us.

And next, dear friends, it is because the comfort of the heart aids in the establishment of the soul in service. They are put together because the one helps the other. May the Lord "comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work!" He that is happy in the Lord will persevere in the service of the Lord. He that derives real support and comfort from his religion is the man who will not backslide from it. I notice that it is usually thus with those who decline; they first of all lose the comfort and joy of religion, they have not the brightness and delight that they once had in the things of God, and then, of course, they drop first this particular service, and then the other; they begin to absent themselves from the means of grace, prayer-meetings, and so forth, because they miss what is so material a stay to the establishment of their minds, that is, the comfort, and joy, and peace that true religion used to bring them. Whenever you are not happy in the Lord, I urge you not to rest until you become so. It is no small evil to get out of the sunlight of God's countenance. A dear child will not say, "If my father is angry with me, it does not matter; he will not kill me; I shall always be his child." No; just in proportion as he enjoys his father's love, it will be painful to him to come in the least degree under his father's displeasure, and he will cry out to be fully restored, and-to have again from those dear lips the kiss of forgiveness that will put away all his offenses. So, dear friends, do believe that your lack of comfort is an evil thing, which may lead to your loss of industry and perseverance in the cause of your Lord. If your heart be not comforted of God, you are not likely to be "established in every good word and work."

Now let me turn the text round the other way. I think that these two things are put together because establishment in word and work is so necessary for our comfort. I said we must be comforted that we might be constant in the service of God; now I put it that we must be constant in the service of God that we may be comforted. God does not give his dainties to idlers. He has choice secrets into which he does not admit everybody, nor even all of his own family. When we are diligent in his service, and all our powers are fully consecrated to him, then he gives us gracious rewards; not of debt, but according to the discipline of his own house, wherein he honors the faithful, and chastises those who are negligent. Now, beloved, you will miss your comfort when you begin to neglect your work. I know how it used to be with the boys at home. In cold weather they huddled round the fire, almost sat on the fire; it was so cold that they could not tell how they would live through the bitter winter; but when father came in, he said, "Now, you boys, set to work, and clear away that snow; don't sit here idle, go and do something; "and they came in with ruddy cheeks, and somehow or other the temperature seemed to have altered considerably, for they were quite warm from their exercise. I do think the best thing that could happen to some men would be that they might have something to do. I do not find much about depression of spirit in the Journals of Mr. Wesley, or Mr. Whitefield, and men of that sort, who spent themselves in the Lord's service. The fact is, the Lord seemed to carry them on from one work to another, and from strength to strength in their service, and they were comforted as to their hearts because they were established in every good word and work. These things act and re-act one upon another; the comfort makes us work, the work brings to us a fresh measure of comfort. See how even the Savior puts it. He says, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." That is the first rest, pardon of sin. What next? "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." That is another rest over and above what Jesus gives. "Through bearing my yoke, you shall find in my service rest unto your souls. God grant us grace to seek that rest which we are to find, now that we have received the rest which Jesus gives to those who come unto him!

I have not yet fully answered this question, — Why is there the conjunction of these two things, comfort and constancy? I think it is because the two blended together serve a very useful purpose. We are in this world to bear witness, and by our bearing witness we are to bring others to faith in Christ through the operation of the Holy Spirit. Now, there are some people who are only to be won for Christ by the holy confidence and comfort of believers. I am sure that, if a Christian woman, in the time of affliction at home, is calm, patient, resigned, and happy, she is more likely to see her husband converted by the comfort that religion brings to her own heart than by taking him to hear a sermon. By her Christian character, she will preach to him, and supply him with evidence of the power of grace which he will not be able to gainsay. I have known persons, in a storm at sea, exercise great influence over all in the vessel by the way in which they have been able to live above the storm, resting patiently in God; and in times of personal sickness, what a wonderful influence there is about holy patience! Some members of the family, who never have been moved by the external services of religion, have been deeply impressed by the patience of great sufferers, and especially by the serenity of dying saints. They have said to themselves, "There is something in this religion, after all; there is no mistake about it; the grace which could support and calm the heart at such a time as this, must be the gift of God." Now, if this were accompanied by idleness, it would lose much or all of its force; but when this holy calm comes over one who, in days of health, was full of active service for the Master, then the two things together become powerful arguments which gainsayers are not able to resist. Do seek to have this blessed blending, this comfort, like a light that burns within the lamp, and then this establishment in word and work, like the rays of light that stream from the lantern at the head of the lighthouse, that all may see, both far and near.

And I should like to give one other answer to this query, which is this. Paul in his prayer puts the two things together, because there is great need for both. There is great need to pray that our Father would comfort the hearts of his people; for there is trouble enough in the land, there is trouble enough in every house, there is trouble enough for each one of us; we do need you often to

pray for us, that God would comfort our hearts. It may be that we have to play the man in public, and yet, when we get away by ourselves, our heart is very heavy, and we have to cry mightily to God for supporting grace. Some of the strongest of God's servants, those who carry a smiling countenance, who, if they fast, anoint their head, and wash their face, that they appear not unto men to fast, yet have need to pray very earnestly to the Comforter that he would come and sustain their spirit. And there is equal need that we should have grace given us to be constant and instant in every good word and work, for there is a tendency in us to think that we have done enough. The feeling creeps over men of a certain age that it is time for the young people to do the Lord's work. One says, "I am now at such an age that as much cannot be expected of me as used to be." Oh, yes! if you have much serving, Martha is not the only woman that gets cumbered with it, and being cumbered is not confined to women. Oh, how many there are, who are not women, who are cumbered as much as Martha was! We need to have the Mary-spirit to keep the heart bright and cheerful, or else we shall quarrel with our work, or with our sister, or possibly with our Master, as we say to him, "Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone?" We need both comfort and constancy; and hence I commend to you this piece of heavenly plaiting, let the two things be twisted together in your life; may the Lord "comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work"!

