

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.

CHAPTER I.

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The Apostle opens his Epistle with his usual Benediction. He desires to bless GOD for the Prosperity of the Church at Thessalonica. He comforts the People under all their Trials, with the assured Prospect of CHRIST's coming.

PAUL, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ :

2 Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is really delightful to observe how uniformly the Apostle keeps in view the grace of God, when writing to the Churches. And as God's grace, in the everlasting love of his purpose, counsel, will, and pleasure, is the source and spring of all the blessings which follow in the Church of peace, and mercy in redemption, with all their blissful consequences, we may well account for the Apostle's beginning all he had to offer the Church in this manner.

I would beg the Reader to pause over it a moment, and consider some few of the wonderful properties of grace. The first, and best, and highest sense of it, as it relates to JEHOVAH's exercise of it towards the Church from all eternity, is, in itself, one of the most blessed subjects which can call up the exercise of our awakened faculties, either in time, or in eternity. Grace, in its original source and spring, hath no one motive but as it arose in the divine mind. No predisposing cause, but God's pleasure. Neither worthiness, nor unworthiness, in the persons on whom he causeth his grace to shine, being in the least concerned. It would cease to be grace, if the LORD had been moved to exercise it from the foreview of merit, in any of those on whom he bestowed it, or if he withheld it from the knowledge of undeservings among any of his creatures. *Paul* elsewhere defines grace with this divine property. *If by grace, (saith he,) then is it no more works: otherwise grace is no more grace.* Rom. xi. 6. Nay, in numberless instances it should seem, as if the LORD would shew, that *where sin abounded, grace should much more abound*; and, like the high water of the tide, arise over every thing of our undeservings which seemed to oppose it. *Paul* calls his own conversion a proof. *The grace of our LORD (saith he) was exceeding abundant.* 1 Tim. i. 14, 15. Reader! do not overlook this scriptural account of grace, from the exercise of which all our mercies flow. Redemption by CHRIST, regeneration by the HOLY GHOST, justification before GOD in CHRIST without works; yea, against all undeservings, sanctification in CHRIST, the forming the spirit anew in CHRIST JESUS, together with all those gracious dispositions formed in the new nature by the HOLY GHOST, all, all flow as so many streams from this one fountain. And the whole sum and substance of the Bible, in the ultimate design of JEHOVAH going forth in acts of creation, redemption, providence, grace, and everlasting happiness

to the Church, is to this one point, and no other; *to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved.* Ephes. i. 6.

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

4 So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure :

5 *Which is* a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer :

6 Seeing *it is* a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you :

We have several very beautiful and blessed consequences arising out of these verses, which the Reader will do well to notice one by one. *First.* Observe how blessedly *Paul* ascends to the fountain head, in ascribing all glory to the great Head of the Church, for their prosperity. He takes no notice of men or things, ordinances or ministers; these in *Paul's* view were secondary and subordinate. *Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the LORD gave to every man?* 1 Cor. iii. 5. How delightful is it to refer all the glory where alone it is due, and to bless God, as it is meet, when faith towards God, and charity towards men, grow under the LORD's favor!

Secondly. Let the Reader observe the growth of faith and brotherly love, as twin graces coming from the LORD. They grow and increase under divine cultivation, and they are very blessed evidences of God's elect children. *Paul* elsewhere distinguisheth it from the mere professional belief, so common among the carnal world, by calling it, *the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth, which is after godliness.* Titus i. 1. Let the Reader, therefore, carefully mark the vast difference. When a child of GOD is new born, and that immense work of GOD the SPIRIT by regeneration, is wrought in quickening the sinner, which was before dead in trespasses and sins, the spiritual life is given, which can die no more. Being made a partaker of the divine nature, this principle is as holy as it ever can be. But, like a new-born child in nature, so the child in grace groweth and *increaseth with all the increase of GOD.* Coloss. ii. 19. 2 Pet. iii. 18. And let the Reader remark yet further, that these graces of faith and charity, with all others that are thereby induced from the spiritual life, given by the HOLY GHOST to the child of GOD, are the *fruits and effects* resulting from the love of the HOLY THREE in One, in their covenant-offices and

characters. Faith and love, however exceedingly they grow and abound, form no *cause* in the great work of salvation. CHRIST'S Person, in his blood and righteousness, is the sole *cause*. Our faith in him, and love to all saints, are *effects*.

Thirdly. When the Apostle saith, that he, and his faithful companion in the ministry, gloried in the Churches of God, let the Reader recollect, that no more can be meant, but that of holy joy, that the LORD blessed them with his grace. It was a constant maxim of *Paul*, that *no man should glory in men*. I Cor. iii. 21. And, therefore, he did not tell the Church, in this place, that their good deeds, or their zeal, no, nor their faith and charity, as their acts, were subjects of his glory. He only meant to say, that the LORD'S blessing upon them, opened a source of giving glory to GOD, and he rejoiced in their progress in grace.

