
A
COMMENTARY
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT.
THE
ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

AT this book of GOD, we enter upon a very interesting part of the divine records, in what relates to the Church of CHRIST, from, and after our LORD's ascension. The history of the Church from this period becomes highly important, in that it presents us with the account of the first open manifestation of GOD the HOLY GHOST, in his Almighty Ministry, agreeably to the promise of CHRIST, before his departure; and thereby becomes a confirmation of the whole. Here it is proved, that GOD the HOLY GHOST is the Founder, and Builder, of the Church, from the beginning. He had framed, and ordained the whole, in all the departments of it. But now, redemption-work being finished, by the Almighty Author of salvation, the LORD the SPIRIT is here mercifully pleased to reveal himself more openly, in the Almighty Ministry, which belonged to Him in his Covenant-office character.

The Acts of the Apostles, so called, because it contains the records of those holy servants of the LORD, takes up the subject from whence the Gospels had left off, at the ascension of the LORD JESUS; and carries on the blessed history of the Church, through a period of about *thirty years*, until the imprisonment of the Apostle *Paul*.

In respect to the Writer of it, there can be no question. *Luke* is allowed by every one to have been the inspired Penman of it. The preface with which he begins it, and his directing it to the same person, to whom he sent the Gospel which bears his name; are evident proofs. And the Church

hath abundant reason to bless GOD the HOLY GHOST, who is the Author and Giver of all Scripture, for the ministry of this man, on both those occasions.

I do not think it necessary to add any thing more by way of preface. I only very earnestly request the Reader, to enter upon the perusal of this sacred book of GOD, with prayer; because this will furnish a well-grounded hope, that the close of it will be in praise. Blessed Author of the whole Scripture of inspiration! (I would say both for myself and Reader,) vouchsafe thy gracious teachings! Open to us both, if it be thine holy will, the precious pages here contained. And, LORD! do thou open our hearts to the right apprehension of all the great truths of GOD, contained in them. Oh! for an ear to hear, *what the SPIRIT saith unto the Churches!* Amen.

CHAPTER I.

CONTENTS.

This blessed Record of Divine Truth, opens with the History of CHRIST's Ascension. Peter's Address to the Apostles. The Election of Matthias to be of the twelve, in the Room of the Traitor Judas.

THE former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

2 Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen :

The principal point which arrests my attention, in the opening of this Chapter, is, what the sacred writer hath here said, of the LORD JESUS having given his commandments to his Apostles, *through the HOLY GHOST*. The Reader will recollect, that the history of the Church, at the Ascension of CHRIST, opens in a more immediate manner, with the ministry of GOD the HOLY GHOST. The commandments of the LORD JESUS therefore were, to direct their minds to the expectation of the LORD the SPIRIT, in his coming. Some more visible, more open display of His Almighty presence and power, they were taught to look for. And not a foot were they to go out of *Jerusalem*, until this had been accomplished. Luke xxiv. 49. I would pray the Reader, therefore, to open this Chapter with the expectation of these momentous things. I would entreat him to be on the look out, at every step he takes. The subject connected with the ministry of GOD the HOLY GHOST, in his Person, GODHEAD, and Covenant offices, can never be too thoroughly understood, neither too closely regarded. May the LORD the SPIRIT be our Teacher!

3 To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:

4 And, being assembled together with *them*, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, *saith he*, ye have heard of me.

5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

It is well worthy our highest attention, that though we are told, the LORD JESUS remained forty days on earth, after his resurrection, yet he did not mingle with his disciples as before, in their daily intercourse. He was seen of them for forty days together: that is, from the first to the last. The morning of his resurrection was the first. And this, which was by appointment, was the last, being the *fortieth day* from his resurrection included. But though he manifested himself to them at times, both when they looked for him, and when they did not; yet the word of GOD gives no authority to conclude, that he was always with them: but rather on the contrary. He gave infallible proofs of his being alive; and of his being the same identical person as before his death; by eating and drinking with them, after he arose from the dead. Luke xxiv. 39—43. And beside the relation, which is given by the Evangelists, of the many separate and distinct appearances, which the LORD made of himself, upon various occasions, after his resurrection, *Paul* mentions, of five hundred brethren at one time, who saw him. 1 Cor. xv. 6. So that, as this scripture asserts, *he shewed himself to them alive, after his passion by many infallible proofs*: and not the shadow of a doubt could remain, of the reality of the fact itself. Yet still it is worthy our observation, that JESUS did not mingle with them as heretofore. The same unbounded love, the LORD shewed them; and every act testified, that there was no change in his nature, nor in his regard to them: but there was a difference in his state. And might not this be intended, (I simply ask the question, and not decide,) to intimate to them, that when his people are quickened, from the death of sin, an holy solemnity should follow, suited to a risen state!

What more immediate subjects those were, which the LORD discoursed upon, between the interval of his resurrection and ascension, is not said, further, than that *they pertained to the kingdom of God*. But as the coming of GOD the HOLY GHOST was at hand, and his office would be, to lead them into all truth, it is reasonable to conclude, that JESUS connected what he had told them before, concerning the Person, work, and grace of the HOLY GHOST, with speaking of him now. And, as the whole efficient part of the Covenant, was to be, in a more eminent manner, distinguished by his ministry, no doubt, this formed a principal subject, in the LORD's discourses.

I beg the Reader, before he goes further, to observe the vast line of distinction, which the LORD JESUS draws, between the water baptism of *John*, and the spiritual baptism of God the HOLY GHOST. Without entering into all the particulars included in this out-pouring of the SPIRIT, expressed under the term baptism: (indeed who is competent to describe, either the nature, or extent of the LORD the SPIRIT's operations:) we may justly conclude, that it was intended more or less, to imply, all the special offices of the HOLY GHOST. And perhaps, in a yet more personal manner, the ordination of the Apostles to their ministry. But yet, not to the exclusion of the whole Church, in all other matters, of which the Apostles were the representatives.

The HOLY GHOST is the Founder and Architect of the Church. His it is, to arrange and order, to preside over, and govern, the whole building. And as He has founded the Church on CHRIST, so is it his to raise up the several departments from CHRIST, and form all the stones of the temple as living stones in CHRIST; for *an habitation of God through the SPIRIT*. 1 Pet. ii. 5. Ephes. ii. 22. Indeed from the beginning of the revelation of God, this had been his special work, according to the ancient settlements of the Covenant. The HOLY GHOST from everlasting, was the Almighty minister, in the Church. And every ordinance and means of grace, were as much his appointment under the Old Testament, as under the New. This we learn from a single verse, most plainly and decidedly, (if there were no other,) in the Epistle to the *Hebrews*. For when *Paul* had related the particulars of furniture in the Jewish tabernacle, and the uses of the whole; he refers the appointment and design, unto the sovereign will and pleasure of God the SPIRIT: *the HOLY GHOST this signifying*, said *Paul*. Hereby ascribing to Him personal being and agency, sovereignty and almighty power; and declaring his own eternal GODHEAD by expressly saying, that the priests, when daily performing those acts of worship, were *accomplishing the service of God*. I pray the Reader to read the whole passage. Heb. ix. 1—8.

