

THE
FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE
TO THE
THESSALONIANS.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.

THESSALONICA, the chief city of *Macedonia*, is said to have derived its name from *Philip*, king of *Macedon*, in consequence of a victory which he obtained in *Thessalia*. From such corrupt and sinful causes, do sometimes, and not unfrequently, spring, the memorable records of men. It is indeed in correspondence with our fallen nature. Sin hath introduced all the baleful effects, which that nature, unregenerated by grace, is subject to, in the multiform fruits of it, from the womb to the grave. And names of places, and monuments, to perpetuate what is called the splendid victories of heroes, both ancient and modern, perpetuate more generally their sin, and shame.

The city of *Thessalonica*, at the time when the Apostle wrote this blessed Epistle, was a large, flourishing, and much peopled place. Now, for many centuries past, it hath been overrun with the impostures of the false prophet; and is in the possession of the Turks. Here once, the LORD had a portion of his Church. But, as he himself said of other places, so here, he hath removed the Candlestick, Rev. ii. 5. We have great cause to bless God for our mercies, in this review of the divine judgments. While we contemplate our high privileges as a nation, in this particular: we may hear, and ought to feel, the strong expostulating words of the Apostle: *Are we better than they?* And, with the immediate answer: *No, in no wise! All are under sin.* Rom. iii. 9.

The date of this Epistle is generally marked as early as the year 52; and as such, must have been the *first*, in point of time, of all *Paul's* writings.

The distinguishing feature which marks every Chapter, like all the Apostle's Epistles, and preachings, is CHRIST. And, oh! how sweetly, and blessedly, hath he held him forth to the Church, through the whole of it. Reader! what a mercy was it to you, to me, to the whole Church of the LORD, that the HOLY GHOST called *Paul* by a vision to visit *Macedonia*?

Acts xvi. 9 to the end, and Acts xvii. And, what a mercy was it, for all the Church of GOD, that the HOLY GHOST prompted the Apostle to write this Epistle, and endited the blessed contents of it? And what a mercy, to preserve the precious records safe to this present hour, and cause them to be handed down to us? And, (shall I add,) what a mercy of mercies, in all these things, if the LORD hath given us the enlightened understanding, in the apprehension of them; so that, as *Paul* said to this very church, in the opening of this Epistle, our election of GOD is known, because *the Gospel is come unto us, not in word only, but also in power, and in the HOLY GHOST, and in much assurance!* Chap. i. 4, 5. Oh! LORD the SPIRIT! direct, and guide the heart and pen, in this feeble work, of the *Poor Man's Commentary*, and cause it to minister to the glory of GOD, in the face of JESUS CHRIST.

CHAPTER I.

CONTENTS.

The Apostle opens his Epistle with his usual Salutations. He tells the Thessalonians, how earnest his Prayers were for the Church. And he teacheth them to observe the Marks of their Election, by the blessed Effects of it.

PAUL, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians, *which is in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ:* Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;

3 Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father:

It is worthy observation, the great humbleness of *Paul's* mind. Though so eminently distinguished by the LORD, as an Apostle; he fails not to take into union with himself, the faithful brethren. Oh! how sweet is it to behold the testimonies of grace manifested in the affections of the LORD's people!

4 Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.

5 For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

6 And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:

7 So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.

8 For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not speak any thing.

9 For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;

10 And to wait for his son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, *even* Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

When the Reader hath duly pondered the marks, and characters, by which the election, according to grace, is known in the soul, as the Apostle hath here noted them; I shall request his attention to the subject itself. It is a most decided testimony, which GOD the HOLY GHOST hath elsewhere given, by which the elect of GOD are known. *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate, to be conformed to the image of his SON, that he might be the first-born, among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.* Rom. viii. 29, 30.

First.—I beg the Reader to notice, one by one, the marks and characters of election, which GOD the HOLY GHOST, hath here shewn to be the true standard, by which the Church of GOD, as well as the Church of the *Thessalonians*, might know the blessed truth. The Apostle begins with that decided testimony, in that the Gospel came not in word only, but in power, and in the HOLY GHOST, and much assurance! Reader! do not fail to note this down in the deepest memorandums of your heart. Yea, beg of GOD the SPIRIT to do it for you. Oh! how unanswerably conclusive is it, when a child of GOD is quickened under the word of GOD, which is the sword of the SPIRIT. When, like *Lydia*, the LORD opens the heart, and gives the hearing ear, and the seeing eye; so that he finds the word, *quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword.* All before this, made no impression upon his mind. But, when the

LORD came in the word, and by the word; he finds the powerful, quickening, illuminating, sanctifying, and renewing teachings; and cries out with *David*: *I shall never forget thy precepts, for with them thou hast quickened me.* Psalm cxix. 93. 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. Hebrews iv. 12. 1 Cor. xiv. 23—25.

Secondly. Another evidence, which follows the former, the Apostle hath here noted, as the way, whereby the child of GOD shall know his election; namely, when the regenerated heart is enabled to discern GOD's faithful servants coming to them in the LORD's name. *Ye know* (saith *Paul*) *what manner of men we were among you.* Souls truly awakened, know *the joyful sound*; and walk in the light of GOD's countenance. *My sheep hear my voice*, saith JESUS, and they follow me. *A stranger they will not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers.* John x. 3—5. It is a most decided mark, whereby we know our election of GOD, when we cannot receive false doctrines, nor follow teachers, unsent of the LORD. The glorious, and discriminating truths of grace, the elect of GOD delight in. They are regenerated, and therefore they know, from their own souls' experience, what manner of men those among them are, who hold up CHRIST, as the One only Ordinance of Heaven: Who inculcate among their people, salvation in his blood and righteousness, without works: Who exclude all other topics, as CHRIST and his Apostle excluded them; determining to know nothing among men, but JESUS CHRIST, and him crucified. And from the same reasons as *Paul* did; because they know CHRIST, and CHRIST alone, to be *the wisdom of GOD, and the power of GOD, for salvation to every one that believeth.* Men, unacquainted with the plague of their own heart, and being vainly puffed up with their fleshly mind, will attempt in themselves, and recommend to others, to compliment GOD, with talking of the remains of somewhat within, that is good. But the truly regenerated, have learnt, and are daily learning, both in themselves, and all others, that *the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*; yea, so wicked, that *none can know it*; in the depths of wickedness, in their unrenewed body of flesh, but *He who searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins.* Jerem. xvii. 9, 10. Rev. ii. 18, 23. Reader! do not overlook this *second* mark, whereby the brethren beloved know their election of GOD, they follow that pure preaching, which is *the truth as it is in JESUS*; and they follow such only under the LORD the SPRIT's teaching, who preach CHRIST, and CHRIST only, the One Ordinance of GOD's own providing, for the elect of GOD.

Thirdly. The elect of GOD, are said to know of this distinguishing mercy over them, in *having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the HOLY GHOST.* This is a very precious, and most decisive testimony. And the more so, because it is personal, and peculiar to GOD's elect. They who are for throwing into the back ground, as much as possible, those glorious proofs of GOD's sovereignty, in electing grace, and predestinating his chosen, to the adoption of children by JESUS CHRIST to himself; Ephes. i. 4, 5. know nothing of what the Apostle hath here said, of *receiving, the word in much affliction, and yet in joy of the HOLY GHOST.* These are contradictions in such men's view. For they know nothing more of

receiving either the written word, or the uncreated Word, but in a whole unbroken heart, unconscious of the depth of the plague of it; and unconscious that CHRIST is the sole healer. Exod. xv. 26. And, where there are slight views of sin, there will be but small affliction in the remembrance of it. Such never can receive the word *which is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword*, Heb. iv. 12. in much affliction. And, as they that are soul-whole, cannot receive the word in much affliction; so the joy of the HOLY GHOST is unfelt, and unknown, by all such characters; for they have never learnt, from that Almighty SPIRIT, that salvation is in no other but JESUS CHRIST. Reader! it will be your mercy, if you have not so learned CHRIST. If you know your election of God, in having *received the word in much affliction*; you can tell me, or rather your own soul, how deeply you lay under the convictions of sin, and your own conscience, when you saw sin in all its tremendous consequences, as you stood in yourself, before GOD. And you also can tell, what kind of joy of the soul that was, when first the Day-spring from on high visited you. Joy, indeed, of the HOLY GHOST, when the LORD shews a poor sinner, that there is more in CHRIST to justify before GOD, than there is sin in the soul to condemn. Such will know their election, *having received the word in much affliction, and with joy of the HOLY GHOST*. But a heart unbroke by sin, can neither know CHRIST's redemption from it, nor the electing love of GOD in it.