Fourthly. I beg the Reader to remark with me, how *Paul* interprets the LORD'S blessing upon his Church, a sure token of the LORD'S displeasure to their enemies. And I beg the Reader to remark it the rather, because the same holds good in all ages of the Church. Depend upon it, in whatever congregation of the LORD'S faithful people, the LORD'S cause prospers, while the LORD manifests his favor thereby to them; this becomes his frown upon those who oppose them. *David* was so convinced of this, that he made it a subject of prayer, that by the LORD'S countenancing him, his enemies might behold it, and hang their heads. *Shew me (said he) a token for good: that they which hate me, may see it, and be ashamed: because thou, LORD, hath holpen me, and comforted me.* Psm. lxxxvi. 17. Reader! do bring this decision, (for it is the LORD'S own decision, and upon scriptural grounds,) into practice, for forming righteous judgment in the present awful day. While the great and glorious truths of the Gospel are frittering away through the land, and flimsy subjects supply the place of preaching God's electing love, CHRIST'S redeeming grace, and the SPIRIT'S regenerating mercy; while places which our forefathers, of blessed memory, occupied, and where those precious truths, whereon was founded all the hope, and joy, and comfort of their truly regenerated souls, once were continually heard, now resound with daring denials of CHRIST'S finished salvation, and the final perseverance of thy saints; look and see where GOD owns and blesseth his word, and where congregations are, among whom conversion work, and confirming work are going on. This will be the way to discover, what the Apostle here calls, *the manifest token of the righteous judgment of God*. The LORD hath engaged to *honor them who honor him*. I Sam. ii. 30. And we may reasonably expect to behold God's electing love manifested in the assemblies where God's electing love is faithfully preached, and CHRIST'S redeeming mercy felt and enjoyed, where redemption by his blood is insisted on as the sole cause of salvation. And GOD the SPIRIT doth, and will, awaken sinners, dead in trespasses and sins, where he sends his faithful servants to preach to the congregation, as the Prophet sent by him did to the dry bones in the valley, whose whole movement, breath, and life, can only come from his sovereign power. Ezek. xxxvii. 4, 5. This will be the way to decide where righteous judgment is formed, not from conclusions drawn from *numbers*, but from conclusions drawn from *the real work of God upon the heart*. Oh!

the high favor the GOD of all grace manifesteth to that real congregation of *Zion*, called by what name soever it may be among men, whom *the LORD shall count when he writeth up the people, that this and that man was born there.* Psm. lxxxvii. 5, 6.

7 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

8 In flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power:

10 When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.

There is somewhat very interesting and affectionate in what is said in the opening of this paragraph. To such troubles as are sharp and severe, arising from persecution, and under which the spirit faints; there is nothing can bring relief equal to the prospect of the great day of God. *Paul*, therefore, bids the Church to rest with him and his exercised companions in this blessed hope. I know not which to contemplate most, in respect to the awful solemnity with which the Apostle hath here represented the coming of CHRIST, whether the destruction of his foes, or the salvation of his people. The imagination can form nothing to itself, which can either give an idea of the alarming nature of the one, or the unspeakable joy of the other. But the admiration of CHRIST'S Person, is said to form the whole of the felicity of his saints. And, most certainly, the union of God and man in one Person, must of itself become such an object of glory, as cannot fail to arrest, and to fix the whole attention of every beholder. But who shall describe it? Who shall form conception of the divine features of Him, *in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the GODHEAD bodily?*

11 Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of *his* goodness, and the work of faith with power:

12 That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I pray the Reader to observe how sweetly *Paul* closeth the Chapter, as he had begun, with prayer. What can be more proper for ministers, than to open and close all their ministerial services in the same manner. By the LORD's counting the people worthy of this calling, cannot be supposed to mean any worthiness in them, for he had before ascribed all to the grace of GOD. But the counting worthy of this calling, means the LORD's counting them one with JESUS; so that now, when the Church comes to be glorified in JESUS, the blessed testimonies of all that is past may appear in their first call by grace, and their being justified, adopted, sanctified, and the whole events they had past through, from grace to glory, might shew their union and oneness with CHRIST from everlasting; so, that as all along their lives had been hid with CHRIST in GOD; now, when CHRIST, who is their life, appears, *they appear with him in glory.* Coloss. iii. 3, 4.

REFLECTIONS.

READER! it were well, if truly regenerated souls would frequently, and with a suitable solemnity of holy joy, contemplate the great day of CHRIST's coming, which the Apostle here proposeth to the Church, as the sure support to all the exercises and trials of life. For what damps the highest prosperity of sinners, becomes the richest encouragement to comfort, under all the pressure of evil, to the saints. And, if the people of GOD would learn, under grace, to connect with their prospect of CHRIST's coming, their union and interest in that glory in which he comes, what a joy unspeakable and full of glory would this bring with it to their souls. And, as the human nature of CHRIST united to his divine, gives a right and interest in all that is divine, and the glory of the GODHEAD is communicated to the human nature, and dwells in it; so our union with CHRIST gives a right and interest in all that belongs to CHRIST, as CHRIST, for communication in all that is communicable, and we derive out of his fulness, grace here, and glory hereafter. This was the very end for which the Church was predestinated, that we might be conformed to his image. May the LORD give to all his redeemed ones, grace, so to contemplate CHRIST, and so to wait for his coming, that his precious name may be glorified in his people, and they in him, *according to the grace of GOD, and our LORD JESUS CHRIST.*

CHAP. II.

CONTENTS.

The Apostle forewarns the Church in this Chapter, of a falling away of Professors. He very awfully describes the coming of Antichrist, before CHRIST's appearing. And takes occasion therefrom to bless GOD, for the Church having been chosen to Sanctification from the Beginning.