We shall have, in some measure, a right apprehension of faith, in relation to the Person, GODHEAD, and Office-characters, of God the HOLY GHOST, in these Covenant transactions, by having these things in view; if so be, the LORD himself, (of whom we presume to speak,) condescends to enlighten our understanding. As God the HOLY GHOST founded the Church, so it was his office, and he did it, to anoint, both the Head of the Church, and all the members of his mystical body. John iii. 34. Ephes. iv. 7. Psm. xlv. 7. His office it hath been from the beginning, to give to the Church all her Prophets. For the Prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the HOLY GHOST. 2 Pet. i. 21. His it was, to ordain all the ministers, as well under the Old Testament as the New. The Prophet *Isaiah* saw CHRIST's glory, when he heard the voice saying, *whom shall I send, and who will go for us*. And that this was God the HOLY GHOST which spake, is evident, by what followed, and *Paul's* explanation, in direct reference to Him. And He said: Go, and tell this people, &c. Well spake the HOLY GHOST (said *Paul*, when he quoted the passage from the Prophet's writings,) by *Isaiah the Prophet unto our fathers, saying: go unto this people, &c*. Compare *Isaiah* vi. 8, 9, 10. with

John xii. 39, 40, 41. and Acts xxviii. 25, 26, 27. And as the ordination to the ministry was the office of God the HOLY GHOST, before the coming of CHRIST, under the Old Testament; so we find him ordaining his ministers, and to his service, under the New. *As they ministered to the LORD and fasted, the HOLY GHOST said: Separate me Barnabas and Saul, for the work whereunto I have called them.* Acts xiii. 2. See the Commentary there. In short, it is the LORD the SPIRIT's work, to *send out* and to *restrain*. Acts xiii. 4. with Acts xvi. 6, to teach *in* the word, and *by* the word. 1 Cor. ii. 13. with 2 Thess. i. 5, to *accompany* the word from heaven: 1 Pet. i. 11, 12. and to *light upon the hearts of the people*, while the word is preaching upon earth. Acts x. 44. And in every instance of success *Paul* saith it ariseth not from *the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in the demonstration of the SPIRIT, and of power.* 1 Cor. ii. 4.

6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

This meeting, which was by the LORD's appointment, (see Matt. xxviii. 16.) and which it should seem, was not the same as that spoken of (verse 5); was the last farewell between JESUS and his Apostles, before his ascension. Every thing in it, became interesting. The question which the Apostles put to CHRIST, plainly shews, that their minds, notwithstanding our LORD's death, and resurrection, were still warped, with the same Jewish ideas, of an earthly kingdom. And I beg the Reader to notice this, the rather because it serves to confirm the blessed truth, that it is the office work of God the HOLY GHOST, *to guide into all truth.* John xvi. 13. Hence the LORD JESUS waved the question, by directing their minds to the expectation of the SPIRIT's coming, which he had just before said, would be not many days hence. And what a blessed promise the LORD JESUS closed up the whole conversation with, when he finished his parting discourse; in the assurance, of what should be the immediate result of the HOLY GHOST's coming: *Ye shall be witnesses unto me!* Reader! though this gracious promise of CHRIST had a special respect to the LORD's Apostles, as the ministers of his word, when God the SPIRIT had ordained them to the work: yet do not overlook the part, which all his people take in the same thing, when they have received also the gifts of the HOLY GHOST. Every regenerated child of GOD, is a witness for GOD; not only to his Being as GOD, but to his being a GOD in CHRIST: and to

all his Covenant offices, as they relate to the Church of God, in all ages. You and I are CHRIST's witnesses, if so be the LORD the SPIRIT hath regenerated us from the Adam-nature of a fallen state, and brought us from darkness to light, and from the power of sin and Satan, to the living GOD. We then can, and do, witness to the whole mission of CHRIST: and have the witness in ourselves, that CHRIST hath finished redemption-work, and is returned to glory; because, GOD the HOLY GHOST is come down, and we know it agreeably to our LORD's most sure promise, before his ascension. Titus iii. 3—7. John xvi. 7.

9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

10 And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

Reader! conceive with what astonishment the disciples beheld the ascension of CHRIST! What must have been their feelings! What their holy joy! How gracious was it in the LORD, not only to them, but for the sake of the whole Church, to send those two angels in human form, to explain to the wondering Apostles, what they saw? Their minds no doubt, were absorbed in contemplating the glorious sight, which so beautifully corresponded to the predictions of prophecy, concerning it. See Psalms xxiv. and xlvii. and lxviii. and probably some of them might recollect, what Jesus had said to *Nathanael*: John i. 51. and to the murmuring Jews: John vi. 62. But be this as it might, the angels called off their attention, from attending to the mere splendour of the sight, to the blissful consequences of their LORD's ascension. And oh! how sweet the scripture which follows: *This same Jesus which is taken up from you into Heaven, shall so come, in like manner, as ye have seen him go into Heaven.* Reader! ponder well these words. Your GOD, your SAVIOR, in the same identity of Person; divine, and human, as he left the earth: so now remains, and so again will return, when his feet shall stand again on the very same mount from whence he went up. See Zech. xiv. 4. Acts iii. 21. 2 Thess. i. 10. And in the mean time, for the full scope of faith, in every need and want, we should never, no, not for a moment, forget, that the SON of GOD in our nature, is now in heaven, and there exercising his office, *of an unchangeable priesthood.* Heb. vii. 24. So that his mercies towards his people, are the mercies of both natures; and are manifested in this double way, and through such a medium as could not have been shewn had he

been God only. His mercies are indeed infinite, because he is God : and his human nature in communicating them to us, renders them endless and unceasing from that Almighty power. But at the same time, they are all in One of our own nature, and they flow to us in, and through this nature, with a sweetness to endear them to our hearts. And hence the Apostle's direction to go to him. Heb. iv. 14, 15, 16. Reader ! do you not believe this glorious article of our most holy faith ? Do you not know, that our *Emmanuel*, God with us, God in our nature, is now in heaven ? And do you not, if so, bring that belief into daily, hourly use ? Are you not often at the heavenly court ? And are you not, like the Apostles, looking for, and hastening unto, the coming of the great day of his return ? 2 Peter iii. 12—14. Philip. iii. 20, 21.

12 Then returned they unto Jerusalem, from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey.

13 And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James, *the son of Alpheus*, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas, *the brother of James*.

14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.

It is better to be conceived than expressed, what were the feelings of the Apostles, when hastening back to *Jerusalem*, from the mount, after they had lost sight of *JESUS*, and the angels had called off their attention to the consideration of what was to follow. But I pray the Reader, not to overlook what is said, of their continuing in prayer. No doubt, the Lord inclined their hearts, to be in this waiting, praying frame, for the mercy they were now so earnestly expecting, of the baptism of the HOLY GHOST. It is always a sure sign, of some coming blessing, whensoever the LORD sets his people a praying for it. Prayer brings the promise, and the God of the promise together. And when any of the praying seed of *Jacob* can follow up *Jacob's* importunity, of wrestling with God, with an earnestness like him ; very sure it is, that all the family soon find, as those Apostles did, a promising God is a performing God.

15 ¶ And in those days, Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of the names together were about an hundred and twenty,)

16 Men *and* brethren, this scripture must needs

have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.

17 For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of his ministry.

18 Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.

19 And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood.

20 For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take.

21 Wherefore of these men which have accompanied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

22 Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

The day here spoken of, means one of the ten days in the interval from the Lord's ascension, to the descent of the HOLY GHOST. I beg the Reader to notice, what *Peter* saith of the HOLY GHOST's speaking by *David*. A plain proof, in confirmation of what hath been before remarked in this Chapter, both of the Person, and GODHEAD, and Ministry, of the Almighty SPIRIT, in the Old Testament dispensation. God the HOLY GHOST was now going to make a more sensible, and open manifestation of himself, as God the FATHER, and God the SON, had done, in their office characters, as the next Chapter shews; but He had, it is plain, as the Founder of the Church, all along been presiding over the Church, and directing all the affairs of it. 2 Pet. i. 21. And I beg the Reader also to remark with me, what *Peter* saith of the *needs be* there was, for the fulfilling of that scripture, concerning *Judas*. Yes! The decrees and appointments of JEHOVAH are sure and certain. But the infamy of the traitor is not lessened, by the sovereign ordinations of the LORD. In all foul transactions, the sin is the same; though the LORD overrules it to the divine glory. Acts ii. 23, 24. Jude 4. And I pray the Reader also to notice, what *Peter* saith of *Judas* having been chosen into the

number of the twelve Apostles, and having obtained part of the ministry. In addition to what hath been already observed, respecting the appointment of *Judas* to the Apostleship, and the obtaining part of the ministry, I would just say further, that it is in my view the mercy of the Church, to have these things always in remembrance. The part of the ministry *Judas* obtained, and the *being numbered* with the Apostles, had not a single act of grace in the whole. He had no part in CHRIST, we are very sure. Neither was he ever *numbered* in the book of life. And he therefore stands forth, an everlasting monument in the Church of the LORD JESUS; never to judge of men by outward things, nor outward privileges. The only well grounded cause for joy, is when our names are found to be *written in the book of life*. Luke x. 19, 20.