II. As I look at my text, a second question comes to my mind. Why Does The Apostle So Specially Address This Prayer?

Notice to whom he addresses it: "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father,... comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work." Why is this?

It seems to me that, in the first place, in this prayer the whole Trinity is supplicated. When the apostle is desiring comfort to be given, he does not mention the Comforter, for that is needless; it would occur to every Christian mind that the Holy Spirit was necessary, since in comforting and quickening he is only exercising his special office; but the apostle does mention "Our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father," so that, to the mind of the thoughtful reader, the prayer for comfort and establishment is directed to the ever-blessed Three-in-One. Oh, that we oftener remembered the distinction of the Divine Persons without dividing the divine substance! It becomes instructed believers to remember that one blessing comes from the Father, another blessing from the Son, and a third blessing through the Holy Spirit. There are times when it would seem as if the one blessing must come through the three Divine Persons, that there must be a manifestation of the whole Trinity to produce the result. I cannot help noticing that truth, and reminding you how the Savior is especially placed here side by side with "God, even our Father," that we may see that equal reverence is to be paid to him with the Father, and equal prayer to be offered to him with that presented to the great Father of spirits.

But then, I think next, that mention is here made of "Our Lord Jesus Christ himself" because, as the prayer is for consolation, he is "the consolation of Israel." The Holy Spirit is the Comforter, but Christ himself is the comfort; the Holy Spirit gives the consolation, but Jesus Christ is the consolation. Beloved, we are never so comforted as when we turn to our blessed Lord himself. His humanity, his sympathy with us, his griefs, his bearing our infirmities, his putting away of our sins, his pleading for us at the right hand of God, his everlasting union with his people, — all this makes us turn our eye to him. He is the Sun that makes our day; from him flows that "river of the water of life" which quenches our thirst. So you see why the "Lord Jesus Christ himself" is mentioned in this prayer for comfort, since he is the every essence of the believer's consolation.

But then we are reminded of "God, even our Father," and is not this expression brought to our mind that we may derive comfort from the relation which God bears to his people? O ye children of God, does not the recollection that he is your Father comfort you? Children of the heavenly King, is not the fact of your relationship to him a well of unceasing consolation? What more do you require to lift your spirits out of the dust, than to know that this manner of love has been bestowed upon you, that ye should be called the children of God, "and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ"? I do believe that, if the Holy Spirit only lays home to the heart the fact of our new birth, and our adoption into the family of God, we have enough comfort to make us swim through seas of trouble without fear, and also enough motive for the most constant, diligent service, when we know that it is for our Father who is in heaven that we are spending the strength that he himself gives us. Do you not see, therefore, why the apostle thus addresses his prayer to "God, even our Father," and to "our Lord Jesus Christ himself"?

And is not this another reason why Paul thus prayed, because he would remind us that it requires the direct action of the Godhead upon our hearts to produce comfort and constancy? This is especially evident at certain times. Very frequently, when I have to comfort mourners, cases will occur in which a young husband has been taken away, leaving a large family of little children unprovided for; or else, two persons have been together for many years, till their lives have grown into one, and, on a sudden, the wife or the husband has been taken away. I have said, and I cannot help saying it often, "My dear friend, I cannot comfort you as I should like to; I have never been exactly in your circumstances, and therefore I cannot enter into your peculiar griefs; but I would remind you that one Person of the Divine Trinity has undertaken the office of Comforter, and he can do what nobody else can." You must sometimes have felt the power of a single text of Scripture laid upon a wound in your heart; it will stanch the bleeding, and

heal by a sort of heavenly magic. Have you not at times felt in a flutter of distress, so that you could not rest? Christian friends have spoken kindly to you, but they only seemed to mock you; then, in a moment, a soft, calming influence has stolen over your spirit, and you have felt that you could bear ten times the weight which had almost crushed you an hour before? God can comfort to purpose; hence the apostle did not say, "I hope you will enjoy the comfort I have Even you, or that, peradventure, your minister next Lord's-day may give you," but this was his prayer at this particular juncture: "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work." It is grand in your prayers to fall back upon your God, and upon a God whom you know as your Lord Jesus Christ, and your Father, and to feel, "The case is beyond me, but it is not beyond my God. The trial overwhelms me even in my sympathy with the tried one, how much more does it overwhelm the actual bearer of it; but I put you and your sorrow into hands quite equal to the emergency, and leave you there."

There is much more to be learned than I can tell you, because time fails me, as to how it was that the apostle presented this remarkable prayer in this remarkable manner.

III. The third point, with which I close, is this. What Does Paul Mention In His Prayer As Pleas?

He mentioned several facts for the strengthening of the faith of those for whom he prayed, and as arguments which they should use while pleading with God for others. Let us speak of these arguments very briefly; there are six of them.