NOW we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and *by* our gathering together unto him,

2 That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;

It should seem, from the opening of this Chapter, that the Church had at this time, strong apprehensions in their mind, that the day of the LORD was at hand. And it is probable, from what the Apostle saith in those verses, that the Church of the *Thessalonians* had been strengthened in this opinion, by their misconstruction of the Apostle's former letter. 1 Thess. iv. 15. *Paul*, therefore, in this Chapter corrects this error; and, under the Spirit of prophecy, relates to the Church, an awful event, which must first take place in the earth, which should be the most distressing in its consequences, to the Church of the LORD, that could be. The great day of GOD, saith he, shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that Man of Sin be revealed, the Son of Perdition. Reader! pause over this account, before you go further. *A falling away*. Not from grace. Not the people of GOD. *Paul* had before told the Church, in his former Epistle to the *Thessalonians*, that *their election of God was known*. 1 Thess. i. 4. And in the same Epistle, he had fully declared, that GOD *had not appointed* his people *unto wrath, but to obtain salvation*. 1 Thess. v. 9. The falling away, therefore, hath no respect whatever, to the real Church of CHRIST; but wholly to the mere nominal Professors of Christianity, and which were numerous as soon as the Empire became Christian, and nations possessed belief in CHRIST, merely as a religion of state policy, without one act of grace in CHRIST. A falling away from this profession became, and hath continued common, ever since. But what hath this to do with CHRIST? Men cannot fall away from what they never had! A man cannot lose grace, who never had grace. There is but one real, and decisive mark of the true faith in CHRIST; namely, the being regenerated, and born again of the HOLY GHOST. All the profession in the world, of believing in CHRIST, is no profession at all, as to its vital principles, before this act is wrought in the soul. And, therefore, men falling away from a mere profession, is all that *Paul* meant, by the expression. But, there never was, neither is it possible it should be, a falling away, in a single instance, of a child of GOD, whom GOD the SPIRIT hath regenerated: for that happy soul is thereby made *partaker of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust*. 2 Pet. i. 3, 4. The *man of sin*, and the *son of perdition*, come next to be considered. The account the Apostle gives is very alarming.

4 Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

5 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

6 And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.

7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth *will let* until he be taken out of the way.

8 And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

9 *Even him*, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:

12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

We have here a very awful prophecy, and most awfully hath it been fulfilled, and still is now fulfilling, in the earth. And what makes it still, if possible, more awful is, that though the Apostle, by the expressions *man of sin*, and *the son of perdition*, might seem at first view, to allude to somewhat *personal*; yet it is not so. It is national: yea, general. It was long since said, by the beloved Apostle *John*, that as Antichrist should come: so, *there were in his days* (and how increased in our's) *many Antichrists*. 1 John ii. 18. The best service which I can render, under the Lord, to the Reader of this *Poor Man's Commentary*, in helping to the proper apprehension of the solemn subject contained within these verses, will be, to gather out the several parts of the passage, one by one, and then consider them, as they appear before us.

And *first*. Let the Reader remark with me, the *names*, by which the Apostle hath distinguished this heresy. He calls it *the man of sin*; *the son of perdition*: *the mystery of iniquity*; *that wicked, which shall be revealed*: *him whose coming is after the working of Satan*:

and who comes *with all power, and signs, and lying wonders; and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness*. These are the awful names, by which the HOLY GHOST hath made known to the Church through Paul, in this scripture, the alarming heresy, which was to appear.

Secondly. The acts, and deeds, by which the character of this delusion should be discovered. He is said to *oppose and exalt himself, above all that is called God, or that is worshipped. That he as God, sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God*. And he is known by the power he is said to assume, and the signs, and lying wonders he comes with, after the working of Satan; and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness.

Thirdly. The awful consequences which shall follow, in them that perish, which are his followers. God shall send them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie; that all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Fourthly. The sure destruction of this Wicked himself, whom the LORD shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and destroy with the brightness of his coming. So much for the Apostle's description of this awful heresy; which, under the LORD the SPIRIT, he told the Church, would be revealed in the after times, when the LORD, who then withheld it, would remove the cause of obstruction out of the way. Now let us, under the LORD's teaching, look at those characters, one by one; and examine, by scripture testimony, and the facts which have since appeared, to what age of the Church they particularly refer. And, first, respecting the names. The man of sin, and the son of perdition; the mystery of iniquity, and the wicked. It is plain that these all refer to one and the same. And not simply to one person; but rather the name of one, and the same heresy. Not Satan, who is emphatically called the Wicked One; for this heresy is said to be *after the working of Satan*; consequently could not be Satan himself. Neither any new revelation of the traitor Judas, whom our LORD calls the son of perdition. John xvii. 12. For JESUS did not so name him, as though he, and he only, should be known by that name. All are sons of perdition, which are lost. Neither did the Apostle mean any individual person, among the enemies of CHRIST, which in after ages shall arise to oppose CHRIST's Gospel, however desperately wicked, and bitter they might be. It is not a person, but a body; an apostacy from the Church, a falling away; still professing CHRIST, but in works denying him. For the character is further defined, of *sitting in God's temple, and calling himself god; yea, exalting himself above all that is called God*.