I hope the Reader will also pay suitable attention, to what *Peter* hath said, of the prophetic Psalm, concerning *Judas*; and which, on his account, is strikingly called the *Iscairiot* Psalm. What, but a spirit of prophecy could have spoken so pointedly to the person, and crimes, of the traitor? The desolate habitation, or palace, is also mentioned in the lxxixth Psalm, 25th verse. It is remarkable, that there should be exactly *thirty* specific curses in the sixth Psalm, as if corresponding to the *thirty* pieces of silver, for which the traitor sold his master. But what is most to be attended to, in the Psalm, and the Apostle's application of it, is, that *Peter* drew his conclusion from it, that it was the will of the HOLY GHOST, another should take his office. His days in the office were indeed few, and soon it became another's. Psm. cix. 8.

In relation to what is said, of *Judas* purchasing a field with the reward of iniquity, and falling headlong until his bowels gushed out: these things are not contrary to what is said of his hanging himself. Matt. xxvii. 3—5. For it was his ill-gotten money, with which the field was afterwards bought. And it is possible, that he might have fallen from the place to which he had hung himself, after he was dead, and perhaps hung long there, and such a consequence might have followed. But what an awful end! And what an awful character!

23 And they appointed two, Joseph, called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

24 And they prayed, and said, 'Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen,

25 That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which *Judas* by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.

26 And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

The casting lots with an eye to the LORD, was agreeable to Scripture. Prov. xvi. 33. And the Scape Goat was chosen in the same manner. Levit. xvi. 8. But let not the Reader overlook what is said, of his going to *his own place*. For whether this refers to *Matthias* or to *Judas*, the doctrine is the same. Every man hath *his own place*. Hence, the Psalmist, describing the assembly of the wicked in hell, and the succession of characters for that place, saith: *he shall follow the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light*. Psm. xlix. 19. And where is that? *Like sheep*, (saith he,) *they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them*. The old translation hath it: *they lie in the hell like sheep*. For the double death, is first in the grave, and secondly in hell. And hence *David* takes comfort, that God had *redeemed his soul from the power of hell*: for saith he, *he shall receive me*. Hence every man, both in life, and death, goeth to *his own place*. Reader! ponder well the striking subject! Oh! the vast difference, between the *precious*, and the *vile*: between him that *serveth* God, and him that *serveth* him not.

REFLECTIONS.

PAUSE, Reader! on the very entrance at this sacred book of God, and mark well the blessed evidences here afforded, of that most precious article of our faith, and hope; in the LORD's return to glory. JESUS! we hail thee, as our risen, and ascended SAVIOR! Thou art indeed *gone up on high*: *thou hast led captivity captive, thou hast received gifts for men*: yea, LORD, in the manhood of thy nature, thou hast all grace for men, *even for thy rebellious children, that the LORD GOD might dwell among them*. Send down, O LORD, the choice effusions of thy HOLY SPIRIT; and remember LORD thy promise, in which thou didst say: *I will not leave you comfortless, I will come unto you*. Even so. Amen.

Reader! let it be our daily exercise of faith, to make this article, of our LORD's ascension, the constant subject of holy joy. There, would I say, as often as I consider the ascension of JESUS, there dwells the LORD CHRIST, in my nature, having accomplished redemption by his blood. The heavens must receive my God and SAVIOR, until the times of the restitution of all things. And he is gone before, to take possession of the kingdom in his Church's name, that *where he is there they may be also*. Moreover, by my LORD's ascension, the justification of his whole redeemed, is confirmed. *Here*, he offered his soul an offering for sin: and *there*, he presented it perfect before JEHOVAH. His sacrifice he made upon earth, as our Great High Priest: and in heaven, he still ministers, going in before the presence of God with his own blood. And by virtue of the everlasting efficacy of that blood, all heaven is perfumed; and the redeemed are sanctified. Hail! thou glorious, and ascended SAVIOR! Send down LORD all thine ascension-gifts upon thy people!

CHAP. II.

CONTENTS.

GOD the HOLY GHOST visits the Apostles in a wonderful and miraculous Manner. The Apostles, being filled with the SPIRIT, speak divers Languages. The Astonishment of the Multitude. Peter's Sermon; and the Conversion of three thousand Souls.

AND when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

The day of Pentecost was fifty days from the Passover. It was the *second* of those three great festivals in the Jewish Church, when all the males of Israel were enjoined to appear before the LORD. Deut. xvi. 16. This was the feast, which was to be observed before the people began their harvest; it being unlawful to enter upon their harvest, until this feast to the LORD, had been observed. See Levit. xxiii. 10, 11. This was the sacred day, which GOD the HOLY GHOST was pleased to appoint, for the more open manifestation of himself, to the Church. And, as GOD the SON, in our nature, made the voluntary offer of himself in sacrifice, at the Jewish Passover; the *first* great feast among his people, being our Passover, and the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world: I Cor. v. 7. Rev. xiii. 8. So GOD the HOLY GHOST, consecrated this *second* feast to the gracious purpose, of assuming, in a more open manner, his Almighty ministry in his Church, by coming down in state, in a visible manifestation, on his Apostles: and from that hour to the present, and through all ages of the Church, to the consummation of all things, the LORD the SPIRIT, carries on all the efficiency of grace, in the hearts of the people, until grace is finished in glory. In this ever memorable and blessed day, the Apostles, (and it is probable the *seventy*, spoken of, Luke x. i. or perhaps the whole hundred and twenty, spoken of chap. i. 15. formed the compleat assembly,) were all with one accord met together, waiting in expectation, the sure promise of JESUS. Chap. i. 5. Reader! pause, and contemplate, the sacred hour; and the holy solemnity of such a congregation! Oh! that the LORD would cause the review of such a season, and such an assembly, to operate upon the minds of the LORD's people now, that wherever two or three are met together, in the LORD's name, they might wait, in the humble frame, of sure expectation, of the LORD's presence. Matt. xviii. 20. Isaiah xli. 1.

2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

As this open display of GOD the HOLY GHOST in the Church, after the ascension of JESUS, is among the most momentous doctrines of our holy faith, and the proper apprehension of it, is, of all others, the

most interesting, I persuade myself that the Reader will grant me a more than usual indulgence, to dwell upon it particularly. And I am free to confess, that, according to my view of things, it is to our ignorance and inattention on this blessed part of the Gospel, is to be ascribed the lamentable state of Churches, (and even some Churches professing all the truths of our holy faith,) so confessedly destitute, as for the most part they are, of vital godliness. For surely, if God the HOLY GHOST, in his Almighty ministry, be not known nor enjoyed, if his Person and GODHEAD, if his covenant-office work and character, his influences and graces, be kept in the back ground of the ordinances, be those ordinances ever so sweet in themselves, or ever so frequently observed by the people, there must be great leanness of soul amidst the whole of them. It matters not what the minister saith, if we hear not what *the SPIRIT saith to the Churches*. Rev. ii. 11, 17, 29, &c.

The first thing I beg the Reader to observe with me in what is said in those verses, is, the manner which God the HOLY GHOST was pleased to make use of, to manifest his Almighty presence. It was with sovereign strength, and by effects making known both his person, and eternal power, and GODHEAD. And, surely, if any thing could be supposed to identify both person and power, this display of Himself, by a sound from heaven, a rushing mighty wind, and filling the whole space occupied by the disciples, these were full demonstrations of both.