First, Paul says that Jesus is ours. He is asking for comfort and establishment, and he begins his prayer, "Now, our Lord Jesus Christ himself." Do, if you can, get the sweetness of this expression, "Our Lord Jesus Christ." Why did not Paul say, "The Lord Jesus Christ"? Why did he not say, "My Lord Jesus Christ"? No, here is a plural possessive pronoun "Our Lord Jesus Christ." Is it so, then, that God has given us the Lord Jesus Christ himself to be ours? Can we not only call his blood ours, and his resurrection ours, and his kingdom ours, but is he himself ours? Oh, can we get a grip of him as "My Beloved"? Is he my Husband, my Covenant Head, my Jesus, and my all? Come, then, beloved; I was going to say that you hardly need pray for comfort, because you have it already, you have it in Jesus. Here is a solid mass of the pure gold of comfort in the fact that Jesus Christ himself is yours. You are Christ's, but Christ is also yours. As the husband belongs to the wife, and the wife belongs to the husband, so there is a mutual possession between Christ and you who are believers in him. Are you poor, then? What! and yet Christ is yours? Do you say that you are helpless and friendless? How is that when you can say, "Our Lord Jesus Christ himself"? No; here is a well opened in the desert for you; come and say to it, "Spring up, O well!" Sing ye unto it, drink of its living water, and fill your earthen vessels to the full. There is comfort enough for all saints in "Our Lord Jesus Christ himself."

The second plea in Paul's prayer is that God be our Father: "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father." I have already shown you what a mine and mountain of delightful consolation lies in the fact that the God who made the heavens and the earth, the omnipotent and unchangeable Jehovah, is "our Father." Do not think that this is a mere metaphor, that God is only set forth to us under the image of a father. There is no doubt that he is our Father, it is a matter of fact, if we are trusting his Son. "Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer; thy name is from everlasting." We have been begotten again by God; our new birth is from his power and his divine energy; we belong to his family, and shall never be cast out of it. Dear friends, what a plea this is in prayer! "My Father, wilt thou not comfort my heart? My Father, wilt thou let thy child despond? My Father, wilt thou not relieve me in the hour of my distress? Jesus Christ, my Lord Jesus Christ, do this for me, and great God, my Father, fail not to cheer my heart."

Then the apostle goes on to remind us that God has loved us. Kindly look at the text, and remember it: "God, even our Father, which hath loved us." You do not expect me to preach from those words, do you? "Which hath loved us." I cannot comprehend this truth; I can very well understand God pitying us, as we pity a beggar in the streets; but God's loving us always deprives me of the power to explain it. There was nothing in us to love; there was everything in us loathsome, and nothing lovable; yet the Lord loved us ere the world began, he hath loved us without bound, so as to give his only-begotten Son to die for us. Is not that a powerful plea in prayer? "Lord, comfort my heart; stablish me in every good word and work, for thou hast loved me, therefore go on to love me. If thou hast given me thy love, surely thou wilt not deny me the comforts of thy face, and the consolations of thy word."

Then Paul adds, "Who hath loved us, and hath given us." God has given us much, and all his past gifts are pleas for more gifts. Men do not plead so. The beggar in the street cannot say, "Give me a penny to-day because you gave me one yesterday," else we might reply, "That is the reason why I should not give you any more." But when dealing with God, this is a good plea. "O flowing Fountain, thou hast long been flowing, How on still! O blessed Sun, thou didst shine yesterday, shine still to-day!" God loves us to make his past mercies arguments for obtaining future blessings; so the apostle says, "God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us."

But what has God given us? God has given us "everlasting consolation." Catch at that expression, for it reminds us of everlasting

love, the everlasting covenant, the everlasting promises, everlasting redemption, and the everlasting heaven. Men nowadays clip this word “everlasting” round the edges; we do not, we take it as we find it. That which is everlasting lasts for ever; be you assured of that. And God has given us consolation which will last us in life, and last us in death, and last us throughout eternity. Well, if he has given us “everlasting consolation”, we may well plead that he would graciously enable us to lay hold upon it, that our hearts may be comforted and cheered, and that we may be established in every good word and work.

There is only one more expression upon which I will say a sentence or so. God has given us “good hope through grace.” It is of grace, and therefore it is a gift; and he has given it to us through the operation of his grace upon our hearts. It is a hope, a good hope, a “good hope through grace.” We have a good hope that God’s love will never fail us, and that, when life dies out on earth, we shall enter into his rest for ever, and behold his face with joy; we have a good hope that, when days and years are past, we shall meet in heaven; we have a good hope of dwelling throughout eternity with our God, “for ever with the Lord.” O Father, after thou hast done so much for us, and given so much to us, it is but little we ask of thee now, when we pray thee to comfort our hearts, and to stablish us in every good word and world!

I cannot understand what those do who have no God; I cannot comprehend the condition of those who have no “good hope through grace.” What can they do? They have to work very hard from Monday morning to Saturday night; on Sunday, they have no day of rest, no thought of a world to come, no rising to a purer atmosphere. They lie in bed, perhaps, in the morning; and then get up, and lounge about in their shirt-sleeves, there is nothing for them to get but what is found beneath the moon, and very little of that. It is better to be a dog than a man if there is no hope of a hereafter. It is better not to live at all than to live such a dead, good-for-nothing life as that man lives who lives without God, and without hope. Surely, you who are without God and without Christ, have your sinking, your mourning, your dull times, have you not? What do you do then? Perhaps you try to drug yourself with strong drink. Alas, some do that; and this is mischievous indeed, to try to poison conscience, and silence the best friend you have within you! Do not so, but think about God, and about “our Lord Jesus Christ.” This way lies hope, where stands that cross, and he pleads who received there those five wounds for sinners; this way lies your only hope. Oh, that you would think of it, and consider it! If God himself comes down from heaven to save men, it must be worth while for man to look and understand what God did for him in that wondrous sacrifice. Look, for

“There is life for a look at the Crucified One;”

look now, for —

“There is life at this moment for thee.”