And where are we to look for the fulfilment of this prophecy? If a Church professing Christianity can be found, to whom those titles clearly belong; there will remain no shadow of doubt, but that this is the very one the Apostle had in view, in this scripture prophecy. And all that have written upon the subject, from the first moment the scriptures have been commented upon, to the present hour, have uniformly, and with one voice, declared it to be the Church of Rome. The selling of indulgencies, pardons, grants, and the like, are too nearly allied to the man of sin; and where practised, too strikingly represent him, whom Paul describes as *sitting in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God*. And it is to

oppose CHRIST in all his offices, as the Prophet, Priest, and King of his Church; when teaching the worship of saints; when setting up merit, and joining intercessors with CHRIST; and when taking up the title of supremacy, as head of the Church. And, it is certainly not a little remarkable in confirmation, that what *Paul* calls in this place, *the mystery of iniquity*, in allusion to the heresy he had been describing; *John*, in the book of the Revelations, calls *Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of harlots, and abominations of the earth*. Rev. xvii. 5. From these, and numberless other testimonies, which, if necessary, might be brought forward, there cannot be the shadow of a doubt, but that the Apostacy the Apostle had in view in this scripture the See of *Rome* was all along designed.

But it would have been a blessing to the true Church of CHRIST, if apostacy had marked only the character of the See of *Rome*. Alas! what errors have sprung up, in this our own land, in what is called the Reformed Church. Who that reads the beloved Apostle's account of his days, and takes the same mirror to look in for ours; but must be struck with the resemblance. *Little children* (said he) *it is the last time, and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists: whereby we know that it is the last time*. I John ii. 18. Let any man read this blessed Epistle of *John*, and then look to the professions of men around him! Let him behold how the GODHEAD of CHRIST is denied: the Person, GODHEAD, and Ministry of GOD the HOLY GHOST is questioned; and then say, are there not many Antichrists?

And, let my Reader bear with me, to make one observation more. What did the Apostle mean, in this scripture, by *deceivableness of unrighteousness*? Mark the expression. *With all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish*. Did there need, the Church should be told, that unrighteousness would end in destruction? Certainly this could not be *Paul's* meaning. Neither in the common sense, and acceptation of the word, unrighteousness could never deceive a man with hopes of being saved by it. But, if a self-righteous *Pharisee*, fancying himself righteous before GOD; makes his own good deeds, and prayers, and alms, and ordinances, a part Savior; all of which are unrighteous before GOD: here is a fallacy indeed, deep, and wretched. And this will well suit the name of *all deceivableness of unrighteousness*. Reader! it is right to exercise a jealousy over our own hearts. The day is awful. In contending earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints, we not only labor to preserve GOD's truth, but our own happiness. And it is a truth well worth laboring for. *For if righteousness come by the law, then CHRIST is dead in vain*. Gal. ii. 21.

13 But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:

14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to

the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

16 Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given *us* everlasting consolation and good hope through grace,

17 Comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work.

What a sweet scripture is here! And how blessedly it comes in, to relieve the mind, after looking at the sad account of the heresy described in the foregoing verses? *Paul* found a constant cause, and so may we also, to give thanks to God always for the Church being chosen from the beginning to salvation through the sanctification of the SPIRIT, and belief of the truth. There is an uncommon degree of beauty, in the strength of expression made use of, in what the Apostle here saith, on sanctification; in the cause, and antiquity of it. It would form more the subject of a treatise, than to offer a few passing observations, on these verses; but I beg the Reader's indulgence, to detain him a moment or two, upon the passage.

Sanctification, or to sanctify, hath a different meaning in the different scriptures. But the most general sense is, either to set apart, consecrate, or dedicate, to a sacred service: or to purify, cleanse, and make holy, what was before unholy in our nature. In the former, CHRIST is said to have sanctified himself. John xvii. 19. In the latter, the Church, when regenerated, is said to be washed, to be sanctified, to be justified, in the name of the LORD JESUS, and by the SPIRIT of our God. 1 Cor. vi. 11. These distinctions, if attended to, through the whole of the Old Testament and the New, would, under God the SPIRIT, open a clearer apprehension than is generally received, upon the subject of sanctification.

It is very blessed to observe, what a beautiful order there is adopted, and carried on, through all the departments of divine love to the Church, in the several acts of the Persons of the GODHEAD. Hence, each glorious Person hath taken part, in all the acts of grace, manifested towards every individual of CHRIST's mystical body. Thus in sanctification, the Church is said to be sanctified by God the FATHER, in his choosing, electing, separating love, when he chose the whole body in CHRIST, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blame before him in love. Ephes. i. 4. But this sanctification is as expressly ascribed to the LORD JESUS CHRIST, in that it is said, we are sanctified through the offering of the body of JESUS CHRIST once for all. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Heb. x. 10, 14. But here again, these gracious personal acts in the FATHER and the SON, do not supersede, or render unnecessary, the same personal tendencies of

love, in the HOLY GHOST: for the LORD the SPIRIT is not only said to sanctify the brethren beloved, in this verse of the Apostle's; but *Peter*, in opening his Epistle to the Church, expressly addresseth it to the *Elect according to the foreknowledge of GOD the FATHER, through sanctification of the SPIRIT, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of JESUS CHRIST.* 1 Pet. i. 2. And what can more plainly, and decidedly prove, the personal election, redemption, and sanctification, of the whole Church of GOD in JESUS CHRIST our LORD.