And here I stop the Reader, to remark the glory by which God the HOLY GHOST was pleased to manifest himself to the Church, for the first time after CHRIST's ascension. He had presided over the Church from the first moment he formed the Church, and numberless instances are on record of his Almighty agency, both on the Person of CHRIST, the great Head of his Church, and the Church, CHRIST's members, all along the way the Church was brought through the whole of the Old Testament dispensation. Hence CHRIST was called by that name before his incarnation, and the LORD JESUS, by the spirit of prophecy, so described himself ages before he was born. Isaiah lxi. 1, &c. And as the LORD the SPIRIT anointed the head, so did he shed abroad his influences in the hearts of his members. See Numb. xi. 16, 17. Nehem. ix. 20. Ezek. ii. 2, &c. But now the LORD the SPIRIT will make an open manifestation of himself, and enter with state and dignity upon his blessed office, as LORD of CHRIST's Church, now JESUS, having finished redemption-work, is returned to glory. So that the whole efficiency of salvation, in the heart of every individual member of CHRIST's mystical body, becomes his province, according to covenant-engagements. Reader! I pray you to ponder well the subject, for it is well worthy the most animated consideration of the LORD's people. Let you and I both look up for the testimonies in our own hearts of His divine teaching, for every view of His Almighty agency in the Church of whom I am now speaking is blessed.

When the Reader hath duly considered these things, I would beg of him next to observe what a beautiful order and harmony there is shewn in the joint acts of the HOLY THREE in ONE, as relating to the Church, now fulfilled by this manifestation of God the SPIRIT at the day of Pentecost. God the FATHER, in his covenant-office and character, through the Old Testament dispensation, had all along been

manifesting his everlasting love to the Church, in proclaiming the Person, Work, and Glory of his dear SON; and under the New Testament dispensation, when CHRIST appeared, he confirmed the same by a voice from heaven, in a public and audible manner, in the presence of the people, declaring the identity of JESUS, by saying, *this is my beloved SON, in whom I am well pleased.* Matt. iii. 17. Luke ix. 35. John xii. 28. God the SON, before his openly tabernacling in substance of our flesh, is expressly said to have *been in the Church in the wilderness, when he spake to Moses in the Mount Sinai with our fathers*, for so Stephen, when filled with the HOLY GHOST, and speaking therefore under the influence of his divine teaching, declared, Acts vii. 37, 38, and which, by the way, it may be observed, throws a light on many other parts of the Old Testament Scripture, in proof that it was CHRIST who all along manifested himself as the *Shechinah* to the Church. So that when *the fulness of time was come*, and the SON of God was to make his open appearance in our nature, he came as God *manifest in the flesh*, entered upon, and finished his office-work of redemption, and returned to glory. See Gen. xii. 7. Gen. xxxii. 24, &c. Exod. xxiv. 9 to the end. And God the HOLY GHOST, though he had all along presided over the Church, (which he himself founded,) during the whole of the Old Testament dispensation, yet now comes at the day of Pentecost in an open manifestation of himself, in his Person, GODHEAD, and Ministry, and makes himself known as the Almighty Teacher in the Church, to render the whole effectual of salvation-work in the hearts of his people. See 1 Pet. i. 10, 11. 2 Pet. i. 21. Heb. ix. 1—8. And wherefore all these glorious manifestations of each divine person, and all but to testify to the Church that the whole GODHEAD is alike concerned, and alike entitled to the adoration, love, obedience, and praise of the whole Church of JESUS, for their joint favor to the Church before all worlds, in her present time-state on earth, and her everlasting happiness to all eternity.

I do not think it necessary in a work of this kind to enter into a critical enquiry concerning the appearances here made by the HOLY GHOST. It will be sufficient to remark that the whole plainly proved the LORD the SPIRIT's personal presence, his Almighty power and ministry in his government over the Church. The *suddenness* of it implied how unexpected the manifestations of his grace are in all instances. The direction coming *from heaven*, proved that the blessed SPIRIT is from above, agreeably to Scripture. James i. 17. The *sound*, as of a *rushing mighty wind*, was in exact conformity to what the LORD JESUS had before said, when speaking of the work of God the HOLY GHOST, whose operations are like the unknown and unexplored source of the air, *which bloweth where it listeth.* John iii. 8. See Commentary there. The appearances of *cloven tongues, like as of fire*, were suitable to denote his presence, who is a *Spirit of judgment, and a Spirit of burning.* Isaiah iv. 4. And their *sitting upon the head of each of them*, graciously taught, that where the LORD the SPIRIT came, he would abide for ever. So the LORD JESUS taught his disciples to expect, and, blessed be God, so his people know. John xiv. 16, 17. But what I would yet more particularly beg the Reader to notice, from all these different manifestations, is, that they all proved the Person, GODHEAD, and Ministry of the HOLY GHOST. And I beg of him to observe, that this manifestation at Pentecost was as

fully and decidedly in proof of GOD the HOLY GHOST's office-work in the covenant, (as far as an open appearance became necessary,) as the personal appearance of the SON of GOD manifest in the flesh, was for his part in this mysterious work. The one is as demonstrative as the other. Reader! do not hastily pass away from meditating on these things. Carry them about with you wherever you go, as so many credentials of your faith, in the present awful day of infidelity with which the Church of God is surrounded.

4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

I beg the Reader, while attending to what is here said of the disciples being filled with the HOLY GHOST, to observe, that it doth not mean to imply they had not been in a state of regeneration before. Very evident it is, that the Apostles to whom JESUS addressed himself in his farewell Sermon, were at that time acquainted with the gracious influences of the SPIRIT, and consequently regenerated. If the Reader will consult what the LORD then said respecting the HOLY GHOST, in their *knowledge of Him*, and of his *dwelling with them*, and being *in them*, he will perceive that these things implied a state of grace different from the world. John xiv. 16, 17. But the being filled with the HOLY GHOST, as is here spoken of, meant (what the LORD JESUS had taught them to expect, and to wait for at *Jerusalem*,) their ordination to the ministry. This was the blessed work wrought at *Pentecost*. And now, ordained by GOD the HOLY GHOST, their mouths were opened to declare among the people *the unsearchable riches of CHRIST*. If the Reader would wish to see similar instances of this holy ordination, he may behold them in the case of several of the LORD's servants. Isa. vi. 7—10. Jer. i. throughout. Ezek. iii. Acts xiii. 2—4. See the Commentary on this last scripture.

I take occasion from hence to observe the difference between regeneration, which is essential to every child of GOD for his personal enjoyment of an union and interest with CHRIST, and the unction of the HOLY GHOST, when calling his sent servants to the ministry. For, though the LORD calls none to the ministry but whom he hath first called by grace, as is evident in the instance of the Apostles, yet multitudes are savingly called by regeneration for their own personal happiness in CHRIST, whom GOD the HOLY GHOST never sends forth as his ministers. A man being regenerated is no authority for ministering in the word and doctrine. And to run unsent, is a solemn thing. Jer. xxiii. 20. Heb. v. 4.

5 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.

6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language,

7 And they were all amazed, and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans?

8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

9 Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia,

10 Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,

11 Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

It is well worthy the observation of the Reader, how the LORD, by the ordinary method of his providence, overruled this event, that it should take place at this particular season, to render it more public to the world. As the death and resurrection of CHRIST took place at the *first* great Jewish feast, the Passover, so the first coming of the HOLY GHOST, in this signal and open display of divine power, should take place at the *second* great feast of *Pentecost*. Hence both were so admirably timed, that multitudes from all parts, which came up for the sake of trade, at those Jewish feasts at *Jerusalem*, should be eye and ear witnesses to the LORD's glory. Reader! think of these things, and learn to reverence and adore the LORD, both in the appointments of his providences, as well as in the manifestations of his grace.