Especially is there life for you who came in here troubled, downcast, almost wishing you were not alive at all, but fearing that, when life came to an end, it might be worse for you than ever, for you have “the dread of something after death.” Oh, that you were reconciled to God through the death of Jesus Christ! That being done, he would comfort your hearts, and you would be led into every good word and work through gratitude to the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior, and his grace would save you, and preserve you to the end. May this be the very moment when you shall seek and find the Lord! If thou seek him, he will be found of thee.” God grant it, for his dear son’s sake! Amen.

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2 Thessalonians 2:16, 17

WHAT WE HAVE, AND ARE TO HAVE

NO. 2991

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“Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comforts our hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.” — 2 Thessalonians 2:16, 17.

Every man who is engaged in a good work desires that it may be lasting. “Establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it,” was not only a very appropriate prayer from the mouth of Moses, who had led the children of Israel through the wilderness, but it is also a very appropriate prayer to be presented by every minister of Jesus Christ. We desire to build that which will endure the fire of the great testing day; — not wood, hay, and stubble, but gold, silver, and precious stones.

The apostle Paul, like all true servants of Christ, was very anxious about those who had been converted, and formed into churches

by him. He died that all the professed converts should be real converts, and that the members of the churches, in the various countries where the gospel had been preached, might be well trained and instructed, and might know the truth, and be firmly rooted in it. It somewhat saddened him that the Christians at Thessalonica had been disturbed by a rumor about the speedy coming of Christ. He was grieved that they had been troubled concerning this matter, and he was still more sorry that they had not men amongst them able to guide them at such a crisis, for they were like children carried away by novelties. The apostle wanted them to be firmly established in the faith, to know the truth, and to have it abiding in their hearts, so that they would be able to stand fast in the evil day, whatever error might be raging round about them.

I think, brethren, that the prayer of the apostle is very suitable for this present period. We have rejoiced to see a large number of persons coming out as professed followers of Christ; but what is wanted is that they should be so enlisted in the army of Christ that they will remain faithful even unto death. We do not want our work to be shallow and superficial; we want it to be like that "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." It is heart-breaking service to sow the good seed of the kingdom upon the rocky ground, for it springs up so rapidly simply because it has no depth of earth; and then, when the burning heat of the sun shines upon it, it withers away because it has neither moisture nor root. It would be far better to have half a dozen souls really brought to Jesus Christ, and enduring to the end, than to have half a dozen thousand blazing away with a false profession for a time, and then returning like the dog to his vomit, or like the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. Our Lord's own declaration is, "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." It is that endurance, that holding out to the end, which is the point to which we would direct all our endeavors on behalf of our hearers and our converts, and the point about which we would most earnestly pray to our God.

Because these Thessalonians had been somewhat fluttered and disturbed, the apostle was distressed concerning them, and he therefore exhorted them to steadfastness: "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle;" but after exhorting them to stand fast, he did not feel that, this was sufficient. So he stopped writing, laid down his pen, fell on his knees, and prayed to God to make them stand fast; and when we realize how feeble our utmost exertions are, we may well join fervent prayer to them; and when we remember that the flesh is so weak, and that, even when men resolve to stand fast, their feet are very soon caused to slip, we may well cry to the great holder-up of his saints to keep them from falling, or even from stumbling. The preacher's work is only half done when he has exhorted his hearers to stand fast; he must then fall upon his knees, and pray for them. And you, who teach others in the Sundayschool and elsewhere, must recollect that, whatever you exhort your scholars to do, you should always pray to God to lead them to do it. This is a blessed compound of preaching and praying; it makes a rich amalgam of Christian ministry when there is, first, the testimony of truth for God to men, and next, the pleading with God on the behalf of men. Regard, then, our text as the apostle's prayer for the Thessalonians, and for all of us who believe in Jesus, that we may stand tall, in this evil day, and that, having done all, we may still stand steadfast whoever and whatever may oppose.

Paul's prayer is instructive, for it directs our attention to two things; first, to what we have already: "Our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace." And then it tells us what we are to have, what is the natural result of what we have already: "Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work."

I. First, then, brethren, we are to consider What We Have Already.

The apostle mentions, first, the source of all our blessings, and then the streams. "Our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father;" there is the source of all our blessings; and, to my mind, it is exceedingly suggestive to notice that word "our" put in twice in the early part of the text. Paul does not write, "Now, the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even the Father;" but it is "Our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father."

The source of our present comfort and of our future perseverance is the fact that Jesus Christ is ours. Look at him now, with the adoring eyes of your reverent contemplation, in his glorious Deity and his perfect manhood. Look at him in the manger; behold him on the cross; regard his perfect life and his redeeming death; behold him in his resurrection, his triumphant ascension, and his perpetual intercession; and look forward to his promised return from heaven. Beloved believer, he is yours, — all yours. In all those positions and conditions he has given himself to you and to me, and we may together say, "Our Lord Jesus Christ." Oh, how precious is this truth to our soul! Being divine, he is omnipotent; and that almighty power he wields for us. Being divine, he is omniscient; and those sleepless eyes of his are ever on the watch for us. Being divine, he is immutable; and that eternal love of his, which knows no shadow of a change, is fixed upon us. All his attributes, and himself also, he places at our disposal, so let each one of us gratefully respond, "Thou art my portion, saith my soul." Enlarge your thoughts concerning the Lord Jesus; think most highly of him; extol him with your heart and with your tongue; but remember that, when you have reached the utmost heights that you can attain in your estimation of him, he is yours, altogether yours, and you can say, with Paul, "Our Lord Jesus Christ

himself.”