Fourthly. A child of GOD knows his election of GOD, in being led by the SPIRIT, so as to become an *ensample to all that believe*. This is a very blessed testimony to the adoption-character of the LORD's people. For the HOLY GHOST laid it down, as a most decided proof of sonship; that *as many as are led by the SPIRIT of GOD, they are the sons of GOD*. Rom. viii. 14. And this, and this only, becomes the security of a child of GOD, to be *an example of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in faith, in purity*, I Tim. iv. 12. There can be no dependance, for the exercise of any single grace, but in the SPIRIT. *If we live in the SPIRIT, we shall also walk in the SPIRIT*. But without the SPIRIT, not a single affection of our fallen sinful nature, can we either mortify, or subdue. Rom. viii. 13. They who talk otherwise, are unacquainted with the plague of their own heart. To address the ungodly with exhortation to good works, manifests the blindness of their own minds. The Apostle's testimony in this scripture, of a state of election, and the proof of it, in being *ensamples*, is *ensamples to all that believe*. What hath this to do with the unregenerate? Reader! note these things, and consider their importance.

Fifthly. The Apostle adds another very delightful testimony, whereby the beloved brethren know their election of GOD, when he saith, that *from them sounded out the word of the LORD in every place, so that their faith to God-ward was spread abroad*. This is not simply confined to preachers of the word, when sent by the HOLY GHOST; but means the conversation of the godly in every place, when, from the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh. Every child of GOD, when regenerated himself, will delight to converse with all that are regenerated. And the language of his heart is expressed in the words of the HOLY GHOST: *Come and hear, all ye that fear God; and I will declare what he hath done for my soul*.

Psm. lxvi. 16. This is to sound out the word of the LORD, and to give testimony of our election of GOD. And, while this marks the features of character, in all that are regenerated; all that are sent out to preach the Gospel by the HOLY GHOST, (and it is awful in any to preach it unsent by him,) hold forth the word of life, by *preaching*, not *offering* CHRIST. It is their province to preach CHRIST. It belongs only to the HOLY GHOST to *offer*, and *give* power to accept CHRIST, to his people. Hence, *Paul's* sermon was preached to all that heard it; but it was *sent to the children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among them feared GOD.* Acts xiii. 26. Gal. iii. 29.

I hope by this time the Reader is led to see, how very blessedly the HOLY GHOST, by his servant the Apostle, hath given the marks, and evidences, in this Chapter, by which the Church *then*, and by the same tokens *now*, may *know their election of GOD.* But, while we find cause to bless GOD, both for the revelation of the doctrine itself, and the way by which all his children in grace may discover their personal interest in it; I would take occasion, from the very plain, and decided manner, in which the HOLY GHOST hath here marked it down, to offer an observation or two upon it. And I confess, that I am the more prompted to this service, from the consideration of the awful day in which the Church of GOD now dwells; when the glorious truths of our holy faith, in which consists the whole life, and spirit of the Gospel of CHRIST, are so lightly esteemed and regarded.

First. I beg the Reader to remark with me, that the election, and choice of the Church in CHRIST, is revealed in, and through, the whole word of GOD, as the distinguished act of GOD the FATHER; and as the result of his own sovereignty, will, and pleasure. The Bible is full of proofs to testify, that *the manifold wisdom of GOD*, should be made known to the Church in this way, *according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in CHRIST JESUS our LORD.* Ephes. iii. 10, 11. So that, each glorious Person, in these high and solemn transactions, as they relate to the Church, might be known, in their several acts of grace, towards the LORD's people. GOD the FATHER in election, GOD the SON in redemption, and GOD the HOLY GHOST in regeneration, according to the good pleasure of his will. I stay not to make quotations in proof, for this would be little otherwise than bringing forth the whole Bible. Let the Reader consult a few. Deut. x. 14, 15. Isaiah xliii. 21. Malachi i. 2, 3. Ephes. i. 4—10.

Secondly. It is very blessed to observe, how CHRIST spake of election, preached it, and delighted in it. Speaking of his people, he calls them GOD's *own elect.* Luke xviii. 7. Speaking of them as precious in his sight, JESUS doth this in a peculiar sweet, and gracious manner, as being his FATHER's gift. *Thine they were, and thou gavest them me.* John xvii. 6. *I pray for them. I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine; and all mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them.* John xvii. 9, 10. Speaking to them, JESUS said: *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you. If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me, before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have*

chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. John xv. 16, 18, 19.

So in like manner in his preaching. The very first sermon CHRIST preached in the Jewish Synagogue, after taking his text from the prophecy of Isaiah, and applying the words of the Prophet to himself; he immediately opened his discourse with the doctrine of election. *Many widows (said Jesus) were in Israel in the days of Elias, but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, to a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the Prophet, and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.* And what I beg the Reader to observe with me concerning this preaching of election by CHRIST, is this, that it brought upon him the same condemnation as it doth invariably upon all his sent servants, both then and now. As long as the SON of GOD held forth the words of the Prophet concerning salvation, and made application of it to himself, it is said, that *all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.* But no sooner did CHRIST preach the doctrine of election, in shewing that God sent his servant but to one poor widow, and one poor leper in Israel; they understood what CHRIST meant, and we read, that *all they in the synagogue were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill, intending to cast him down headlong.* Luke iv. 16—30. Such is the bitterness in every man's heart by nature against the precious doctrine of election, though CHRIST himself be the preacher. Reader! do you know of the like bitterness against it now in you? Certainly it was so *once*?

And if it be not so *now*, it is sovereign grace alone that hath rooted it out. Well do I remember, and in the remembrance bless God for the change, when my proud, unhumbled heart, rose up in daring rebellion against it! And well, therefore, may I now forbear anger-against those who oppose it, when I call to mind how very long the graciousness of my God forbore with me. I do lament, however, when, at any time, I hear of young, presumptuous men, who are just come forth of the shell of human education, daringly preach against a doctrine they know nothing of, though many of them have subscribed to support it. It is awful to hear such setting up their bold opinion against the sovereignty of God, and presuming to charge those whom God hath taught and sent to preach the everlasting, unchanging love of God to his Church, as shewing too much regard to the doctrines of election, predestination, and the decrees of God. Upon all those occasions, I would pray for grace to follow the HOLY GHOST's directions concerning the ministry. *The servant of the LORD must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness, instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance (as I bless his holy name he hath me,) to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.* 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25, 26.

Once more. I observed that our dear LORD not only spake of election, and preached it, but that he *delighted* in it. And what an higher proof can we have of his great pleasure therein, than in the instance we have upon record, when he expressed himself to his

divine FATHER, for the manifestation of his electing love to his disciples, in those memorable words: *At that time JESUS answered and said, I thank thee, O FATHER, LORD of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, FATHER, for so it seemed good in thy sight.* Matt. xi. 25, 26. Reader! pause, I beseech you, over the solemn subject, for it is most solemn! Did it seem good in GOD the FATHER's sight, to make such distinguishing proofs of his electing and predestinating will and pleasure, as to hide it from the wise in their own eyes, and the prudent in their own conceit, and reveal his precious truths to babes in CHRIST? Did JESUS delight so much in this electing love, as to thank the FATHER for such displays of it? Doth the HOLY GHOST abound towards the elect Church of GOD in CHRIST, as to have made *known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself?* Ephes. i. 8, 9. And shall not the Church of GOD, to whom these precious truths are made known, while hidden from the world, take delight in them, and thank GOD for them also? Shall there be any; to whom, by regenerating grace, the LORD hath made known this mystery of his will, be silent and regardless of such unspeakable mercy? Shall we not, on the contrary, while overwhelmed with the contemplation, cry out with the astonished Apostle: *LORD! how is it that thou hast manifested thyself unto me, and not unto the world?* John xiv. 22.

May I be permitted upon so interesting a subject to trespass a little longer, I would add to all that hath been said, that the doctrine of GOD's election, so truly scriptural, so truly blessed, and so very full, in confirmation of GOD's sovereignty, carries with it a certain degree of evidence, independent of every other, from the universal hatred, which all men in a state of unregenerated nature uniformly bear against it. Since the LORD in mercy brought me to the knowledge of himself, and into an acquaintance with the plague of my own heart, I have been led into this discovery also. It appears most decidedly, that the former hatred I had to this sovereignty of JEHOVAH in election, and the universal hatred of all unregenerate minds to the same divine truth, is an additional testimony in its favor. Oh! how blessed it is, when to all the other glorious assurances of our most holy faith, the LORD gives us to see, that by grace we not only differ from ourselves in what we were before, but from the world. How blessedly to this point is that prayer of JESUS. *I have given them thy word, and the world hath hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world!* John xvii. 14.