But, while these grand, and indeed (as they may well be called) fundamental truths of the Gospel, are generally received, and admitted in the Church of the faithful, as so many standards of decision, against which there is no appeal; the glorious doctrine of sanctification, doth not seem to be as clearly understood, as those of election, and redemption. The more generally received opinion is, that at regeneration, we are regenerated but in part; and that as well in body as spirit. There is a perfection (say they) of parts of the new man, in both of the LORD's people, but only in degrees. Though there be a compleat perfection in CHRIST, in which they are interested; yet their sanctification is imperfect. They are in a progressive state of holiness, and progressive sanctification; but not compleat in either. This I apprehend, is the general received opinion.

I am well aware, that the whole tide of Commentators are against me, while I would desire, with all humility of soul, instead of swimming with them down the stream, to bear up my feeble bark to the torrent of this opinion. I beg, as I have before done, my Reader's indulgence, to state the reasons for which I differ. If I err, I pray the LORD to pardon me, and preserve his people from adopting my errors.

In the *first* place. I humbly conceive, that as all our blessings of the Church of GOD in CHRIST, result from the joint love, and grace, of the whole Persons of the GODHEAD, in their covenant characters; so have they been pleased to manifest those acts of favor in such a way, as do endear the Almighty Authors of our blessings to our affections, with equal adoration, love, and praise, as the united source in CHRIST. It was but one act of GOD the FATHER, when in his infinite mind, he chose the Church in CHRIST; and which, when chosen, became a compleat, perfect, and immutable purpose, remaining for ever. In like manner, it was but one act in the purpose of GOD the SON, in relation to all the concerns in redemption; for by *the one offering of himself once offered, he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.* And the act of regeneration, or new birth, by GOD the HOLY GHOST, when considered as quickening the sinner dead in trespasses and sins, could be but one act; by which, as the Apostle saith, *being born again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, liveth, and abideth for ever.* 1 Pet. i. 23. Beheld, in this point of view, there is a beautiful order, and analogy, in those several acts of divine agency, which not only manifest equal acts of the GODHEAD, towards the objects of their love; but also demonstrate, each act, to be equally essential, to all the great purposes of their spiritual being, and well-being, in CHRIST.

But on the supposition, that this act of GOD the SPIRIT, in regeneration, is but in part; not only this beautiful order and equality in

those acts of grace is destroyed, but a train of the most painful consequences arise, which involve the mind in endless apprehensions, concerning the eventual perfection. And wherefore should the work of regeneration and the sanctification included in it, be an imperfect act of GOD the SPIRIT, more than the act of election in GOD the FATHER, or redemption by GOD the SON? If it be only for one moment admitted, that regeneration doth not renew the body, neither was ever intended, during the time state of the Church, to renew the body; every difficulty vanisheth. And what can more plainly declare this, than our LORD's own words, in his blessed discourse on regeneration? *That* (said JESUS) *which is born of the flesh, is flesh: and that which is born of the SPIRIT is spirit.* John iii. 6. If at our regeneration, the work was wrought *by* flesh, or *on* flesh; the thing would be just the reverse of what it is. But CHRIST saith: that which is born of the SPIRIT, is spirit. Words, in my view as plain as words can express, that the blessed act of regeneration, is by the SPIRIT; and that it is *on* the spirit; and that that which is born of the SPIRIT, is *only* spirit. The LORD draws a line of distinction, between the flesh, and the spirit, as if in confirmation of the subject. If this be the sense of our LORD's words, (and I think it will be difficult to prove the contrary,) it will follow, that no alteration whatever, is made on the body at regeneration. No part of it is sanctified; The work is on the spirit; and which wholly regenerated, is justified, and sanctified, by the HOLY GHOST in CHRIST JESUS.

Secondly. Upon the presumption of correctness in the foregoing statement, it will then follow, that the new born child of GOD, though sanctified in CHRIST, and to whom CHRIST is made of GOD, both *wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption*; hath no inherent holiness in himself, for his body is still the creature of sin; and so far is it from being in a progressive state of holiness, that it is daily the subject of sin, and tending to corruption. Let those who are advocates for the progressive sanctification, and holiness of the creature, state to us the causes, how it is, on the supposition the *body*, as well as the *spirit* of a regenerated child, is made perfect in part; that such opposition should take place, as continually doth take place, between the flesh and the spirit, when the spirit is regenerated? Gal. v. 17. According to *Paul's* statement of himself, this conflict never began with him, until he was regenerated. Before the killing power of the law came on his conscience at his conversion, he tells us, that he was alive in all the self-confidence of his own holiness. *But,* (saith he,) *when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.* Rom. vii. 9. And hence, at a period of nearly *three-and-twenty* years after his conversion, he groaned under the conscious sense, that in him; that is, saith he, *in my flesh dwelleth no good thing.* Rom. vii. 18. Can the advocates for progressive sanctification, explain these things, upon any principles whatever, if the body was in part sanctified? And will they at the same time, on the presumption of a body in part sanctified shew, how it was, that holy men of old, when conscious of a work of grace upon their souls, still groaned in the consciousness at the same time, of their being *vile*; Job xl. 4. of having *their sin always before them*; Psm. li. 3. of being of *unclean lips*: Isaiah vi. 5. and of their *comeliness*

turned into corruption? Dan. x. 8. Nay, will those advocates for progressive sanctification, kindly say, whether while insisting upon inherent holiness, and the whole man becoming more perfect in others, they truly experience such things in themselves? Are they more holy, more heavenly minded, more weaned from the world, than they were in times past? If they say yes, to such heart-searching questions; they will but afford stronger testimony of their ignorance of the plague of their own heart, and prove the LORD'S assertion, when he saith, *the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?* Jerem. xvii. 9.