“Our Lord is risen from the dead

Our Jesus is gone up on high

The powers of hell are captive led —

Dragged to the portals of the sky.

**“There his triumphal chariot waits
And angels chant the solemn lay; —
Lift up your heads, ye heavenly gates!
Ye everlasting dove, give way!”**

And then the apostle adds, “And God, even our Father.” We sometimes tremble at the thought of God our Father, as well we may. How could we ever approach him were it not for God in human flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ? But when we have once really trusted in Christ, it is an easy matter for us to look by faith to God, and to rejoice in him; and, with the deepest reverence of soul, let us know that God, — the ever-blessed God, — the terrible God, — the omnipotent God, who shakes both heaven and earth with his voice, who toucheth the hills, and they smoke, — this God is our God; and all his attributes of power, as well as those which we usually consider to be more full of grace, are exerted on our behalf. I do not know anything that is more comforting in times of trouble than this great truth. I met, yesterday, a gentleman, who told me that he was converted, some thirty years ago, through the instrumentality of a great-uncle of mine, with whom he lived as an apprentice. He said, “There was a terrible thunderstorms and the old gentleman was sitting by the fireside, and we youngsters were afraid, the flashes of lightning were so vivid, and the thunder pealed out so terribly; but,” he added, “the old gentleman rose from the fireside, went to the window, and as he looked out; he began to sing, —

“The God that rules on high

And thunders when he please,

That rides upon the stormy sky,

And manages the seas:

**“This awful God is ours,
Our Father and our love;
He shall send down his heavenly powers
To carry us above.”**

The gentleman said to me, “I never forgot the impression I then received of that good man’s quietude of mind, and of the evident delight which he took in that display of the divine omnipotence. There seemed to him a sweetness in the eloquence of his Father’s voice, though it made every timber in the old house be shake.”

Yea, brethren, the apostle brings these things to our minds so that we may realize that, in having “our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father,” we have on our side those who will be true to us for ever, and therefore we ought to continue to be comforted in heart, and stablished in every good word and work. If you had trusted only to a dead Savior, you might well go and weep over his tomb; — if you had such gods as the heathen have, then might all consolation be withholden from you; but with an almighty Savior who ever liveth to make intercession for you, and with an omnipotent and omniscient Father who ever liveth to watch over you as his dear children, you must not so much as think of being disquieted in spirit, nor even dream of being moved from the firm foundation of your faith, and hope, and love.

While still thinking of this source of our consolation, it will help us if we notice, most, that the apostle specially mentions the person of Christ: “Our Lord Jesus Christ himself.” Why did he put in that word “himself” just there? It would have sounded all right if he had written, “Now our Lord Jesus Christ, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us.” Ah, but he wanted to call our very particular attention to the real personality of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to make us feel that, in him, — not merely in what he does, and what he bestows, but in “himself” is the source of our comfort: “Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself.” O brethren, is there any surer source of joy to a Christian than Jesus Christ, the incarnate God? John writes, “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth;” and, from the inspired Word, I know that God has taken humanity into union with Divinity, and that he, who stands at the right hand of God, even the Father, is the Son of Mary, bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh. Why, there is comfort in the knowledge that he is there as the representative Man who has taken redeemed human nature right up to the throne of God, — picked up human nature as it lay, all bruised, and

mangled, outside the gate of the earthly paradise, and taken it up into the heavenly paradise, from which it never can be expelled.

There must be, in the heart of God, thoughts of love be man, since his only-begotten and well-beloved Son is a man. When you think of your Savior, you are not to think exclusively of him as God, but also to think of him as man, for he was born into this world, and lived in it; he ate, and drank, and slept, and walked, as we do; and he also died, as we do; and in his humanity, as well as in his Divinity, he has gone into the glory. Leaving out; for the moment, what he has done for us, we may well rejoice in what he is himself as Immanuel, God with us. Here is music in thee very sound of that sweet name, and there is the very essence of music in “our Lord Jesus Christ himself.”

But look at his person, not merely as man, but as the God-man who has offered a complete atonement for his people’s guilt. Up yonder, enthroned in glory, is your Savior, not merely as man, but as the Mediator between God and men, who has completed his great sacrifice, accomplished all his Father’s purposes, and fulfilled his Father’s will, so that he could truly say, “It is finished.” Look at him, by faith, as the glorified man, glorified because, having descended into the grave bearing his people’s sin, he came up out of the grave without sin. He “was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification;” and his resurrection was the proof that he had —

**“To the utmost farthing paid
Whate’er his people owed.”**

Surely it should bring the sweetest consolation to you to think of Jesus Christ, as the Representative of his people, gone up into the glory, and soon to come to this earth again to reign “before his ancients gloriously,” when the bodies of all his sins shall be fashioned like unto his glorious body, and so shall be “for ever with the Lord.” Brethren and sisters, may “our Lord Jesus Christ himself” manifest himself unto you, with those dear upraised hands of his, with the scars still visible; and as you gaze upon him, may you realize that he is giving to you “everlasting consolation and good hope through grace,” and therefore may your hearts be comforted, and may you be stablished in every good word and work! How can you be moved from your steadfastness so long as you can see him? How can you ever depart from, him who has won your affection, and holds your soul fast with cords of a man, and bands of love? Surely you must cling to him for ever and ever. I feel that I must say with the poet, —

“A very wretch, Lord! I should prove,

Had I no love for thee:

Rather than not my Savior love,

Oh, may I cease to be!”