Reader! perhaps I shall surprize you by what I am going to observe, but the fact is most certain and sure. Amidst all the hatred of mankind, in every instance of the unawakened and unregenerate, throughout the whole earth, to the doctrine of GOD's sovereignty in election, GOD hath so constructed the human mind in such a way and manner, that he absolutely overrules every son and daughter of Adam, from the first dawn of reason to the close of life, in acting or thinking, to practise election in all they say or do; and this every day, and hour of the day, during the whole of their existence upon earth. There is not an action or design; there is not a motive of conduct in thought, word, or deed, more or less, but what manifests

in the whole race of men, their election to one way rather than to another; whether they walk or talk, go hither or thither, associate with this rather than that, eat of one food rather than another, and, in short, in the whole tenor of their daily pursuits, habits, dress, and all the circumstances of life; choice, and election guides them in all. So, then, while every man, yea, every child is guided by the capricious whim and purpose of his own heart, to make his daily election, as his wayward humor guides him; the LORD, who is the only Being that, from his unerring wisdom, cannot make a wrong choice, shall be the only One, according to man's daring presumption, which shall be restrained from making his election. Is not this the real state of the case? And can any thing more fully demonstrate the awfulness of man's fall by sin, which hath induced such tremendous effects in his very nature? And doth not this wonderful display of divine wisdom, by overruling the human mind to do *that* which he denies his Creator *to do*, seem to say, as if the LORD would convict such daring sinners to their face, by making them continually practise themselves, what they call in question and arraign in their Maker. And when we consider, that it is in election only the LORD thus compels the whole earth to the practice, in whatever country or clime, whatever form or constitution of religion, or none; wherever a human being is found, the very nature of man is such, that he shall practise election; doth it not, I say, seem to intimate the LORD's overruling such a wonderful event to his own glory; that while all the race of men by nature hate God's election, they shall condemn themselves by their own daily practice of it, and thus, however unconscious, bear their unwilling testimony to the great truth. Reader! see to it once more, whether the Apostle's marks are in your own testimony, and that you can say to yourself, as he did to the Church; *Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God!*

REFLECTIONS.

READER! is it our privilege, like this Church, to give thanks to GOD always for the divine grace, and mercy, and love, bestowed upon us? Can it be said to you, and to me, as the Apostle did to the *Thessalonians*, in the remembrance of our work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our LORD JESUS CHRIST, in the sight of GOD our FATHER? Can we with full assurance of faith, and in the enjoyment of the same testimonies as *Paul* here marked down, take up the well-grounded confidence of our election of God? Oh! then, let us see to it, that our faith in JESUS is a working faith, working by love. That our hope is that hope founded in CHRIST, and his blood and righteousness, which maketh not ashamed. That our patience is that which the Apostle elsewhere describes, and which worketh experience. And in the exercise of which, we wait for the return of the SON of GOD from heaven, who hath delivered us from the wrath to come. This will be an honorable testimony to the SPIRIT's work in our heart, and will most plainly shew, in the midst of the awful day in which we live, what manner of entering in the word of grace hath had in our souls; and how, through the regene-

rating power of the SPIRIT, the LORD hath turned our hearts from idols to serve the living and true God. Blessed be the electing love of GOD the FATHER, the redemption by CHRIST, and the quickening of GOD the HOLY GHOST!

CHAP. II.

CONTENTS.

In this Chapter the Apostle dwells chiefly upon his Labors among them as a Minister of CHRIST. He strongly expresseth his Affection for the People.

FOR yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain:

2 But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.

3 For our exhortation *was* not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile:

4 But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

5 For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God *is* witness:

6 Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor *yet* of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.

7 But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:

8 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.

9 For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.

10 Ye *are* witnesses, and God *also*, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe.

11 As you know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father *doth* his children,

12 That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

I have always considered this Chapter, since I knew any thing of the LORD, with peculiar pleasure, as opening the very heart of a faithful minister of CHRIST. And if the Reader be taught of GOD the SPIRIT, how rightly to appreciate divine things, I venture to believe that he will think with me, that the whole Chapter from beginning to end, furnisheth one of the most finished portraits of a truly ordained minister of the LORD JESUS. Oh! that it pleased the Almighty LORD of the harvest, to send such laborers into his harvest! Oh! that we could look round, and behold many such coming forth in this awful day, that we might be led to hope the LORD would not then remove our Candlestick out of its place! Rev. ii. 5.

I cannot propose, in a *Poor Man's Commentary*, to follow the Apostle through all the parts of the ministerial labors which he hath enumerated in this Chapter. But I shall select a few of the most striking, and such as were not confined to the days of the Apostles, but more or less, correspond to the general state of the Church in all ages.

And I shall begin with the one which *Paul* himself hath begun with, namely, the decided testimony that the LORD the HOLY GHOST sent him and his few faithful companions to labor in the word and doctrine, from the evident blessings which attended their ministry. *You yourselves know, brethren, that our entrance in unto you was not in vain.* Reader! it were to be most earnestly sought for from the LORD, that the Churches of the living GOD, both the people and the minister have the LORD's testimony that his presence is among them, by his blessings which go before and follow the word. There is somewhat tremendously awful, when men run unsent into the ministry, to whom it might be said, *who hath required this at your hand when ye tread my courts?* Isaiah i. 12. And to behold multitudes expressing seeming anxiety for the conversion of others, which never were converted themselves, is among the awful signs of the present times!

The next beautiful feature of character in *Paul's* ministry is, what he hath marked of opposition. Never was there a faithful servant of CHRIST as yet unopposed. And very certain it is, that there never will be, for then would *the offence of the cross be ceased.* The Apostle appears to have marked it down, as a never failing token, upon every occasion, that wherever the LORD opened a great and effectual door to preach his Gospel, there would be sure to be found many adversaries. 1 Cor. xvi. 9. Hence the shameful treatment *Paul* met at *Philippi*, is blessedly explained, by the success *Paul*

found there in the LORD's blessing upon it. *Lydia* and the *Jailor* are upon everlasting record, wherefore the devil roared, and stirred up his agents to oppose and scourge the Apostles; and how many more the LORD might have called there, we are left to form hopes. See Acts xvi. And such is the case in all ages. Wherever the LORD sends his faithful servants to gather his redeemed from among the world, the Gospel of GOD must be delivered *with much contention*. To preach CHRIST, and CHRIST only, to insist upon the everlasting love of GOD the FATHER, as *Paul* did, in choosing the Church in CHRIST before the foundation of the world, predestinating that Church to the adoption of children by JESUS CHRIST to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to preach wholly and solely, as *Paul* did, redemption through the blood of CHRIST, and to insist, moreover, that without the regeneration of the heart by GOD the SPIRIT, as CHRIST himself did, there can be no entrance into his kingdom to preach these glorious truths, as the whole of salvation will be, indeed, with much contention. All modern Pharisees of the world will take offence at such preaching, and such preachers, as the ancient ones did at CHRIST himself, and will not barely oppose, but raise an hue and cry against both. And it is a blessed testimony to the truth when such men oppose it. For, as they know not the plague of their own heart, and never entered by the door of regeneration into the sheepfold, how shall they know the glorious, distinguishing truths of the Gospel? Ephes. i. 4—10. John iii. 3. and x. 1.

The Apostle hath given another most striking character of his faithfulness in the ministry, when he said, *For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile. But, as we were allowed to be put in trust with the Gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but GOD which trieth our hearts.* What a lovely account is here of a faithful minister of JESUS CHRIST! But it is a solemn question to ask, whether such are not of deceit, and uncleanness, and guile, who call themselves ministers of CHRIST, and yet are men pleasers. To bolster up Pharisees in compliments of their goodness, to suppress the grand and distinguishing doctrines of election, CHRIST's atonement, and the final perseverance of the saints in submission to such men's false opinions, to suffer the LORD's people to go lean, in keeping back the precious consolations of the Gospel, that the proud may be gratified in having smooth things preached before them; these are awful signs of unfaithfulness in the ministry, wherever they are found! And what a striking appeal the Apostle makes, in confirmation of his faithfulness, when he doth it both before GOD and man. *For neither* (saith he) *at any time used we flattering words, ye know. Nor a cloke of covetousness, GOD is witness.* How very blessed it must be thus to act in the ministry! The real Church of CHRIST knows no distinction of persons. All are equally dear to JESUS. And equally dear they must be to his faithful ministers. That servant of the LORD, that is himself conscious of the plague of his own heart, will exercise the greater jealousy over his people. And, as more danger is to be dreaded from the leaven of the Pharisee, than from all the other causes of evil whatever; he that knows his own heart will spare not others. He will never fawn nor flatter,

but rather, as *Paul* commanded *Timothy*, *reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine*. And, if ever there was a day in which this faithfulness was more imperiously necessary than another, the present is so. *Paul* said *the time would come when they would not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts would heap to themselves teachers having itching ears; turning away their ears from the truth, and being turned unto fables*. 2 Tim. iv. 2—4. And had the Apostle pointed to this very age, as the day he alluded to, it could not have been more correct in description. Instead of making *CHRIST* the all in all, as *Paul* did, human perfection is cried up, and men are complimented with their zeal and liberality, and almsdeeds, in promoting, as it is called, the spread of the Gospel. Where is the model of *CHRIST*'s preaching discoverable in such Essays? Who that reads *CHRIST*'s first Sermon in the Jewish Synagogue, can find any traces of it in the discourses of modern times? His was *to preach the Gospel to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind*. Luke iv. 18. Happy the people who sit under preaching formed on this plan?