Thirdly. The very tendency of the body to corruption, and the daily removing of the pins of our earthly tabernacle, loudly proclaim, that in order to its being raised a *spiritual* body, it must first be a *natural* body. Whereas, if it were now a spiritual body, or in part spiritual; that part, even to the ten thousandth part could not corrupt. But it is wholly corruption. And, when the spirit leaves the body, the earthly part (as one said to me when calling me to bury the dead) cries for its original earth. And here indeed comes in, to our delight, and joy, the LORD JESUS in the power of his resurrection, as a quickening SPIRIT. Of none but JEHOVAH'S HOLY ONE, could it ever be said, he was not liable to corruption. It was impossible in this account, that *the pains of death could hold him!* Psalm. xvi. 10. Acts ii. 24.

I am well aware, (as I said before,) that the great tide of Commentators are against me. And I am also well aware, that to men unacquainted with the plague of their own heart, I shall expose myself to their displeasure, by the view I have given of the subject. But these things do not move me. If one only of the LORD'S humbled ones, shall herefrom, through grace, be led to be more out of love with themselves, and more in love with CHRIST JESUS; I shall find cause to bless God for his teachings. This will be to grow in grace; not in sanctification. Growth in grace leads to the greater knowledge of the LORD, as the Apostle states it. 2 Pet. iii. 18. Grace is an humbling principle. He that groweth in grace, layeth lower, and lower, in the dust before God. And, from being humbled more and more, every day, in himself; JESUS, and his great salvation, will be increasingly precious. This is to grow in grace; and not in sanctification.

But still, it will be yet further contended, that on the supposition, there is no change wrought on the body, when the spirit is regenerated; how doth this correspond to what the scriptures declare, that *our bodies are the temple of the HOLY GHOST, which dwelleth in us?* 1 Cor. vi. 19. (See Commentary there). Can it be supposed, that GOD the SPIRIT will dwell in a nature unregenerated, and un sanctified? To which I answer. Every act of grace, in the Persons of the GODHEAD, toward our nature, continually opens subjects of unceasing wonder, adoration, and the lowliest prostration of soul and body. But the indwelling residence of GOD the SPIRIT, is not more the subject of astonishment than that of GOD the FATHER'S making his abode with the redeemed; John xiv. 23. or GOD the SON, for the purpose of redemption, being *made in the likeness of sinful flesh.* Rom. viii. 3. We are taught to consider all and every part of the LORD'S tendencies to his Church as full of mystery. 1 Tim. iii. 16.

And, it should be continually remembered by us, that great as our wonder is, in the mystery of godliness, we are not called upon to explain the *causes*; but believe only, and bless God for the *effects*. And the very manner, in which the Apostle hath informed the Church of this astonishing condescension in God the HOLY GHOST, in making the body of his people his temple, implies the sense he wished the people to have of it. *What!* (saith he,) *know ye not, that your body is the temple of the HOLY GHOST which is in you?* Great would have been the mercy either way, and every way, in this act of grace, when we consider the infinite distance between God and his creatures; had the LORD made those bodies compleatly holy, and then have dwelt in them. But it is very plain, from *Paul's* manner of speaking, that he would have the Church consider the wonders, in the HOLY GHOST dwelling in them, because they were, in their unregenerated bodies, so altogether corrupt, and unholy. *What!* saith he, *know ye not?* As if he had said, what think ye of the unequalled grace, that the HOLY ONE who inhabiteth eternity, and who is himself holiness, in himself should dwell in the bodies of nothing but filth and defilement! Oh! the grace of God.

I must not enlarge: though the subject itself affords occasion. I shall leave the Reader to his own conclusions, under the LORD. For my own part, I desire to bless God for those humbling views, the consciousness of a body virtually all sin, and hastening daily to corruption, keeps alive, through grace in my soul. The daily workings of corruption in my heart (I know not what other men's hearts feel) sheweth me, that the carnal mind is still carnal. Psm. xxxvi. 1. Rom. vii. 14. I feel a daily warfare. I groan, being burdened. I not only feel these workings when unoccupied with divine things, but often in the house of God. Like *Paul*, I know what it is, that *when I would do good evil is present with me*. Rom. vii. 21. In the pulpit, at the table of the LORD, at the mercy-seat, often when in a moment of sweet communion with my God and SAVIOR; a train of thoughts rush through me like unbidden guests, and rob God at his face of his glory, and my soul for the time, of comfort! Can a body, where such things are, be in part renewed? Am I in a progressive state of holiness, in a body where I find such cause of humblings; and which I loath? Sweet scripture! which explains all, and leads me to CHRIST for all. *God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the SPIRIT, and belief of the truth, whereunto he hath called you by the Gospel; and to the obtaining of the glory of our LORD JESUS CHRIST!* See I Cor. v. and vi. Chapters, and Commentary.