The consternation occasioned in *Jerusalem* by these prodigies, may be better conceived than described. Let the Reader figure to himself those poor humble fishermen of Galilee, the natives of a little despised city, whose inhabitants were dull and unlearned, even to a proverb, (John i. 46.) let him fancy that he beholds one Apostle speaking to a *Parthian*, another to a *Mede*, another to an *Elamite*, without the help of an interpreter, as had always been done before; and let him call to mind that the Apostles addresses were not of earthly things, but of the wonderful works of God, and then let him pause and ponder over the Almighty ministry of GOD the SPIRIT! Here were no less than *fifteen* different nations of the earth brought together on this occasion, and all of them distinguished by a different language. And to these different nations those poor, humble, untaught fishermen of *Galilee*, were at once qualified to talk on the great things of God in their own mother tongue in which they were born with the greatest fluency of language! What will the Reader say to these things? What less could it be than the power of God, and the wisdom of God, speaking in them and by them to the blessed purposes of salvation? JESUS had said that his disciples should speak with new tongues. And here we see the LORD's promise fulfilled. Mark xvi. 17. And, Reader! shall not you and I depend upon the promises of JESUS?

I beg to call the Reader's attention to one beauty as discoverable

in this miracle, which perhaps in the first view may not so immediately strike him; I mean the wonderful circumstance with which GOD the HOLY GHOST here begun his ministry, in restoring to his servants, the Apostles, the use of tongues, which was made confusion in the first instance at the building of *Babel*. In the early world, when the sin of men taught rebellion against God, the LORD confounded their language. Before this, *the whole earth was of one language, and one speech*. Gen. xi. 1—9. And it was God's own language. It was sacred. It was divine. And no doubt it was a blessing to mankind. For it not only promoted a general intercourse and good will between man and man, but being the sacred language, it tended to preserve the knowledge of the LORD throughout the earth. But, when for sin man lost this privilege, what difficulties for apprehension must have occurred? But, who should have thought, that in the designs and stores of omnipotency, the LORD would have made this sin of man the very foundation of bringing forth greater mercy, and have made that which sprung out of evil to become the very means of greater good? And yet so it was. This miracle of enabling the Apostles to speak various languages in a moment of time, would never have had an opportunity for display, had not the tower of *Babel*, and the confusion of tongues taken place. So that here, as in a thousand instances beside, the LORD overrules the unworthiness of his creatures to his glory, and renders their weakness the means of manifesting his strength. *Oh! the depths of the riches both of the wisdom, and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out.* Romans xi. 33.

12 And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?

13 Others mocking, said, These men are full of new wine.

I detain the Reader over these two verses, just to call his attention to the very different effects here described, which were wrought upon the minds of the different characters beholding this miracle. Pause, Reader, at the view. What but divine teaching could have made this difference? Here is *one* set of men struck with awe at the wonderful works of God. And here is *another* attempting to turn the solemn work of God the SPIRIT into ridicule. *One* praising God; and *another* blaspheming. And yet the work is the same. And is it not so now? Do not some mock, while others pray? Some laugh, while others mourn? Doth not the same Gospel, the same preacher, produce these different effects? Reader! do you not know it? Have you never seen it? 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16. And, Reader! depend upon it, such is, and must be the case for ever. If the devils in hell were liberated from their chains, devils they would still be. Nothing short of Almighty grace could make a change. If the Reader would see an awful representation of this, let him read what is said under the fourth and fifth vials poured out upon the seat of the beast. Rev. xvi. 8—11.

14 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea, and ~~all~~ *ye* that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words :

15 For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is *but* the third hour of the day.

16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel ;

17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh ; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams :

18 And on my servants, and on my hand-maidens, I will pour out in those days of my Spirit ; and they shall prophesy :

19 And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath ; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke :

20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come :

21 And it shall come to pass, *that* whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

22 Ye men of Israel, hear these words ; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God, among you, by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know :

23 Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain :

24 Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

25 For David speaketh concerning him, I fore-

saw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved ;

26 Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad ; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope :

27 Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

28 Thou hast made known to me the ways of life ; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.

29 Men *and* brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.

30 Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne ;

31 He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.

32 This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses.

33 Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

34 For David is not ascended into the heavens : but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,

35 Until I make thy foes thy footstool.

36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

There must have been somewhat very striking, when *Peter* and the eleven all arose at once, as if (and which indeed was the case,) all animated by a supernatural power, to refute the foul calumny of drunken-

ness. And I beg the Reader to remark with me, how mildly the Apostle expostulated with their accusers, appealing to their own principles of religion, in proof of the falseness of what they had said, seeing it was now but the *third* hour of the day, namely, nine of the clock in the morning, the well-known hour of the morning sacrifice; before which, and especially on the Sabbath, which this was, it became unlawful for any of the seed of *Abraham* to indulge in bodily refreshment. Compare Numb. xxviii. 1—10. with Exod. xii. 16. Reader! so will every preacher, yea, every child of God, mildly reason with opposers, when under the blessed influences of God the HOLY GHOST. 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25.

I am constrained by the limits I must observe, from entering very largely into a Commentary upon this sweet Sermon of the Apostles. For the text which *Peter* took from the prophecy of *Joel*, I refer to some few observations I have already offered in my *Poor Man's Commentary* on the place. And in addition to what is there proposed, I would here remark, that by the *all flesh* the Prophet speaks of, and the Apostle comments upon, cannot be supposed to mean *all mankind*; but as other Scriptures explain the phrase, all God's people in all places; and not confined, as the early Prophets had supposed to be the case, to the people of *Judæa*. Thus *Haggai*, when speaking of CHRIST, calls him the *desire of all nations*. *Haggai* ii. 7. meaning the desire of his people in all nations. So CHRIST, when speaking of the world, God *so loved the world*, that all that believe in him, &c. meaning believers throughout the world. John iii. 16. That the phrase must be understood in this sense, is evident, from what is said in other parts of scripture concerning the world, which cannot receive the SPIRIT of truth, and for whom CHRIST doth not pray. See John xiv. 17. and John xvii. 9, 10.

Let me particularly request the Reader to observe how *Peter* speaks of his divine LORD. A man he calleth him approved of God, among them by miracles and wonders as they knew. But while a man, truly and properly so, (for otherwise he could not have been the seed of the woman promised, Gen. iii. 15.) yet, as truly and properly God, whom the pains of death could not hold, because; (saith *Peter*,) *it was not possible that he should be holden of it*. Reader! what higher demonstrations can be wished in proof of GOD-HEAD. Surely common sense must say, that had he not been God, the pains of death and the power of the grave must have held him, as they would hold any man, and make every man a prisoner. But, in the person of the God-man CHRIST JESUS, it was not possible, that he who was both God and man should be holden of either. And, as another Apostle saith, and under the same authority, *JESUS was declared to be the SON of GOD with power, according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead*, Rom. i. 4. How very blessed and precious are both testimonies to the union of the nature of God and man, in the person of our LORD!

I request the Reader's attention to another beautiful part in *Peter's* sermon. He saith, that CHRIST was delivered by the *determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*, when crucified and slain by wicked hands. Oh! what a very blessed relation is here, to the truth as it is in JESUS? For what can be more blessed to every child of God, while rejoicing in hope of the glory of God, through the blood

and righteousness of CHRIST as a Savior; than to see the hand of JEHOVAH in the appointment? In this united point of view, GOD our Redeemer's full equivalent sacrifice for sin, (yea, more than equivalent, as a ransom for the sins of all his people,) we find a blessed plea before the mercy-seat in all our approaches there; in that we find all the strength necessary to make it blessed, because it is also from the appointment and ordination of JEHOVAH. Hence, we not only plead on the footing of CHRIST's blood and righteousness; but we plead, when we plead rightly, the LORD's appointment of it, and his approbation and pleasure in the Almighty work. Is it not sweet then, yea, very sweet, to bear back to the throne, what comes first from the throne, and to tell our GOD and FATHER, what our GOD and FATHER hath first told us; that it was JEHOVAH *which bruised our glorious Head, and put him to grief, when he made his soul an offering for sin; that it was JEHOVAH which laid on Him the iniquities of us all, when by the determinate counsel of GOD, by wicked hands he was taken, and crucified, and slain?* And, that the hand of the LORD was first in the great work, when JESUS was *delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification?* Reader! what correspondence is there from the teachings of GOD the HOLY GHOST, in your heart with these things? Oh! the blessedness of being able to join the voice of Old Testament saints, now we have seen the accomplishment of the whole to New Testament believers, and say as they did, *Behold, O GOD! our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed?* Happy the man, who amidst all the remains of indwelling corruption within, and the ungodly world without, the demands of law and justice, and all the accusations of Satan, can, and doth, go daily to the pardon office of JESUS CHRIST, pleading his blood and righteousness, and JEHOVAH's covenant promises, the joint security of everlasting salvation. See Isaiah liii. 5, 6. Rom. iv. 25. Psm. lxxxiv. 9.