One word more. We never can too much admire the affection with which *Paul* describes his labors, and those of his companions in the ministry, as he hath here represented it. *We were gentle among you, (saith he,) even as a nurse cherisheth her children*. The image is most tender, and is designed to represent how very watchful the faithful servants of the *LORD* are of his fold, and how affectionately they bear with all the weaknesses and wants, and even waywardness of the babes and the young of *CHRIST*'s family. But, while I admire *Paul*'s figure of the nurse, I cannot but remark his modesty also, in taking that of the nurse, and not of the mother. The nurse, yea, the tenderest nurse is not the real, but only the foster mother. *JESUS* hath taken this image of the mother to himself, and to himself alone it belongs; and, therefore, *Paul* doth not presume to use it. *As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you*. Isaiah lxvi. 13. But I pray the Reader to observe what a fulness of love the Apostle hath summed up in his expressions, when he saith, that *being so affectionately desirous of the LORD's people, they were willing to have imparted to them, not the Gospel of God only, but also their own souls, because they were dear to them*. It is hardly possible, in the cold and selfish times in which we live, to enter into an apprehension of the warmth of *Paul*'s heart. All he had, and all he knew; his gifts, and graces, and enjoyments were all for the people, among whom he labored in word and doctrine; yea, his very soul was theirs, because *CHRIST* and his members are all one. Oh! what a lovely view of the affectionate minister of *CHRIST*! If the Reader would wish to see the several features more largely drawn, I refer him to Acts xx. 17, &c.

We must not overlook the disinterested conduct of *Paul* and his companions in their ministerial services, that it was all free, and without cost or charges. He labored night and day at his trade of tent-making, that the Gospel might bring no expence to his hearers. See Acts xviii. 3. Not, as he elsewhere said, because that he had no right of eating of their bread, while he fed them with the bread of life; see 1 Cor. ix. 14. and Commentary; but because it was delightful to his generous mind to be not burdensome to the people. He

knew the blessedness and truth, in his own experience of his Lord's words, and acted upon them. Acts xx. 33—35. Reader! do not overlook this part also of *Paul's* character!

Allow me to add one word more on this beautiful passage, in which the outlines of a faithful minister of CHRIST is so correctly drawn. I beg the Reader to observe how the Apostle tells the Church that they were witnesses, and GOD also, how holily and justly, and unblameably, they had behaved themselves among them, and also had exhorted and charged them as a father doth his children, that they would also walk worthy of GOD, who had called them unto his kingdom and glory.

I entreat the Reader to be the more attentive to this feature of the ministerial character, as drawn by GOD the HOLY GHOST with the pen of *Paul*, because many, either from ignorance or perversity, are perpetually mistaking the subject, as though they who preach the great truths of the Gospel in GOD's electing love, CHRIST's redeeming blood and righteousness, and GOD the SPIRIT's regenerating grace, do not inculcate obedience, neither exhort to godliness and an holy life. Whereas the fact is the very reverse. Preachers sent by GOD the HOLY GHOST, (and none unsent by him are sent at all,) being themselves regenerated, (and an unregenerate man was never ordained by the HOLY GHOST,) begin the subject where CHRIST begins it. *Make the tree good, (saith JESUS,) and his fruit good.* Matt. xii. 33. Until the sinner is born again, he is dead in trespasses and sins. Ephesians ii. 1. Hence, when a soul is himself renewed and ordained by the HOLY GHOST, and sent forth to preach CHRIST, he simply preacheth CHRIST, and nothing beside. He doth, as *Moses* did in the wilderness, *lift up the SON of man, that whosoever believeth in him may not perish, but have eternal life.* John iii. 14, 15. And when GOD the SPIRIT, who sends the word, gives power to the word, and by his regenerating grace quickens the sinner to a new and spiritual life, then all the blessed effects are the consequence, which the Apostle here describes. Holiness of life and conversation will always follow the renewed life. But to do as some modern teachers would prescribe, namely, to address the ungodly, and call them to faith and repentance, is like bidding the *Æthiopian* to change his skin, and the leopard his spots. Reader! do pause over the beautiful portrait which the HOLY GHOST himself hath drawn by *Paul*, of a faithful minister of CHRIST, and admire the loveliness of his character!

13 For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received *it* not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

14 For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ

Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they *have* of the Jews:

15 Who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men;

16 Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sin alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost:

17 But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.

18 Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.

19 For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Are* not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?

20 For ye are our glory and joy.

How very lovely it is to observe the Apostle following up the account he gave the Church, of his going in and out before them with thanksgivings to the LORD for the success of his ministry! And I beg the Reader to observe no less, how blessedly he traceth all the success of his labors to this one source, in the LORD's disposing them to receive the word of GOD, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, *the word of GOD*. It is always blessed to behold CHRIST's servants referring all the glory where alone it is due. We have a beautiful instance, Acts iii. 12.

We can easily conceive what the Apostle alludes to, when he saith, that he was taken away from them, meaning, as his history informs us, when he was hurried away at the time the uproar was made against *Paul* and his companions; Acts xvii. 5. And the hindrance of *Satan*, meaning his agents, was what *Paul* more than once noticed. See Rom. i. 13.

I admire the expression of the Apostle, when he calls the Church their hope and joy. Not that he meant that he was their hope, or they his, for both rested wholly upon CHRIST, and CHRIST is all the joy of the Church, both in heaven and earth. But *Paul* beheld the Church of the *Thessalonians* as a beautiful building, founded with himself wholly in CHRIST; and in the labor of the work, the wise Master-builder had condescended to employ *Paul* and his companions. As such, their furtherance in the knowledge and love of CHRIST, became a subject of great joy to the Apostle. And he was looking forward to the day of CHRIST's coming, with holy rapture and delight, as the blessed period, when he should see them and the

whole Church arrived to that perfection *in* CHRIST, and *of*, and *from* CHRIST, as he hath described to the Church of the *Ephesians*. Chap. iv. 13.

Reader! pause, and contemplate the holy view, for it is both holy and blessed. This perfection in CHRIST, is CHRIST himself made perfect in his Church. We are said to come *in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the SON of GOD to a perfect man*; namely, CHRIST in his fulness, having all his mystical body, his saints, then fully and perfectly prepared in body, soul, and spirit, for the everlasting enjoyment of their LORD to all eternity. Every member brought home. Every faculty most compleatly blessed. All deriving their beauty *from* CHRIST, and all made holy *in* CHRIST. This will be the wonder of heaven, when CHRIST's glory and beauty will communicate and reflect both glory and beauty to all his members, and all the vast ends of the SON of GOD, in marrying human nature, will be consummated, and seen by worlds of admiring spectators, and CHRIST will be beheld everlastingly blessed and glorious in Himself and in them, and they in Him, and shine as the stars around his Person for evermore. Reader! well might *Paul* express himself as he did, in the contemplation of this glory, which shall be revealed! And well may you and I look forward to this great day of God, if we now know him here in grace, for we shall then assuredly know him in glory. *He shall come* (saith the Apostle) *to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.* 2 Thes. i. 10.

REFLECTIONS.

LET as many ministers of the LORD JESUS CHRIST as read this precious chapter, beg for grace, to be enabled to follow the Apostle's example in their ministry, and humbly pray for the same success. Oh! what an arduous undertaking, what a solemn trust, what distinguished honor, and what vast responsibility. Who that considered it as he ought, but would rather shrink from the high calling, than run unsest! But let every faithful servant of JESUS not despond. JESUS is the all-sufficiency both of his ministers and people. And he that looks wholly to JESUS, and draws all his resources from JESUS, whether minister or people, will never fail of finding an all-sufficiency for his own soul, and for his labor among others. Where God the SPIRIT ordains, he will give the suited supply. And those words of the LORD are sufficient to carry the servant through the whole of his labor. *Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world!*

And no less, ye people of God! do you hold up the hands of the LORD's servant, who goeth in and out before you by the LORD's appointment, by prayer and supplication, for a blessing on his labors. It is a sweet encouragement to the faithful laborer in the LORD's vineyard, when he knows that his people go before with their prayers to the LORD for his blessing, and follow him for supplications for pardon to all his imperfections. And where the LORD hath blessed a Church with a faithful servant, who taketh the oversight of the Church of CHRIST, *not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy*

lucre, but of a ready mind: what may not be hoped for from the divine blessing on such a congregation, both of minister and people! LORD, the SPIRIT! send Pastors after thine own heart, which shall feed thy people with knowledge and understanding!

CHAP. III.

CONTENTS.

This is a short but interesting Chapter. Every Verse is expressive of the Apostle's Love for the Church. Amidst his Sufferings, he finds Comforts in their Soul-prosperity.

WHEREFORE when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone;

2 And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow-labourer in the Gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:

By *Paul's* sending *Timothy* to the Church of the *Thessalonians*, while he himself stood much in need of this young man's services, we plainly discover how little he regarded himself when the welfare of the Church was before him. I have often thought, and prayed for grace to follow it, that the whole life of *CHRIST's* ministers ought to be directed in no one pursuit but the *LORD's* glory, in waiting upon and enquiring into the wants of the *LORD's* people. If there was less selfishness about my poor heart, I should consider it no interruption, but rather rejoice in the occasion which called me from (otherwise the pleasing employment of) study, to listen to the complaints and enquiries of the humble, and the weak of the *LORD's* family. And, I believe, that among those faithful ones in *CHRIST's* service, who have sought out, without waiting to be sent for, the sorrowful and tempted in the household of faith; they have found their own souls often refreshed, when the *LORD* hath caused them to minister to the refreshment of others. *Paul* himself found this to be the case, for he told the Church, that he *longed to see them, that he might impart unto them some spiritual gift, to the end they might be established, and himself comforted by the mutual faith both in them and him.* Rom. i. 11, 12. And very sure I am, that next to the word of *GOD*, in the *LORD's* teaching, sick rooms and dying chambers are the best books, under the *SPIRIT's* explaining them, from whence a minister, ordained of *GOD* the *HOLY GHOST*, may learn subjects for preaching.