REFLECTIONS.

Who that reads the solemn account of the great day of CHRIST'S appearing, but must stand with astonishment, in beholding the awful end of the ungodly, and the everlasting happiness of God's people!

Reader! think what an awful account is here given, of *the man of sin*, and the *son of perdition*! Oh! what deplorable consequences would follow, if ever again the *mystery of iniquity*, and that *Wicked*, should be revealed in this our land. And yet is there not,

in the present hour, him, whose coming is after *Satan*, in what the Apostle calls, *the deceivableness of unrighteousness!*

Blessed be God for his Church! It is still as the remnant of *Jacob*, in the midst of many people, a dew from the LORD. And God hath from the beginning chosen it. And God to the present hour doth choose it, and so He will to the latest posterity, *to salvation, through sanctification of the SPIRIT, and belief of the truth.* May the LORD be the strength of his people, to help them to stand fast in his name. And may our LORD JESUS CHRIST, and God, even our FATHER, comfort and stablish all his redeemed to the end. Amen.

CHAP. III.

CONTENTS.

The Apostle closeth his Epistle with this Chapter. He takes an affectionate Leave of the Church, begs an Interest in the Prayers of the People, and prays the LORD to bless them.

FINALLY, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have *free* course, and be glorified, even as *it is* with you.

2 And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all *men* have not faith.

3 But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep *you* from evil.

4 And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you.

5 And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.

In folding up this beautiful Epistle, the Apostle makes an earnest, and an affectionate request, to be remembered by the Church at the throne in prayer, together with *Silvanus*, and *Timotheus*, whom he joined with himself in this letter. And I beg the Reader to remark with me, the great burden of his request, namely, that the word of the LORD might be blessed among the LORD's people. *Paul* makes use of the figure of a free course, which like an unobstructed river, runs on, and washes, and makes fruitful every place where the LORD sends it. And, observe, it is God's glory, when his people are made blessed by the free course of his word. Every child of God should remember this. It becomes a great strengthener to faith, when the LORD enables any of his to consider, that when our souls being made blessed in CHRIST, CHRIST is glorified in us. We not only bless him with our hearts, when we give him praise for his mercies, but we glorify him also when our wants give him occasion to fill into our emptiness.

And let the Reader further observe the drift of *Paul's* prayer, that he, and his faithful companions, who preached the truth as it is in Jesus, might be delivered from the opposers of those precious doctrines, *Paul*, and his brethren in the ministry, taught. Not the openly profane, but false teachers. *Paul* could not mean the openly profane, when he said, for all men have not faith. This was too notorious a truth to need the remark. But the all men the Apostle here alluded to, which had not faith, were plainly those who preached unspent. Men who had not *the faith of God's elect*. Titus i. 1. May the LORD deliver all his faithful, both ministers and congregations, from such men, in all ages of his Church!

The Reader will not overlook, I hope, the very blessed prayer *Paul* closed up this paragraph with. He opened the first part of it with calling upon the Church to pray for him and his companions. And here, in the close of it, after assuring the Church of God's faithfulness, to stablish and keep them from evil, he recompenseth their kindness in praying for them. And what a sweet and comprehensive prayer it is? Surely none but God the SPIRIT could have taught it. *And the LORD* (said he) *direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for,* (or, as the margin renders it, the patience of,) CHRIST. Reader! do observe how all the Persons of the GODHEAD are here included in this short, but blessed prayer. The LORD the SPIRIT *direct your hearts*. And where directed? *Into the love of God*. And how is this to be attained? *In a patient waiting on, and through CHRIST*. And short as this direction is, if the Reader be taught of the same GOD who directs the heart to mark the LORD's leadings, he will discover that this is the direct way, and the only way to comfort. The child of God that goes to the throne in any thing of his own, such as his experiences, or his enlargements, as men call them, or the exercises of his own graces, is going a round-about way, and wearying himself for very vanity. Whereas direct acts of faith upon CHRIST's Person, and the pleadings of CHRIST's blood and righteousness, and God's faithful covenant promises in CHRIST; the precious soul that doth so, is truly directed by the LORD the HOLY GHOST, and led by the hand to the mercy-seat of God in CHRIST. Such a soul must speed well, thus led, thus fed, thus taught, and thus enabled to plead. I warrant ye, on the authority of God's yea and Amen-promises, he shall prove a wrestling seed of the stock of *Jacob*, and come off a prevailing descendant of the true *Israel*. To all such, whom I met at any time going to the pardon office of JESUS CHRIST, I would say, oh! remember me when you see the King, for sure I am you will get near to him. Yea, I would beg of God the HOLY GHOST to direct my heart to go with them. And what might not a company of CHRIST's redeemed ones expect, when going together to the Heavenly Court, whose hearts were all directed by the same Almighty LORD, *into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for JESUS CHRIST?*

6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disor-

derly, and not after the tradition which ye received of us.

7 For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you.

8 Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought: but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you:

9 Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.

10 For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.

11 For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busy bodies.

12 Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.