Let me beg the Reader not to overlook the mercy and love of GOD the HOLY GHOST, in another sweet part of *Peter's* sermon, namely, the explanation of the sixteenth Psalm, in direct reference to the LORD JESUS CHRIST. There can be no doubt from the manner in which *Peter* spake upon it, in begging permission to speak freely of the Patriarch David, but that the Jews of those days, considered that psalm, as written by *David*, in allusion to himself. What a blessed scripture, therefore, it is, to have it thus explained with an eye to CHRIST, and from such authority. And may we not observe, that from the illustration of this psalm, we derive information upon many other occasions of a similar nature, to make application to CHRIST? Reader! do not forget to notice *Peter's* appeal from the whole, to the hearts and minds of his hearers. How affectionate, yet how faithful the Apostle is. *Let them know, (saith he,) even the whole house of Israel,* what the result of this wonderful event is. To JESUS shall every knee bow. He whom ye crucified, is now the Almighty and everlasting LORD of heaven and of earth! Reader! behold the bold, the undaunted Apostle! Oh! what did grace accomplish in him! And why not in you, or me? LORD! the SPIRIT! do thou in thy rich mercy make thy servants faithful! Speak, LORD, in them, and by them, and let all whom thou hast sent, do the work of Evangelists, and make full proof of their ministry!

37 Now when they heard *this*, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the Apostles, Men, *and* brethren, what shall we do?

38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call.

40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

Behold the wonderful grace of God, as here manifested! How sudden, how powerful, how gracious! Surely, the LORD the SPIRIT here wrought by his Almighty sovereignty, on the hearts of those *Jerusalem* sinners. And, was not this in proof of what Jesus had said and promised? John i. 50. xiv. 12. But, let not the Reader forget, that the same LORD still carrieth on the same works of grace, and is as much the Almighty LORD in his Church, as ever!

And I pray the Reader to remark with me, the characters of those, to whom such grace was shewn. No doubt from what *Peter* said, (ver. 23.) that many of those who were now pricked in their heart, were among those who joined the rabble, to crucify the LORD of life and glory. Oh! who that knew these wonderful events, but must have exclaimed, *what hath God wrought!* The Reader will probably recollect, upon this occasion, some of these scriptures. Hosea vi. 5. Heb. iv. 12. Jerem. xxiii. 29.

It is well worthy observation, how very natural it is with sinners of all descriptions and characters, under the first alarms of sin, to cry out, *what must I do to be saved!* Every carnal mind is for *doing*, although all his life past he hath done nothing but sin. But, such is the pride of human nature in an unhumbled, unregenerate state. John vi. 28. Acts ix. 6. xvi. 30.

The Apostle's answer to their anxious question, deserves to be well attended to, when saying to them, *repent and be baptized*. Did *Peter* mean to say, that repentance was in every man's power to perform? Surely the Apostle could not, for in a subsequent discourse before the Jewish council, he expressly ascribes the work to CHRIST. *Him*, (saith *Peter*,) *hath God exalted to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins*. Acts v. 30, 31. What, therefore, is CHRIST's gift, cannot be man's work. And, moreover, *Peter* commanded them to *repent*, and then to be *baptized*, that they might receive the gifts of the HOLY GHOST. So that the repentance *Peter* enjoined, was to go before the gifts of the HOLY GHOST, and not to *follow*. And so the Prophet in the LORD's name

promised, in the latter day dispensation, to *pour out a spirit of grace, and of supplication*; and then godly mourning and true sorrow should follow, in prompting them to look to Him *whom they had pierced*. Zech. xii. 10. Hence it should seem, that the repentance Peter called upon them to perform, differed from that which is the gift of God.

And it is worthy remark, that CHRIST, and his harbinger, *John the Baptist*, preached the same. Matt. iii. 1. and iv. 17. And no doubt there is a repentance, which is simply the sorrow of nature, arising from natural causes, and produced by natural means; and which differs as widely from the spiritual sorrow of the heart, inwrought by the HOLY GHOST, by reason of sin; as the rain of pools which dry up for want of supply, from the water of the fountain, which forms a living spring in the heart, springing up to everlasting life. Every carnal mind upon earth, more or less, knows this repentance; for when sin brings sickness, and sickness threatens death, the sinner will naturally repent his folly. *Peter* calls upon those *Jerusalem* sinners, to repent of their wickedness, in their false views of CHRIST and his Messiahship; and in testimony of that sorrow, to be baptized in his name for the remission of sins, and to receive gifts of the HOLY GHOST.

I beg to observe on the form of baptism enjoined by *Peter*, that it differed from what the LORD JESUS himself appointed, when giving his final commission to the Apostles. This of *Peter* was to be baptized in the name of JESUS CHRIST. That of CHRIST himself was in the joint name of the whole three Persons of the GODHEAD. Matt. xxviii. 19. But here lay the difference. The Jews to whom *Peter* addressed himself, had hitherto denied the Person and GODHEAD of CHRIST, as the Messiah. They acknowledged God the FATHER; and believed in the SPIRIT, as speaking in, and by, the Prophets. So that by following what *Peter* commanded, of being baptized in the name of JESUS CHRIST, implied also the whole Persons of the GODHEAD as included. But CHRIST's commission to his Apostles, had respect to the Gentiles, who were alike ignorant of all the Persons of the GODHEAD: and therefore the LORD mentioned all.

One observation more I beg to offer on this most precious sermon of the Apostles, namely, the sure consequences *Peter* promised, in the gifts of the HOLY GHOST; that is, I apprehend, all the saving gifts of the SPIRIT necessary to salvation. Not the more special operations of the HOLY GHOST needful to the Apostolic office, but only such, as suited their own personal sanctification. For had all these received miraculous qualifications for the ministry; the Apostles needed not, as they soon afterwards did, to recommend the Church to look out seven men of honest report, to exercise the office of deacons. Chap. vi. 3. And in relation to the promise of the HOLY GHOST, how sweetly the Apostle finished the subject, in shewing the extensiveness of it, while bounded by the LORD's call. So ran the charter of grace, in the original Covenant with *Abraham*. Gen. xvii. 7. So the LORD confirmed it, in the days of the Prophets: *Isaiah* xlv. 3. and lix. 21. And so all the after ages of the Church found it, both Jew and Gentile, subject to the divine call. Psm. ciii. 3. Oh! the preciousness of a Covenant, *ordered in all things and sure*. 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. Gal. iii. 28.

41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls.

42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common.

45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all *men*, as every man had need.

46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Here we have the gracious, and blissful consequences resulting from the whole, in the powerful operations of GOD the HOLY GHOST, by the instrumentality of *Peter's Sermon*. *Three thousand Souls*, savingly converted on the spot, to the knowledge and love of JESUS! What a specimen, in the first fruits of the HOLY GHOST's descending, of what in the after harvest the LORD the SPIRIT would gather in, to the Church of God! And behold, what continued evidences followed, to the compleatness of the work. A stedfast continuing in doctrine; and a continued observance of ordinances. And while those who received the HOLY GHOST, in his gifts and graces received all that was needful to their *private* sanctification; the Apostles received the power of working miracles, in proof of their *public* ministry. An holy fear came upon all beholders. The most unbounded charity brake out among all the faithful. The temple, or private house; the public assembly, or the private meeting; all resounded with the adorable name of JESUS. And so much of GOD appeared in all the deportment of those holy men, at this most blessed season, that it was one continued festival. And JEHOVAH in his threefold character of Person, gave such testimony to the word of his grace, that daily the LORD called his own *from darkness to light, and from the power of Sin and Satan to the living God*. Oh! blessed *Pentecost* of a blessed GOD! LORD! grant in this latter day of thy Church a renewed *Pentecost* to manifest thy glory!