3 That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.

4 For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.

It should seem, that part of the sorrows of the *Thessalonians* was on the Apostle's account. They knew that he had been driven from them by the storm raised round the house of *Jason*, from whence the brethren had sent away *Paul* by night. See Acts xvii. 1—15. And as he had been obliged to flee to *Athens* from *Berea*, their fears on his account were increased. How sweetly *Paul* reminds them of what he had continually preached as the true marks of the Apostolic character. *No man should be moved by afflictions.* It is *JESUS* which appoints, watches over, regulates, and sanctifies them. How little understood are those things in the present hour? If a faithful minister of *CHRIST* was to be sought for, in the present day by this mark of persecution, to what congregation would the enquiry be made? The general feature of the times is, to soften as much as may be, doctrines which are not palatable, for others of a more accommodating spirit. The primitive days of our fathers, after the *LORD* in his mercy had caused this land to emerge from popery, were remarkable for holding forth the word of life. The great truths of our holy faith, such as the election of God, redemption wholly by *CHRIST*, the regeneration by the *HOLY GHOST*, and the everlasting safety of the Church, in the final perseverance of the *LORD*'s redeemed ones, were never lost sight of in their ministry. But how are these esteemed in the present hour, when, under the delusive pretence of spreading the truths of God, men of the most opposite principles in religion mingle together, concealing their different views of faith, that they may give no offence to each other. What would *Paul* have said to this smothering spirit, had he lived in these days? His affectionate Epistle to the *Thessalonians*, in charging them not to be moved by the afflictions of persecution, would have been totally unnecessary.

5 For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.

6 But now when *Timotheus* came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you:

7 Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you all in our affliction and distress by your faith.

8 For now we live, if ye stand fast in the *LORD*.

9 For what thanks can we render to God again

for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God:

10 Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?

In the present day of the Gospel, when the spirit of persecution is known only in name, it is hardly possible to conceive, how the minds of the faithful were exercised, when, as *Paul* here saith, he could no longer forbear to know how they stood in the faith; and how the heart of the Apostle rejoiced, in the tidings he received, of the Church's welfare. It is blessed when the Church centers all in CHRIST. The least departure from this, is going off the foundation. But when all rests on CHRIST, and all is built up in CHRIST; perfect peace, and happiness, will mark the order, and joy of the people. Blessedly *Paul* calls this life. *For now we live* (saith he) *if ye stand fast in the LORD.*

11 Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.

12 And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:

13 To the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.

Some have thought, that the whole Persons of the GODHEAD are included in this prayer of the Apostle. GOD himself the HOLY GHOST the great Author of his holy word; and our FATHER; and our LORD JESUS CHRIST. But whether so, or not, certainly the whole GODHEAD is engaged, in those Covenant-acts, as relating to the Church. And in all our removals, from place to place, the LORD's people are under the special, and personal presence, and blessing, of the whole GODHEAD. See John xiv. 23, 26. Rev. i. 4, 5. And, it is very precious to a child of GOD, when he finds a corresponding effect in his own soul, that his access to GOD, and communion with GOD, as well as the gracious visits from GOD; are all bringing testimony with them of those blessings. For this becomes a practical evidence, of living under the constant influence of the love of GOD, the grace of the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and the communion of the HOLY GHOST. 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

REFLECTIONS.

Who can behold the affection, manifested by the Apostle to the Church, as set forth in this Chapter, without being struck with the conviction, that there is, there must be, in every faithful minister of

CHRIST ordained, and sent forth, as *Paul* was, by the HOLY GHOST, somewhat of the same love and affection. How is it possible for that man to be earnest in the service of souls, whose own soul is not melted by grace, into an ardent desire, for their everlasting welfare? Coldness, deadness, and an indifferency, argue, yea, prove, an unsuitableness for the ministry. And, whatever gifts and talents of the head a man may possess, in the mere letter-knowledge of the truths of God; he will never enter into the ministry with an earnestness to win souls, except a sense of his own salvation, makes him feel for others. Blessed *Paul* counts it *his* life, while the Church lived. The salvation of the people, was his hope, and crown of rejoicing. And hence, he could, and did say: *as you have acknowledged, so we trust you shall acknowledge even to the end, that we are your rejoicing, as ye also are ours, in the day of the LORD JESUS.* Reader! it will be your happiness, and mine, to discover our hearts brought into the same oneness of spirit, in CHRIST. His is the glory, and ours is the happiness. And, while both minister and people, are established by his grace, in him; we shall then be accepted, *unblameable in holiness in him, before GOD, even our FATHER, at the coming of our LORD JESUS CHRIST with all his saints.*

C H A P. IV.

CONTENTS.

The Apostle is here exhorting the Church, to the blessed Fruits, and Effects, of Regeneration. He sweetly comforts the LORD's People, on the Subject of the Body sleeping in JESUS.

FURTHERMORE then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort *you* by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, *so* ye would abound more and more.

2 For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.

3 For this is the will of God, *even* your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication :

4 That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour ;

5 Not in the lust of concupiscense, even as the Gentiles which know not God.

6 That no *man* go beyond and defraud his brother in *any* matter : because that the Lord *is* the

avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.

7 For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.

8 He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.

In the opening of this Chapter, we find the Apostle, calling upon the Church, to exercise those distinguishing features of character, which are the immediate fruits of regeneration. *If we live in the spirit, let us also walk in the spirit.* Now, for the better apprehension of the subject itself, as well as the special arguments, by which alone the Apostle calls upon believers to the practice of holiness; I very earnestly beg the Reader to attend to what the Apostle hath said, in these verses. *First.* It is to the Church *Paul* here speaks; and not unto the unawakened, carnal, and ungodly world. He considers them as in a state of regeneration; for he saith: *as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and please God.* A plain proof that he considered them as such, who from being called out of the Adam-nature of sin, had received CHRIST JESUS as the whole of salvation; and were looking to him for grace in the exercise of all gospel sanctification. *Secondly.* As the principle of the new life by regeneration, was wrought in the heart; so the effect of it would manifest itself in the life, in all holy conversation, and godliness. Nothing can be more manifest, that this is the whole drift of the Apostle's precept. *As ye have received of us how ye ought to walk.* There can be no walk, for there is no life, in one, *dead in trespasses and sins.* But, as the Church was no longer dead in trespasses and sins; so, from the new life imparted, it was expected, suitable actions of life would appear. Ye have received of us the knowledge of these things; look to it then, that there be a suitable correspondence.

And this appears with yet further evidence, from what follows. *For this is the will of God even your sanctification.* God's will is, that CHRIST is made of God unto his people, *wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.* 1 Cor. i. 30. Then, as this is God's will, and CHRIST is the sanctification of his people; this life of CHRIST in the soul, will manifest itself, in all corresponding conduct. CHRIST reigns, and rules within; and is the source of every thing blessed to his people. Hence, therefore, it is known from the actions without, that CHRIST reigns within. *For they that are CHRIST's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.* Gal. v. 24.

And, it should be observed yet further, that the sins of our corrupt nature, which the *Gentiles* were much addicted to, were not considered by them, in the light which the Gospel regarded. Hence *Paul*, writing to a Church chiefly gathered from *Gentiles*, found occasion, more particularly to advert to this subject. And where the HOLY SPIRIT was given, which a state of regeneration implies, it became an interesting part of the Apostle's exhortations, to shew the Church, how effectually his Almighty power was manifested, in

the lives of God's people, in that work of the new-birth, wrought upon the heart. Agreeably to what *John*, the beloved Apostle, taught, *Whoever is born of God, doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin because he is born of God.* I John. iii. 9. Reader! it is very blessed to see, where the security of God's people is found; that all strength in a life of grace, and righteousness, may be sought for only from the LORD! For further views on sanctification see 2 Thess. ii. 13.

9 But as touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

10 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.

11 And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you;

12 That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and *that* ye may have lack of nothing.

I do not think it necessary to offer a single observation upon these verses. Brotherly love towards one another in those who are members of CHRIST's body, is not only a principle which carries with it its own conviction, but is so strongly enforced, from the very relationship in which those members are knit to each other; that, as the Apostle saith, it is not needful to write upon it. Truly regenerated souls, are one in CHRIST. And where they are so, there can be no schism. The sorrow, or joy, which one hath, all must partake in; if this membership be truly a living principle. I Cor. xii. 25, 26. And, in relation to Church members, *walking honestly toward them that are without*; it were a reproach to the name of CHRIST, if the ungodly had any charge to bring against them. Very sweet to this purpose, is that comprehensive exhortation, by the HOLY GHOST to the Church: that *whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report; believers in CHRIST are expected above all men, to be eminent in the practice of these things.* Philip. iv. 8.