The apostle, however, does not let us forget that, in union with our dear Redeemer, at one with him in every purpose of grace, is “God, even our Father, which hath loved us;” and he bids us think, not so much of his person, which we cannot comprehend, as of his love. So, beloved, let us try to view God our Father in the attitude of loving us. Truly, this is a boundless and unfathomable sea. We can neither fly across it, nor dive into its depths. Remember, believer, that the Lord loved you long before the foundation of the world. You are so insignificant in the scale of being that, if he had quite forgotten you, you might not have wondered; and yet, or ever the mountains were created, or he had kindled the morning star, in the glass of his decrees he beheld you, and even then he loved you. Recollect how Jeremiah was inspired to write, “The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved them with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee. Dwell on that wondrous truth, that God has loved you with an everlasting love. Suck the honey of consolation out of that glorious fact; surely, if your faith is at all in exercise, you will find much sacred sweetness there.

God loved us, as Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “even when we were dead in sins.” God loved you when you resisted his Spirit, loved you when you despised his Son, loved you out of the horrible pit and the miry clay, Loved you into a state of grace, and so loved you into loving him. And he has loved you ever since with an unabating love; though he has sometimes chastened you for your profit, — for his love is wise and discriminating, — he has never deserted you, but his love for you has been constant and true. He has often been grieved with you when you have sinned against him, for his love is a holy love which cannot endure iniquity, yet he has forgiven you, for his love is a gracious love. He has always loved you, and is loving you at this moment. Surely this fact ought both to comfort the believer’s heart, and to hold it fast; and this is what the apostle was aiming at when he wrote our text. What can bind a Christian to his God so well as a sense of love divine? If it be but shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost, you will not be tempted away from your Heavenly Father’s house, neither will you be weary of your Heavenly Father’s work, nor tired of your Heavenly Father’s words. That which comes to us perfumed with love is always sweet and precious, so let us rejoice to remember “God, even our Father, which hath loved us.”

And, beloved, do not forget that, having once loved you, he always will love you. When this great world has passed away, and, like a dream, has vanished into nothingness, you will still live, because Jesus will still live, and you will still be loved by “God, even our

Father," because Jesus will still be loved by him. As you are in him, you shall be for ever in him, and for ever be the object of the Father's love. These are simple matters to speak of, but they are sublime truths to live upon. Bread is a common thing, but a hungry man thinks it very precious. O ye hungry children of God, cut large slices from the loaf that is set before you now, and gratefully feed upon it! Here is "our Lord Jesus Christ himself," in his complex person as God and man, as a fountain of comfort to his people, and he is "God, even our Father," in his everlasting love to us, as the same fountain under another aspect.

Then the apostle, having pointed out to us the diving source of all our blessings, bids us survey the streams which flow from that source: "which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace." Beloved, the consolation which God gives to us is not temporary, but eternal; such consolation is worth having, and when we get it, we may well rejoice over it.

What are the consolations which God gives to his people? I need not mention all the forms of consolation, for, to meet each separate case of distress, there is a special message of comfort, and every promise that God gives you is part of the everlasting consolation with which he has enriched all his chosen people. The potent "shalls" and "wills" of Jehovah stand fast like his throne, and never can be changed. Hath he given you a promise, and shall he not fulfill it? Ay, and fulfill it again, and again, and again, as long as you shall need to have it fulfilled, for his promises are inexhaustible, and full of manifold riches of blessedness to the believing soul. God's promise of consolation is based upon the "everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure." God has entered into a covenant with Christ on the behalf of all his people, and from the provisions of that covenant he never will depart, for he has "confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge, to lay hold upon the hope set before us."

"This oath, his covenant, and his blood,

Support me in the sinking flood;

When all around my soul gives way,

He then is all my hope and stay:

On Christ the solid rock I stand,

All other ground is sinking sand."

Pardoned sin is, to my mind, one phase of the "everlasting consolation" which God hath given to us; for, be it known unto you that God does not forgive your sin today, and then lay it to your charge again tomorrow. Little children give presents, and then want to have them back again; and fickle men often play fast and loose with one another; but when God forgives, he forgives for ever, "for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance;" that is to say, he never repents, and takes back the gift which he has bestowed. Hast thou received absolution from the lips of thy God? Then, thy sins shall never again rise up against thee in judgment, for they have been cast into the depths of the sea. "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them, whom I reserve."

What "everlasting consolation" there is also in the great doctrine of adoption! We become the children of God when we are born again; "and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." A man's child is always his child, and God's child is always his child. A man cannot unchild his own son or daughter; and if thou art a child of God, thou shalt be a child of God throughout eternity. The life that God has put into thee is not transient, as Jesus said concerning his sheep, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." What rich consolation there is for you in this blessed truth! The very life which becomes yours by your adoption into the family of God is an everlasting life; it must, therefore, yield you "everlasting consolation."

Time would fail me to remind you of all the various forms of consolation which the Spirit of God applies to the heart of the believer, and every phase of it is everlasting. Therefore, brethren, let us not be moved away from the hope of the gospel. Let us not cast away our confidence, "which hath great recompense of reward." Let us not be disturbed or disquieted; let not our hearts be troubled. If we have everlasting consolation, let our joy also be perpetual.