In order for the better apprehension of this part of the Epistle, we must consider CHRIST'S Church as one family. And a family wisely regulated and ordered, must be guided by one uniform plan, for the comfort of the whole body, in temporal things as well as spiritual. It appears from what the Apostle saith here, that there were some which had joined the Church, who had not first joined the LORD. And it is worthy our observation, that notwithstanding the Apostle possessed a divine gift of discerning spirits in matters of moment; yet, even in the Churches under his own direction, some men crept in who had no part in the matter. In the Church of the Romans, we find the Apostle reproving such who served not the LORD JESUS CHRIST, but their own belly. Rom. xvi. 18. see also Philip. iii. 18, 19. There have been such in all professing Churches of the saints in all ages. Nay, Paul himself saith, *there must be also, even heresies among them, that they which are approved may be made manifest among them.* 1 Cor. xi. 19. Reader! do not overlook these things. In the present day the view is highly profitable. It is a great point to make a right distinction between real and nominal Christians, as well as between the professor and the profane. When idle and disorderly persons creep into a Church, and cover themselves over with a name to live, while virtually dead before GOD; we may expect all such consequences will follow, as Paul hath here described. And it is a melancholy consideration when this conduct is found among the humbler walks of life, who follow the ordinances, as

those of old did the Lord himself, *not because they saw the miracles, but because they did eat of the loaves and were filled.* John vi. 26.

But the Apostle, not only speaks in this scripture, of the idle among the poor, but the disorderly also. And, it is more than probable, that these were chiefly among the rich; as riches, and what is called the good things of this life, are more likely to open temptations to indulgence, in things disorderly. It is a sad, sad thing, when wealth, and worldly rank, tempt churches to admit into their community, any whom God hath not admitted. Such men may fill the coffer, but they themselves add nothing to the real number of CHRIST'S Church. How blessedly our great Apostle speaks of his fears on this ground. *I am jealous over you, said he to the Corinthian Church, with a godly jealousy, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to CHRIST.* 2 Cor. xi. 2. It is one thing to entertain suspicious opinions, ungrounded, and ill-formed, of any professor, and another, to be jealous over one another, with a godly jealousy. But if Churches professing the eternal, and unalterable truths of God, were to admit none into Church fellowship, but such as had fellowship with the FATHER, and with his SON JESUS CHRIST there would be no idle among the poor, neither disorderly among the rich. And very blessedly then, would the whole body, *holding the Head and being knit together, increase, with all the increase of God.* Coloss. ii. 19.

13 But ye, brethren, be not weary in well-doing.

14 And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.

15 Yet count *him* not as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother.

16 Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord *be* with you all.

17 The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write.

18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen.

The second *epistle* to the Thessalonians was written from Athens.

The Apostle, having pointed out the errors, and infirmities, which creep into the Church, closeth his Epistle with his usual kindness, in recommending tenderness, and affection, one towards another, among the people. I admire *Paul's* charge, that brethren should not *be weary in well doing.* By which, if I apprehend him right, he doth not refer to acts of grace, and faith, in the exercises of their high calling, towards God; for that is always understood: but rather, after

what he had been speaking, of the idle and disorderly, not to be discouraged, if any acts of kindness the Church had shewn such persons, were abused, and unthankfully treated. It is a melancholy thing, to be sure, to behold at any time, the bounties of gracious souls, misapplied by the ungracious. But, it is much more to be deplored, that such misapplications, should ever operate, to check the liberal hand, and heart, and make them follow the reverse of *Paul's* precept; *and be weary in well doing*. Not so the LORD. And not so his command. *That ye may be* (said that unequalled Example, of requiting blessing for cursing,) *the children of your FATHER which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil, and on the good; and sendeth rain on the just, and on the unjust.* Matthew v. 45.

I do not think it necessary, to swell the pages of this *Poor Man's Commentary*, with any further observations, on the close of the Apostle's Epistle. His method is, for the most part, the same in all his writings. They are full of zeal to the LORD's cause, and love to 'his Church; and very plainly read to us, the heart of the Apostle. Let us rather join in the benediction, for it is truly blessed; and say to the whole Church, as he did: *the grace of our LORD JESUS CHRIST be with you all. Amen.*

REFLECTIONS.

BLESSED be the LORD JEHOVAH in his threefold character of Persons, for all the mercies, grace, and love, manifested to the Church of GOD, in JESUS CHRIST. And blessed be the LORD the SPIRIT, for this precious portion of his holy word, from the ministry of his servant the Apostle. Add to it, LORD, the blessing of making it life, and spirit, to the souls of all thy redeemed: and do thou, blessed GOD, for it is thine own sweet office-work alone to accomplish it, *direct our hearts into the love of GOD, and into the patient waiting for CHRIST.*

And, oh! thou Almighty Minister, under whose government the entire welfare, and prosperity of the Church depends; do thou watch over all the congregations of the faithful, that idleness, and disorderly conduct, may find no shelter; neither the poor of thy people be neglected, in the daily ministration. LORD, the work is thine, and thine alone the glory. Make thy ministers faithful: and let the Church be blessed. Farewell Paul! the Church of the *Thessalonians* have praised GOD for thy labors of love: and all the Churches, to whom thy writings have been sent by the HOLY GHOST, have blessed, and do bless GOD, for calling thee to the ministry. But oh! thou glorious Head, and praise of all thy saints, be thou eternally loved, and adored, for all the *Pauls*, and the Pastors, of thy Church! All is thine, Almighty JESUS! And for all we praise thee! Amen.