REFLECTIONS.

BLESSED be GOD; FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST, for all the blessings vouchsafed the Church, in all the Covenant purposes, before all worlds : and for all the mercies in the time-state of the Church, through all dispensations. Oh! blessed hour, when JESUS, having finished redemption-work, returned to glory; and GOD the HOLY GHOST came down, to render effectual his great salvation! Do thou blessed holy LORD, still vouchsafe thy *Pentecost*-days to thy Church; until, not only three thousand souls, but thousands of thousands, yea, every one to whom this promise is made, to all that are afar off, and to all that are nigh, even as many as the LORD our GOD shall call, shall *know the joyful sound, and walk in the light of thy divine countenance!*

Ye ministers of my GOD! seek for the daily proofs of your Apostleship, in the anointings, and ordination of the LORD's *Pentecost* visits! And ye, no less, of the LORD's people, who have hitherto lived, unconscious of the resurrection of JESUS, from any saving testimony of it in your hearts; be on the look out for those ascension-gifts of a risen and exalted SAVIOR, whose gracious act it is, *to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins.* Oh! for the out-pouring of the SPIRIT upon all the LORD's redeemed ones, that there may be daily added to the Church, *such as should be saved.*

CHAP. III.

CONTENTS.

Peter and John heal a Cripple at the Gate of the Temple. Peter takes Occasion therefrom to preach to the People.

NOW Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, *being the ninth hour.*

We have here the entrance into the history of a miracle wrought by two of the Apostles, *Peter* and *John*, on a cripple, in the name, and by the authority of their Divine Master the LORD JESUS CHRIST. It appears to me, that beside the fact of the thing itself, it hath a sweet spiritual allusion to the crippled state of our nature: and as such, upon both occasions, it may well merit our close attention.

We are told, that those two dear brethren, *Peter* and *John*, were going up together at the *ninth* hour to the temple; that is three of the clock in the afternoon, the hour of prayer: meaning the time of the evening sacrifice. This was the memorable hour of CHRIST's death on the cross; and to which all the evening sacrifices of the temple, from the first moment of their appointment to the death of JESUS, had respect. *David's* hour. Psm. lv. 17. *Daniel's* sweet hour, ix. 21. See also Exod. xxix. 38, 39.

2 And a certain man, lame from his mother's womb, was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;

This certain poor man, it appears, from Chapter iv. 22. was now at this time forty years old: and as he never had walked, having been lame from his birth, had most probably been often, if not daily, laid at this gate of the temple, by way of exciting the compassion of the feeling, to soften his indigence by their alms. And what can more strikingly represent the crippled state of our fallen helpless nature? Every son and daughter of *Adam* is born so; and hath been lame from the womb. We may be laid down as this poor man was, at the gate of the temple or in the way of ordinances, but never until an act of grace be passed upon us, shall we truly walk in the temple of the LORD. Forty years long the LORD was grieved with Israel, and the LORD said, they have not known my ways. And this cripple at the beautiful gate might have lain there unhealed; had not *Peter* and *John* passed by to give his feet and ancle bones strength, in the name of the LORD. And spiritually considered, as well as in body, there is no healing for the soul, but in JESUS.

3 Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked an alms.

4 And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.

The poor man had no consciousness of being healed of his lameness, and only asked the alm for the supply of the body. The crippled sinner, in like manner, until made sensible by grace of the blessedness of healing, hath no apprehension of any cure to the lameness of the soul. Both, in those instances, are the same.

5 And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

7 And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ancle bones received strength.

8 And he leaping up, stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

It must have been a delightful sight, to have seen these poor Apostles, acting in the faith of the LORD, and the power of the HOLY GHOST, in this wonderful manner. And no less astonishing must have been the expression of countenance of the cripple, when, instead of money, he found strength in his bones; and he who had never walked, entering with his benefactors into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God! But, Reader! think, if it were possible to be the object of our sight, how much greater would it be, to behold the LORD JESUS himself passing by, and bidding the crippled faculties of our souls to

arise and walk : and to feel JESUS taking his redeemed by the hand, and lifting them up ! Oh ! the inexpressible joy, when at the name of JESUS CHRIST of *Nazareth*, and in the power of his strength, poor crippled sinners, yea, dead sinners, and from their mother's womb dead in trespasses and sins, are called into spiritual life ; and walk, and leap, and enter with JESUS into the temple, and the galleries of his grace, walking, and leaping, and praising GOD ! And who shall say the numbers, or who shall write down the greatness, of the cure ; in the daily cases where JESUS manifests the riches of his grace, in restoring life and health to his people ! Exod. xv. 26. Isaiah lxi. 1, 2, 3. with Luke iv. 18, &c.

9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God :

10 And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple : and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.

There is somewhat particularly affecting, in what is said, of the healed cripple holding fast the garments of his benefactors : clinging to them, as we may suppose, not only to manifest his attachment to their persons, for the mercy he had received, through their hands ; but also to hear more of Him, by whose sovereign and Almighty name he had found a cure ! But, Reader ! with what holy ardor doth a soul, truly saved in CHRIST, follow JESUS in the regeneration, and cleave to Him, because he then knows him *to be his life*. He feels, and is conscious, of his daily need of JESUS ; he is convinced that every act of faith, and love, can only be kept alive, by the grace that is in CHRIST JESUS. See Deut. x. 20. Psm. lxxxix. 16. Hosea xiv. 8. Psm. lxxi. 15, 16. Acts. xi. 23.

Perhaps the Reader will think with me, what a wonderful effect also, was wrought upon the minds of the whole neighbourhood who knew this cripple from his birth, or at least for a long time ; when they saw him, after forty years total infirmity, now leaping, and walking. What views must they have had of the poor Apostles ! And what greater apprehensions of the person and glory of the LORD JESUS CHRIST ! But, Reader ! cannot you, and I, bear testimony to the word of the LORD's grace, in a much greater demonstration of the sovereign power of JESUS ; in a spiritual recovery, to the crippled, yea, the dead faculties of our souls ? Yes ! if so be the LORD himself hath opened the eyes of our understanding, or our deaf ears to discipline : hath given strength to the feet and ancle-bones of our spirits, in enabling us to run the way of his commandments, having set our souls at liberty ! Here is a subject of still greater astonishment, when grace hath passed upon the heart, and that gracious prophecy concerning the LORD JESUS, is fulfilled : *Behold, your God will come and save you ! then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped : the lame man shall leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing.* Isaiah xxxv. 1—6.

11 And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.

12 ¶ And when Peter saw *it*, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power and holiness we had made this man to walk?

13 The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let *him* go.

14 But ye denied the Holy One, and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you;

15 And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.

16 And his name, through faith in his name, hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him, hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

Reader! I charge it upon your heart, while I desire to feel the full impression of it upon my own, that in attending to this very precious Sermon of *Peter's*, we do not overlook the ministry in it, of God the HOLY GHOST. It is delightful to behold the animation of the servant in the Lord's cause: but never to forget from whence the whole energy is derived, in the master. And I pray the Reader to call to mind, the particular æra of the times, when this miracle, and preaching took place. The SON of GOD, having finished redemption-work, had just before returned to heaven. And God the HOLY GHOST was now come down, in a more open manifestation of himself, to carry on the glorious cause. His special act, therefore, as the Original and Almighty Architect of the Church, was *to build up the tabernacle of David which was fallen down, and close up the breaches thereof.* Amos ix. 11. Hence, the whole ministers to his glory. And it is blessed, yea, very blessed, at every verse we pass over, in this wonderful account, to watch, and mark, the footsteps of the HOLY GHOST; and like the Prophet on the watch tower, to be on the look out, for the Lord's manifestations, in what we read, of his grace in our hearts. Habak. ii. 1, 2.