And then the apostle, still further to comfort our hearts, and establish us in every good word and work, tells us that God has given us "good hope through grace." You know what that good hope is, — the hope that he will preserve us unto the end, — the hope that we shall be raised from the dead in God's good time, — the hope that we shall be accepted in the day of Christ's appearing, — the hope that we shall be with him where he is, and shall behold his glory, and share it with him for ever and ever. This is a good hope because it has a good basis to rest upon. God has given this hope to all who believe in his Son, Jesus Christ; and as God is true, the hope is a good hope. A hope that is founded upon a lie is a vain hope, but a hope that is founded upon a promise of God is a

good hope. It is a good hope because it is a hope of good things, — so good, my dear friend, that you cannot find anything to match them in the whole world. It may well be called a good hope, for it is the hope of image of Christ, perfection, the hope of being transformed into the image of Christ, the hope of everlasting delight. It is the best of all hopes, and we cannot say more of it than that. It is a good hope because of its operation on the heart. “Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as Christ is pure;” for the man who has a good hope through grace longs to be purged from sin, to be waiting and watching for his Lord’s appearing and to have an abundant entrance into the kingdom of God.

Now, brothers and sisters, since so much of what God has given to you is at present the subject of hope, do you not see how bound you are to remain in the posture of waiting and hoping, and neither to be discouraged, nor yet to turn deserters? May the Lord “comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work,” because you are saved by hope, and the realization of that hope is not visible at present; for, if you saw it, you would not continue to hope for it. You are expecting greater things than you have ever realized yet; it is better on before, for your faces are toward the sunrising. We were told, Some time ago, by a philosopher, that our nation had been shooting Niagara, and taking a leap in the dark. Well, that may be, or may not be; but this I know, believers in Christ are not descending Niagara, for they are ascending; and their leap, whenever they do leap, is not into the dark, but into the light, and into light that is brighter, and brighter still. Our progress is away from evil up to good, from good to better, and from the better to the best of all, in, infinite progression, by the divine impulse of the grace of God; for it is by grace: “good hope through grace.” We do not get this good! Hope through nature, or through our own free-will; but we get it through grace. Grace has given us what we have already received, and grace also gives us the hope of what we have not yet received. Grace lets us see the things that are ours at present, and grace enables us to realize the things that shall be ours in the future.

I hope you understand what the apostle meant in setting all this before you. If I had the tongues of men and of angels, I could not tell you the heights, and depths, and lengths, and breadths of these gracious words. Let me read them to you again: “Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace.” That is what we already have.

II. Now I want to clinch the nail by speaking of What We Are To Have as the result of what we already have.

Paul prayed for the Thessalonians, first, that the Lord would comfort their hearts; and, brethren and sisters in Christ, may the Lord comfort your hearts! God does not wish you to be sad. A certain Persian king would allow no one to wait upon him if he had a sad countenance. It is not so with our Lord, for he looks with a tender eye upon those who are heavy of heart, and he does not forbid them to come into his presence. At the same time, —

“Why should the children of a king Go mourning all their days?”

If you have everlasting consolation, my dear sister, what reason have you for such constant fretting? If you have a good hope through grace, my dear brother, why did you say, the other day, that you were tempted almost to give up all hope? May the Lord comfort your hearts! Perhaps you think it is a small thing for the Lord’s people to be comforted; but God does not think so. He said to his servants, the prophets, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.” It was not one alone whom he bold to do this, but he said, “Comfort ye my people,” as though he summoned all his servants, and said to them, “Whatever you do in denouncing sinners, and in stirring up my people to work for me, never forget this part of your duty: ‘Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem.’” Our Lord Jesus Christ did not think that it was a small thing for his people to be happy; for, on the very night in which he went forth to his passion, among the last words that he uttered were those blessed ones which have cheered millions of mourners: “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.”

The normal condition of a child of God — I mean, his healthy condition — is one of repose, rest, comfort, and delight. Certainly, the Lord has given special promises to those who reach this state of mind; such as this, “Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give them the desires of thine heart.” He means, then, to give great things to those who honor him by trusting him so that they cease to be troubled, and are comforted, whatever happens. What aileth thee, daughter of sorrow? Art thou poor? So was thy Lord; yet I never road that he complained at what his Father willed. Why shouldst thou complain of the dispensations of providence? Art thou sick, my dear brother or sister? Thou wilt not be the first child of God who has pined away into heaven if that should be my lot. Perhaps the Lord means thus gradually and gently to take down thine earthly tabernacle; but, if so, remember what Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” “Ah!” say you, “but it is one who is very dear to me who is dying.” Yes, but when the Lord lent you your husband, or your wife, or your child, he did not tell you that any of them would live for ever. Be thankful that you have had these loans so long; after all, they are not really yours; and if the Lord takes back what he lent to you for a while, why should you be so cast down? “I have lost all,” cries one. Have you lost your God? “No.” Then you have not lost your all. May the Lord comfort your heart, my dear friends, because, if you are unhappy, you dishonor your God by your doubts and fears, and you often hinder those

who would enter into the kingdom. They see your sad face, and they say, "Christ's yoke must be a heavy one, and his burden must be intolerable. Look at the face of that Christian man or woman." I would rather that they should say to you, "we would fain go with you, for there is a brightness about your face that we would like to have. We perceive that your Master is a good Master, and that he cheers and comforts your hearts."