13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the

Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Perhaps there is not a more affectionate passage in the word of God, to soothe the sorrows of our nature, under the humbling prospect of the grave, in the death of our friends, and the sure departure of ourselves, than what God the HOLY GHOST hath here given to the Church, by his servant the Apostle. I have often read it, with, I hope, profit and delight. And I do not conceive, that a child of God, under divine teaching, can ever read it, but at every renewed perusal, with increasing comfort.

It appears, that the Church of the *Thessalonians* had very imperfect apprehensions, on the interesting subject of the dead in CHRIST. And it was our mercy, that their ignorance gave occasion to God the SPIRIT, to teach the Church, what is here so blessedly explained, concerning it. The *first* thing I beg the Reader to remark with me, in the passage, is, the expression, of being *asleep in JESUS*. He doth not call it death, but *sleep*. It is remarkable, that in relation to the death of *Lazarus*, JESUS called it *sleep*. *Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep!* See John xi. 11. and Commentary. The blessed dead, which die in CHRIST, die in union with his Person. As such, they are part of CHRIST. The voice *John* heard from heaven, declared this, and bid the beloved Apostle write it down. Rev. xiv. 13. Hence, this is more properly called *sleep*, than death; for by virtue of this union, there is a principle, by which they are still part of CHRIST, and by which the LORD becomes to them at the last day, *the resurrection and the life*. John xi. 25. So that, in death, or life, CHRIST is the believer's portion; and the believer is a member of CHRIST's mystical body. And this oneness, union, and interest in CHRIST, so totally differs from the Christless dead, that the HOLY GHOST is pleased to call it *sleep*, rather than death. *They sleep in JESUS*.

Secondly. The HOLY GHOST by *Paul*, commands the Church concerning all such, that the sorrow which surviving believers feel, in their departure, is not to be as the grief of those who mourn over the hopeless dead. The LORD doth not forbid all sorrow; for the LORD allows nature's feelings to have vent. And JESUS himself wept

at the grave of *Lazarus*. John xi. 25. But the tears of God's people, shed over the remains of the dead which die in the LORD, are like the spiced wine of the Pomegranate. The tears of nature, are sweetened in CHRIST. There is a blessed hope, yea, an assured hope, they shall again live. See a beautiful account by Job, xiv. 13—15.

Thirdly. The belief in CHRIST's resurrection, brings up after it, a full assurance, of the resurrection of all his members. They who sleep in JESUS, must arise with JESUS. For CHRIST died, and arose, as the common head of his body the Church. Not as a private person; but in a public capacity. Hence, in his resurrection, the Church, in every individual member, is included; for CHRIST was declared to be the first fruits of them that sleep. *For to this end,* (saith the HOLY GHOST by Paul,) CHRIST both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be LORD both of the dead and living. Rom. xiv. 9. See I Cor. xv. and Commentary.

Fourthly. There is somewhat particularly striking, in the Apostle's manner of expression on this subject, when he saith: *For this we say unto you by the word of the LORD.* It is not said when Paul received this message to deliver to the Church. Neither doth he make any other preface, by way of introduction. But, it should seem, from the words themselves, that though all the Apostle delivered to the Church, was in the LORD's name, and by the LORD's authority; yet he had now somewhat to deliver on this subject, of the resurrection of the bodies of saints sleeping in JESUS: and of the change to be wrought on the bodies of saints, which would be found alive at the last day; which he had not had either the knowledge of himself before, or direction to communicate to the Church. Hence, like the Prophets of old, who frequently, in the midst of their preaching, called up the attention of the Church yet more strikingly, with breaking off, and saying; *Thus saith the LORD:* so Paul here adopts a similar manner of expression, and saith: *For this we say unto you by the word of the LORD.* Reader! we have great cause to bless God the SPIRIT, for this special revelation, on a subject so very interesting, both to ourselves, and to all the members of CHRIST's mystical body, whereby we learn, under divine teaching, wherefore we ought not to sorrow, concerning the departed in CHRIST, as others that have no hope. And I pray the Reader, to be particularly attentive, to the very blessed manner, in which God the HOLY GHOST hath taught the Church, on those most momentous points.

The Apostle begins with the state of those saints of God, which are found in the body at CHRIST's coming. *We* (saith he) *which are alive and remain unto the coming of the LORD shall not prevent them which are asleep.* Now, let the Reader observe, that by the *we, which are alive;* Paul did not mean himself, or any of the Church of God then living. For, in his second Epistle to this same Church, he positively declared to them, that *the day of CHRIST was not at hand.* *For* (saith he) *that day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.* 1 Thess. ii. 1—3. But Paul speaks in the name of the Church, in that part of CHRIST's members which shall be alive, when CHRIST comes to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe. 2 Thess. i. 10. Hence, by the way, we are taught, that there shall be a portion of CHRIST's mystical body alive, at his second coming.

The Apostle next proceeds, in the name of the LORD, to shew the Church, how they are to be disposed of, who pass not through the territories of death, and the grave, to the embraces of CHRIST. *We shall not prevent them* (saith Paul) *which are asleep*. The word *prevent* is an old English word, and means, *to go before*: we shall not be first changed, before the dead which sleep in JESUS shall be awakened to CHRIST's arms. This is a sweet thought, on every account. For it shews the watchful care of JESUS, over his sleeping members; and becomes a blessed comment of the LORD's own, on that sweet Scripture: *Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints*. Psm. cxvi. 15. And it is blessed on another account. The living members of CHRIST's mystical body, will find their spirits abundantly strengthened, in beholding the dead in CHRIST arise to the wonders of eternity. And what joy will burst forth, at the second voice of the Archangel, and the trump of GOD! Yea, what inexpressible emotions will be felt by all the living in CHRIST, at that time, when they shall see JESUS personally descending from heaven, in all the splendor, as here described, of glory?

Next, Paul describes the wonderful change, after the dead in CHRIST have first risen, which will instantly follow, on the bodies of the saints then living. *Then we* (saith he) *which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the LORD in the air*. And so shall we ever be with the LORD! The Apostle doth not say *how* the change of our vile bodies, which have not gone down to the grave, shall be accomplished. It is sufficient for the Church to know, that it shall be done: though the process we are not made acquainted with. But, as those bodies of the saints, which are sown in corruption, are promised to be raised in incorruption; and their natural bodies, raised spiritual bodies: I Cor. xv. 44. we are led to conclude, the same change will be accomplished, though not in the same way: So that all the members of CHRIST's mystical body, shall be alike prepared, and qualified, for the everlasting enjoyment of GOD in glory. Oh! what unknown felicity will the saints of GOD be brought into, when those bodies, which now interrupt the spiritual pleasures of the renewed soul, will interrupt them no more; yea, then will join in all their enjoyments. Well might the Apostle add: *wherefore comfort*, or exhort *one another with these words*. Let GOD's people, under all bereaving providences, when at any time the LORD takes home any of his redeemed ones; let them call to remembrance, what GOD the HOLY GHOST hath here so sweetly, and fully unfolded: they that live in CHRIST by regeneration, sleep in JESUS at death till the resurrection. They are part of CHRIST; and whether living or dying, in life or death, they are the LORD'S. And they whom the LORD appoints to be alive in the body, at his coming, shall be instantly changed into a glorified body in CHRIST, as those of CHRIST's which arise at the voice of the Archangel, and the trump of GOD. Both shall be equally blessed in CHRIST; and be everlastingly happy with him, in glory. See Jude 9.

REFLECTIONS.

READER! what a blessed consideration is it, to the renewed soul in CHRIST, that He who is made of GOD to us wisdom, and righteous-

ness; is no less our sanctification, and redemption? And, it is among the most blessed of all thoughts, and which GOD the HOLY GHOST is for ever impressing on the minds of his people, that our oneness and union with the LORD JESUS, brings up after it, an interest, in all that belongs to him as CHRIST. Our union with his Person, gives a security to our life *in* him, our graces *from* him, and our everlasting happiness *with* him; for assuredly, where He is, there must his members be. Precious JESUS may I never lose sight of those gracious assurances of thine. *Because I live ye shall live also.*

Blessed LORD the SPIRIT! thanks to thee, for sending thy servant to teach the Church, how to regulate our sorrows, when under bereaving providences. Never let my soul mourn any more, when any die in the LORD. Tears may fall. Yea, JESUS will not be displeased when they fall. It is the funeral of nature. And JESUS, who wept himself at *Lazarus's* tomb, will not be angry if any weep at mine. But grace triumphs. It is not death, but sleep, yea, a sweet refreshing sleep, when JESUS calls home his members. But while we hear the voice which *John* heard, we may write it as the inscription on the graves of the saints. *Blessed are the dead which die in the LORD!* And, as sure as they sleep in JESUS; so sure GOD will bring them with JESUS in that day when he comes. And ye members of CHRIST, who are yet unborn, whom JESUS shall appoint to be alive at his coming; ye also shall partake in the triumphs of his coming. Though ye go not down to the grave, yet will the LORD change your vile bodies, under which ye groan, and fashion them like unto his glorious body; according to the power whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself. LORD! give grace to thy Church, that amidst all the dying circumstances of thy people here below, we may be able to *comfort*, and to exhort *one another with these words!*

CHAP. V.

CONTENTS.

The Apostle closeth his Epistle in this Chapter. He describes the striking Difference of the LORD's coming, as he will appear to his Church, and to the Ungodly. He again exhorts the Church to be comforted: and closeth the Epistle with his Apostolic Blessing.

BUT of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.

2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

The Apostle in the close of the former Chapter, having so blessedly spoken to the Church, concerning the great day of God; begins this, with shewing the dreadful effects, the Lord's coming would have on the minds of the ungodly. He makes use of two very striking similitudes, to represent the horrible distress, with which the graceless, and unawakened, will be overtaken in that day. *First*, that of a thief, coming at the dark hour of midnight into a man's house, when all are asleep, in apparent quiet, and safety; to surprize, and murder the unconscious inhabitants. And, *secondly*, that of a woman in travail, whose agonies, for the time, are supposed to be the sharpest our nature is capable of feeling; and are therefore called (*dolores tergiversantes*) thundering pains. And this latter is rendered still more striking in resemblance, because the pains of child-bearing, are the fruits of our first mother's transgression, and entailed upon all her daughters, passing through the hour of nature's extremity. Gen. iii. 16. And the sinner's day of wrath, is the fruit also, of our own transgression. Oh! who shall conceive, or imagine, the horrors of that day, to every Christless son, and daughter of Adam? *Where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?* What paleness, and convulsion of soul, will that sentence induce; *depart ye cursed!* Matt. xxv. 41.

4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

5 Ye are all children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

6 Therefore let us not sleep, as *do* others; but let us watch and be sober.

7 For they that sleep sleep in the night, and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breast-plate of faith and love: and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

10 Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

11 Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

How very gracious was it in the Lord the Spirit, while describing the awful events of this great day of God, as they will overtake the wicked; to comfort the Lord's people, with the assurance of their safety, when surrounded with such tremendous judgments, in their view, before them? And, I beg the Reader to be careful with

me to observe, from whence, and in what, their safety is found. Not in themselves, or their own attainments. For wherein do they differ from others? and what have they which they did not receive? Not from birth, or descendants in nature. For all are alike born in the same *Adam*-stock, of whom Scripture bears testimony, *there is none good, no not one.* Rom. iii. 12. Not in works of righteousness which they have done; for they were by nature children of wrath, even as others. Ephes. ii. 3. But *Paul* blessedly shews the cause; because by the water of regeneration, and a renewing of the HOLY GHOST, shed upon them abundantly, through JESUS CHRIST our LORD. Titus iii. 3—7. And here again, the Apostle sums up all in one, the sole cause, of their safety, and their everlasting blessedness in CHRIST JESUS; because GOD (saith he) *hath not appointed them to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our LORD JESUS CHRIST.* And hence, the Apostle adds, *He died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.* Song v. 2. Matt. xxv. 5. Here is the sole cause of mercy. This the glorious security of the Church: Hence no day can overtake them, no surprize of the midnight hour alarm. Sleeping, or waking, they are the LORD'S.

I cannot suffer myself, neither the Reader, to pass away from these most blessed, and precious assurances, of GOD the SPIRIT, without first desiring to pause over them, and ponder well their deep importance, on that great subject contained in them. And I desire to do this the rather, because they come in with a strength of argument, at once perfectly irresistible, and unanswerable, to silence the presumptuous reasoning of men untaught by the HOLY GHOST, who venture, in direct defiance to all the glorious promises of GOD, to call the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints, unscriptural, and highly dangerous. These men are so full in their apprehensions, of human worth, and human works, that they cannot ascribe the whole salvation to the finished redemption by the LORD JESUS CHRIST; but will make the purposes of GOD'S grace, still to be depending upon the will of man. Alas! what is not the unhumbled pride of our fallen nature capable of bringing forth, where men are not taught of GOD, and remain unacquainted with the plague of their own heart? I very earnestly beg the Reader, to ponder well this precious scripture, looking up to GOD the HOLY GHOST to be his Teacher; and then, to his cool, and serious judgment, under the LORD I will leave the subject.

If, as GOD the HOLY GHOST by *Paul*, here taught the Church, that GOD hath *not* appointed the Church to wrath, but *hath* appointed them to obtain salvation, by our LORD JESUS CHRIST; can GOD'S appointments be frustrated of their end? And if not, can that be unscriptural, or dangerous which inculcates, under divine teaching, such blessed truths? If GOD, who appoints these blessed things, to save from wrath, and to obtain salvation, hath in confirmation also, secured the means for the accomplishment of his purposes; is it possible to suppose, that any peradventure shall arise, which GOD did not foresee; and for which GOD made no provision? If, as a blessed security to the Church, GOD the FATHER, who hath not appointed to wrath, but hath appointed unto salvation; hath made the whole everlastingly secure; having chosen the Church in CHRIST,

before the foundation of the world, that it should be holy, and without blame before him in love; and hath predestinated the Church unto the adoption of children by JESUS CHRIST unto himself; accepting the Church in the Beloved: if, on the part of GOD the FATHER, in the high Covenant offices of his everlasting love, he hath mercifully made such ample provisions of security, for the sure accomplishment of his purposes; can either men, or devils, frustrate his designs? Moreover, the HOLY GHOST hath added in this very scripture, another blessed cause of assurance. He that appointed us to obtain salvation by our LORD JESUS CHRIST, hath confirmed it in CHRIST; for, we are here told, CHRIST died for us, that whether we wake, or sleep, we should live together with him. Hence, here is also, the Pillar, and ground of the truth. Neither doth the subject stop here. For GOD the SPIRIT hath engaged, to regenerate those, whom GOD hath chosen, and for whom CHRIST died; and, in confirmation that he hath done it, in this very chapter, the LORD declares, that they are not in darkness, as are the ungodly, whom the day of GOD will overtake as a thief in the night; but that they are children of the light, and the children of the day. Now then, in the face of these, and numberless other scriptures to the same purport, shall we be told, that GOD's purposes are doubtful? That the final perseverance of the elect, is unscriptural, and dangerous? Are such men indeed so desperately blind, as to suppose, GOD hath appointed the means, but is uncertain of the end? Oh! what a leanness, and poverty of soul, must there be in congregations under such teaching? Surely it may be said of all such men, as Job did to his Pharisaical instructors: *miserable comforters are ye all, physicians of no value?*

Reader! I pray you for the LORD's glory, and your own personal happiness, look up to GOD for his instruction on this momentous point. Hear what the LORD saith to confirm his word unto his people. *Wherein GOD willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, 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.* Heb. vi. 17, 18. Here observe the several gracious expressions. GOD's immutable purpose, formed wholly in himself, without any regard to the mutability of his chosen people. That purpose confirmed by two immutable things, GOD's word, and GOD's oath. And confirmed with this express design, that the heirs of promise, (mark the expression, *heirs of promise*, not workers of the law, see Gal. iii. 15 to the end,) might have a strong consolation. And all this because GOD was willing that those heirs of promise should have his gracious purpose more abundantly shewn unto them, to confirm all his promises; yea, and Amen in CHRIST JESUS. Now then put the whole together. Here is the immutable purpose, will, and pleasure of Him, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.* James i. 17, 18. And, hence, CHRIST in allusion to it, saith, that in order for the sure accomplishment of it, the LORD will cut short the times of persecution in his Church. For speaking of those exercises, JESUS saith, that *except the LORD had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved. But for the elect's sake, whom he*

hath chosen, he hath shortened the days. And the LORD further confirms the everlasting safety of his people, in that he shews the impossibility of deceiving the elect, Mark xiii. 19—22. So that GOD's purpose is founded in himself, and established in *the covenant, ordered in all things and sure.* 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. It is confirmed in the blood and righteousness of CHRIST. Ephes. i. 7. And the people which are *the heirs of promise*, are made willing, by the regenerating work of GOD the SPIRIT, according to covenant engagements *in the day of his power.* Psm. cx. 3. And what crowns the whole, as this immutability of GOD's will was not founded in any expectation from man, or liable to change from the mutability of man, neither depended upon any thing good or bad in the objects of this distinguishing mercy; so the ultimate blessings given to those heirs of promise, were not given them for their merit, or to be kept back for their undeservings. Among the very first clauses in the charter of grace, we find the merciful design expressed in these words: *For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of GOD according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth; it was said the elder shall serve the younger.* Rom. ix. 11. And, hence, the Almighty Founder, which in his own immutability formed the counsel of his will, formed, no less, all suitable provision to make the heirs of promise everlastingly blessed, and happy in their heritage. *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his SON, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.* Rom. viii. 29, 30. And what shall we then say to these things? Not, surely, as those say who call the consolations arising from those doctrines wrong, yea, and the doctrines themselves unscriptural and dangerous, but rather to hear what the LORD JESUS himself saith in comforting his people, with the full assurance of faith. *Fear not little flock; for it is your FATHER's good pleasure to give you the kingdom!* Luke xii. 32.