I believe that thoroughly happy Christians, those who really enjoy the things of God, are also amongst the most stable Christians; I think that is why Paul was guided to put the truth as it is in our text. You cannot get a man to give up that which is his daily delight. I never wonder when I hear of some professors giving up Christianity, for they have never experienced the joy of it; it was only a burden to them. When a poor fellow has a load on his back that does not belong to him, and does not yield him any comfort, but only galls his shoulders, you are not surprised if, when he gets to one of those rests for powers in the city, he lays down his load, and walks away and forgets it, and is very glad to forget it. But if it was his own property, his own treasure, you would not find him forgetting it, or going away and leaving it behind. The thing out of which you get the most joy will, in the long run, be the dearest thing to you; and if you continually rejoice in the Lord, your joy will greatly help you in resisting the many temptations to scepticism and superstition to which others will yield. You will stand fast in the Lord because you will be held there by the golden rivets of joy which God has given you in communion with himself.

Then the apostle adds, "and establish you in every good word and work." He wants God's people to be established in every good word. I suppose he mean that he would have us firmly fixed in our belief of the doctrines of the gospel; and, beloved, you may very well say that you will keep to them till somebody shows you something better, just as I have read that, when the people of the State of Massachusetts wanted a set of laws, and they had not time to make them just then, they passed a resolution that they would be governed by the laws of God until they had time to make better ones. We may believe the doctrines revealed in the Word of God until we find better ones, and that we never shall do. Have those doctrines converted you? Then, be established in them. Does your experience confirm the truth of them? Then, cling to them. It is one of the characteristics of the doctrines of the gospel that, the older a man gets, the more he loves them. I always find that the older saints become more Calvinistic as they ripen in age; that is to say, they get to believe more and more that salvation is all of grace; and whereas, at first, they might have had some rather loose idea concerning free-will, and the power of the creature, the lapse of years and fuller experiences gradually blow all that kind of chaff away. Old saints get what is called "a sweet tooth." They love the sweet things of the covenant; they like their meat to have a rich savor. I am not old yet, but I confess that, I get more and more fond of the sweet things of the gospel of grace, and cannot endure the novelties that are so current and so exceedingly popular nowadays. Oh, no; tell me of my Father's eternal love, tell me of my Savior's precious blood, tell me of the Spirit's sacred indwelling, and my heart is glad; but tell me anything short of this, and my soul is not fed. I pray that you, brethren and sisters who are members of this Christian church, may know what you know, and hold fast to it. May you drive your roots down into the rich soil of infallible truth. May you not be as leaves of the forest, driven hither and thither by the winds because there is no life in you, but may you to "like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season;" whose "leaf also shall not wither." God make you to be thus "stablished in every good word."

The apostle would also have those to whom he wrote stablished in every good work. Sometimes, an attack of this kind is made upon us: "It is no use trying to teach the gospel to children; we cannot suppose that they can understand its deep mysteries." I heard that said only the other day. Well, I can say that we have tried it, and we have found that, whether you choose to call them great mysteries or not, children do understand the gospel, and seem sometimes to comprehend it better than their fathers do, just because they are so childlike. This qualification for entering the kingdom of heaven is not fully-developed manhood, but rather that we should become as little children; and unless we do become childlike, we cannot enter the kingdom. Dear friend, do not be turned aside from your work by anything that is said concerning it. If people say that it is no use to go down to the lodging-houses, and talk to the poorest of the poor, be established in doing it because your Master did it, and because the everlasting consolation which comes to you through the grace of God makes you feel that to most unworthy are the fittest objects for the gospel of Jesus. Since you received consolation from God's mercy, you may well be established in the belief that there is consolation in the mercy of God for the vilest of the vile.

Do not be turned aside from any part of your work, and especially from the blessed work of prayer. Some people tell us that prayer is useless, but what do they know about it? They have never tried it; but, those of us who have tried and proved it, and who still practice it from day to day, know that prayer is heard. We may send a telegraphic message, yet it may never get where we want it to go; we may put a letter, yet it may never reach its proper destination; but when we pray, we are sure that we are heard, for we have distinct answers to our petitions, and our heart is filled with delight as we recollect the hundreds and thousands of times in which the right hand of the Lord has been stretched out to help us when we have cried unto him in our time of need. Be established in every form of good work, you who are part of the Lord's great army, meeting here for drill and for battle with the forces of evil. I beseech you, brethren, let not your hearts grow faint, and do not so much as think of retreating in the day of conflict. Lo! our victorious Leader, "our Lord Jesus Christ himself," is coming; wherefore, let every one of us play the man for our coming King. The fight will not to long, and woe be to the man who turns his back in the day of battle, but blessed shall he be who is found faithful even unto death. I speak thus to you, beloved, though I am fully persuaded that he, who has begun the good work in you, will

perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ.

I wish that my sermon had a great deal more to do with some of you than it has, for I fear that there are many here to whom I have not been speaking. Therefore, my closing message shall be to the unsaved. My dear friend, I cannot bid you be steadfast, and I cannot talk to you of everlasting consolation, for you have not yet believed in Jesus Christ to the saving of your soul. There is an awful text of Scripture which at present applies to you. The apostle Paul, a cool-headed and warm-hearted man, who loved sinners, once wrote thus: "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha;" that is, accursed at the coming of Christ! O my dear friend, that is what you will be if you love not our Lord Jesus Christ, and that is what you ought to be, and what the warm-hearted lover of his race, who also loves his God, feels must be, and ought to be your doom if you love not the Lord Jesus Christ. Think of that, and I pray that the Holy Spirit may lead you first to trust in Jesus, and then to love him, and so you shall be saved, and shall bless him for ever!

"Ye sinners, seek his grace, Whose wrath ye cannot bear; Fly to the shelter of his cross, And find salvation there."

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