12 And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you;

13 And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. *And* be at peace among yourselves.

14 Now we exhort you brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all *men*.

15 See that none render evil for evil unto any *man*; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all *men*.

16 Rejoice evermore.

17 Pray without ceasing.

18 In every thing give thanks : for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

19 Quench not the Spirit.

20 Despise not prophesyings.

21 Prove all things ; hold fast that which is good.

22 Abstain from all appearance of evil.

23 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.

We have much subject for the most interesting meditation and improvement, contained within these verses. But the several heads of discourse dwelt upon, are too plain to need a Comment. The love and affection to be shewn to faithful ministers, in an esteem for their persons, and yet more for their doctrines; the rebuke to be manifested to the unruly; the forbearance of returning evil for evil; and the earnestness of following every thing that is in conformity to the Gospel of CHRIST: these are so blessedly set forth by the Apostle, as to supersede the necessity of adding any further observations in this *Poor Man's Commentary*. Unless, indeed, it be, to beg of God for grace, both to the Writer and Reader, that we may be eminent in the exercise of such things.

And I beg the Reader to notice with me, how earnestly the Apostle follows up his several exhortations, in recommending that holy joy of the Spirit, which a truly regenerated child, conscious of his personal interest in the Covenant of grace is justly entitled to. And those who feel the sweet teachings of God the HOLY GHOST, will most earnestly desire both to rejoice and to pray, and never quench those motions of God the SPIRIT, but to abound in hope, and joy, and peace, in believing, that both his prophecies, and his blessings may have an abiding influence in their hearts.

I detain the Reader over that verse in which *Paul* considers our nature as compounded of *spirit, soul, and body*. It is well known, that we are generally supposed to be composed but of *two* principles, namely, *soul and body*. But, certainly, the Apostle is correct, for there are *three*. By the *spirit* is meant that immortal part, which, in consequence of the *Adam*-nature fall, is dead in trespasses and sins, but by the HOLY GHOST, in every child of God, is quickened to a new and spiritual life. And being part of CHRIST, can die no more, but is holy and without blame in CHRIST for ever. The *soul*, as it is called here by the Apostle, is that thinking faculty which man hath in common with some other animals of the inferior creation, concerning which the Psalmist speaks, that *in that very day when the breath of man goeth forth, he returneth to his earth, and his thoughts perish*. Psm. cxlvi. 4. And the *body*, it is hardly neces-

sary to observe, is the mere mass of flesh and bones. Hence, by this view of our nature, the great doctrines of grace are seen in the clearest manner. The *spirit*, which in a state of unrenewed nature, like all the mass of *Adam's* race, is dead in trespasses and sins; when, (as in the instance of every child of GOD,) it is regenerated and born again, is made a partaker of the divine nature; the HOLY GHOST, by that sovereign act, hath, according to his divine power, given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness. 2 Pet. i. 3, 4. So that this new-born babe in CHRIST is born perfect in all his parts; and in respect to the spiritual life imparted, is as holy as it ever can be in heaven. Grow it will in grace, as a new-born child grows in nature. But like a child in nature, it will have no other nature, but the same for ever in which it is new-born. It is born again, (saith an Apostle,) *not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of GOD, which liveth and abideth for ever.* 1 Pet. i. 23. But the thinking faculty, which Paul here calls the *soul*, and the *body* which is nothing but flesh and bones, these are never renewed during the whole time-state of the Church below; but, as Paul himself found in his own experience, and groaned under the daily burden thereof, they form a *body of sin and death.* Rom. vii. 18 to the end. Yet, notwithstanding the unrenewed state of the thinking faculty and the body, the whole man being in the Covenant of grace, spirit, soul, and body are included in the great purposes of redemption. And, hence, Paul prays that *the whole spirit, soul, and body* of GOD's children, *be preserved blameless, unto the coming of our LORD JESUS CHRIST.*

24 Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.

25 Brethren, pray for us.

26 Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss.

27 I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.

28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you: Amen.

The first *epistle* unto the Thessalonians was written from Athens.

It is hardly necessary to make any observations upon those sweet verses, they are in themselves so plain, but they are also so beautiful and affectionate, that I hardly know how to pass them by unnoticed. I shall only, however, just remark how blessedly the Apostle assures the Church of GOD's faithfulness. GOD's call is a most decided proof of his faithfulness. *For whom he did predestinate, them he also called.* And his call looks as sure forward to justify and glorify, as it looks back to his eternal purpose, will, and pleasure in predestinating. Hence, Peter admonisheth the Church to prove their *election* by their *call*. Compare Rom. viii. 29, 30. with 2 Pet. i. 10.

I pray the Reader not to overlook the Apostle's desiring an interest in the prayers of the faithful. It is a sweet thought when

the whole Church of God be considered as mutually helping each other in prayer. *There should be no schism in the body, but the members should have the same care one for another.* 1 Cor. xii. 25. And if so great an Apostle thus sought a remembrance by the people before the LORD, how earnest may it be supposed ought all who now minister in holy things, to say continually to the Church, *Brethren, pray for us!*

And let not the Reader overlook the Apostle's command, that *all* the brethren should be greeted, the humblest, the poorest, the least. For, as in the human body there is not a part so inconsiderable but what the whole is concerned for, and cannot but take interest in, both in its pain or pleasure; so, in the mystical body of CHRIST, all are equally concerned in what belongs to each member, and all, yea, the glorious Head himself CHRIST JESUS, *cannot*, (indeed, He would not,) *say to the feet, I have no need of you.* 1 Cor. xii. 21. Oh! what an argument ariseth therefrom, to all that christian love and affection, which ought to distinguish the members of CHRIST's body! 1 Cor. xii. 27.

One word more. An holy kiss for holy brethren, is a sacred and sanctified description of character for distinguishing the LORD's brethren. Heb. iii. 1. 1 Pet. ii. 9. *Holiness unto the LORD*, was to be upon the bells of the horses in the Gospel day. Zech. xiv. 20. JESUS wills this holiness in and from himself to his people. Compare Levit. xi. 44. with 1 Pet. i. 15, 16. And how needful must it be, that all the holy family should have the Scriptures of our GOD, which are not of any private interpretation, read to them for their instruction, exhortation, and comfort. 2 Pet. i. 20, 21. And how blessedly *Paul* closeth all with his Apostolical benediction, and which is his mark of their being his. 2 Thess. iii. 17.

REFLECTIONS.

READER! here is a Chapter highly calculated, under GOD, to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: While the ungodly are scoffing at the threatened judgment of the LORD's coming, behold with what awful and alarming account it is said that day will be known. As a thief in the night, so sudden, so unexpected. And, while the graceless will be thus surprized, both with the greatness and unlooked for horrors of that day; the prospect, like the Cloud in the camp of Israel, while dark with the blackness of despair to the enemies of our GOD and his CHRIST, will be bright and shining to all the LORD's people, who are the children of the light, and of the day. Oh! the blessedness of that assurance, *GOD hath not appointed us unto wrath, but unto salvation, through JESUS CHRIST our LORD!*

Blessed be GOD the HOLY GHOST for commanding his Scriptures to be read unto all the holy brethren. A plain proof of the sin and folly of that class of men, who would shut up the word of GOD from the common people. GOD be blessed for his mercy to this land, in that we have the Scriptures open to us, *which are able to make us wise unto salvation, through JESUS CHRIST our LORD.* And blessed be the LORD for the ministry of his faithful servant *Paul*, in this very

sweet Epistle, and for all the inspired writings which GOD the SPIRIT taught him to send to the Churches! Ere long, the Church will meet with him, and all the faithful servants of the LORD, in every age of the Church, which have ministered in the name of the LORD. In the mean time, may GOD the SPIRIT cause his unction to enlighten all his people in the reading of them. And while the grace of GOD is directing the Church upon earth, may both the Church in earth and heaven be continually ascribing glory to the united source of all mercy, FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST, now, and for evermore. Amen.

THE
SECOND EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE
TO THE
THESSALONIANS.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.

IT is more than probable, that this *second* Epistle to the Church of the *Thessalonians* was written not a longer space after the first, than *two years*. The chief scope of it seems to have been by way of fortifying their minds against the assaults of persecution, which ran very high at that time. It should seem also, that the Church of GOD in *Thessalonica* had conceived the day of judgment to be at hand. And, if one may conjecture from what the Apostle hath said in various parts of this Epistle, many of the people were tempted therefore to neglect the honest attention to their calling, and the care of their families. But while *Paul* sets himself in this Epistle to correct these things, he doth not lose sight of making JESUS the grand feature of this, as well as his other writings and preachings.

I do not think it necessary to make any further detention by way of Preface, to the immediately entering upon the Epistle itself, only first to beg the Reader to bend the knee in prayer with me before the Almighty Author of it, the HOLY GHOST, to bless it to the Church in every age, till time shall be no more.