Let the Reader not fail to observe, with what energy and power,

under the influence of GOD the SPIRIT, *Peter* opened his animated discourse. He begins, with humbly declining all pretensions to himself, and his partner *John*, of any merit, or worth, from the deed wrought on the cripple; and strives to call off the attention of the people, in the astonishment which they had expressed, from them, as instruments; in order to fix their views on JESUS, as the Author. And having thus called forth their notice, he begins with a text from their own Scriptures, which they were supposed all of them to be well acquainted with, in relation to the Covenant. *The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob: the God* (said he) *of our fathers.* Nothing could have been more happily chosen, by way of arresting their attention. And no higher proof could be needed in testimony, that the LORD the SPIRIT both directed the Apostle's mind, to the choice of this scripture; and gave to the Apostle's mouth, ability to unfold, and explain it, to the people. While the Apostle was speaking to them of *Abraham's God*, and the God of their fathers; he could be setting forth no strange gods, or new gods, as *Moses* charged some of old with, newly come up, which neither they, nor their fathers knew. *Abraham's God*, in his threefold character of Persons, was well known, and well proclaimed in the scriptures of eternal truth. Here therefore *Peter* takes his stand, and demands their attention.

Having thus paved the way by a foundation for discourse, which as the *Israel* of God they could not but acknowledge, it was the very principles of their religion to stand upon: *Peter* next advanced to the one great subject of all his, and all the Apostles' preaching; namely, the LORD JESUS CHRIST in his Person, GODHEAD, Offices, Characters, and Relations: and to set him forth as God had set him forth, in the word of his grace. *The God of our fathers*, (said he,) *Abraham's God* in Covenant, hath glorified his SON JESUS. Reader! pause over the blessed words, for they are most blessed. The whole design of JEHOVAH, from beginning to end, and from one eternity to another, through all the time-state of the Church, is to glorify his SON JESUS. The Bible is to this one end, and is full to this, and this only, purpose. Every Promise centers but in Him; yea, JESUS himself, is but as one promise, for every other is comprehended, and folded up, in this One. 2 Cor. i. 20. Every Precept, both under the law, and the Gospel, tends but to exalt CHRIST JESUS. For by him the whole have been fulfilled, and he is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. Rom. x. 4. And as they relate to his people in him, the whole is comprehended in looking to CHRIST, and believing on him. John vi. 28, 29. Every Ordinance is intended to minister but to him: indeed CHRIST himself is the One great Ordinance of JEHOVAH; for there is salvation in no other, neither is there any other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. Acts iv. 12. Reader! what saith the experience of your heart to these things? You see, that the great will and purpose of JEHOVAH, is, to glorify his SON JESUS. Is this your will and purpose also? Do you make him, what JEHOVAH hath made him, the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: the Author and Finisher of faith? Oh! how sweet is it, when a poor sinner discovers, that He, who is JEHOVAH's salvation to the ends of the earth, is his salvation also. He is the praise of all his saints; the people near to him! Rev. i. 8. 11, Heb. xii. 2. Isaiah xlix. 6. Psm. cxlviii. 14.

It is well worthy the observation of the Reader, with what firmness the Apostle chargeth the men of *Israel*, with the crucifixion of *JESUS*. He hesitateth not to bring it home to their consciences. And what I admire in this short, but sweet sermon of *Peter's*, is, that while he bears testimony to the *human* nature of *CHRIST*, in the proof arising from his death; he most decidedly proves his *divine* nature in the strong terms by which he calls them: the *HOLY ONE*, and the Prince (or Giver) of life. And in relation to the miracle wrought, he refers the whole into his Almighty name. And his *name* (saith Peter) *through faith in his name hath made this man strong whom ye see and know*. Reader! do not overlook in this place that faith, upon all occasions, hath for its whole object and dependance, the Person of *CHRIST*. I beg the Reader to consult a few of the many scriptures which speak of *CHRIST*, as the *HOLY ONE*, and the *HOLY ONE* of *Israel*: for they can refer to no other. Deut. xxxiii. 8. Psm. xvi. 10. Psm. lxxxix. 19. Isaiah xli. 14. Isaiah xliii. 3. Isaiah xlix. 7. Dan. iv. 13. Heb. i. 12. Mark i. 24.

17 And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did *it*, as *did* also your rulers.

18 But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.

19 ¶ Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

20 And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you:

21 Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

22 For Moses truly said unto the Fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.

23 And it shall come to pass, *that* every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.

24 Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel, and

those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.

25 Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

26 Unto you first, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

When the Apostle had thus clenched his doctrine, by a train of the most decided and unanswerable arguments, and from their own Scriptures; and confirmed the whole by a miracle, wrought before their own eyes: he then endeavors to bring home the subject from the head to the heart. And who but must admire, the very sweet, persuasive, and conciliating manner, which he used upon the occasion. But let us not overlook the cause, nor in the Apostle's words forget the Apostle's Lord. It was GOD the SPIRIT, speaking in him, and by him! And must not all sermons be persuasive, when *the Gospel is preached with the HOLY GHOST sent down from heaven?* 1 Pet. i 12.

I do not think it necessary to enlarge on the several parts of Peter's exhortation after his sermon. Every thing in it is plain, and easy to be understood. The chief object of the Apostle, was to lead their minds to CHRIST. He shews the LORD JESUS to have been the One great object, all along intended, from the Scriptures of truth, as the promised *Messiah*. He aims to soften the anger of their minds against themselves, in ascribing their rejection of CHRIST to their ignorance. But he shews no less, that what in times past might have been pleaded for want of knowledge; now it is known, if neglected, will prove their destruction. He calls upon them, as he had done before, (see Chap. ii. 37—40. and Commentary,) to the exercise of that repentance, which nature herself dictates, when the conscience is made sensible of error. And he tells them, that in the refreshing of the LORD, their sins may be blotted out. In short, *Peter* makes a most affectionate appeal to the hearts of the people, and concludes with one of the sweetest entreaties language can furnish, to the children of God, whom he tells them they are. *Unto you first*, entitled by every claim to be first spoken to, (Luke xxiv. 47. Acts xiii. 26.) *God having raised up his Son JESUS sent him to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.*

REFLECTIONS.

WHAT a sweet thought is it to my soul, that to all the crippled faculties of my fallen nature; the name of JESUS CHRIST of Nazareth can make me whole. Yea, his name, through faith in his name, will give a perfect soundness to all his redeemed. LORD! grant that in all my approaches to thy house of prayer, I may go always in thy name, making mention of thy righteousness, even thine only. And oh! with what holy joy and rapture, shall I tread thy courts, when God the

SPIRIT causeth me to enter by his strength, into thy temple, *walking, and leaping, and praising God.*

Almighty God of our fathers! the God of *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*; thou hast indeed glorified thy SON JESUS! Oh! LORD, send down thine ascension-gifts, and bless my soul, in all the sweet manifestations of thy love. In thee, and by thee, and from thee, let all my joy be found. As a child in the Covenant, which God made with our fathers, being CHRIST'S, and consequently *Abraham's seed*, and an heir according to the promise; let all my springs arise, and let that assurance to the great father of the faithful, be mine also: *In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.*

CHAP. IV.

CONTENTS.

Peter, and John, are put into Prison. They are examined before the Council, threatened, and dismissed. The LORD gives a gracious Token of his Presence, in answering to their Prayers.

AND as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them,

2 Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

3 And they laid hands on them, and put *them* in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide.

4 Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.

Reader! mark in the awful characters of those men, the malice of hell, at the success of the Gospel. Can the imagination conceive, any higher proof, of the desperately wicked state of the human heart, than is here shewn? To imprison those Servants of the LORD, for so illustrious a miracle as JESUS had wrought, by their instrumentality. But, Reader! you will stop at the surface of this matter, if the LORD the SPIRIT doth not lead you deeper, to see, that all men by nature, and unawakened by grace, are the same. Both *Sadducees*, and *Pharisees*; *Priests* of the law, and mere *Professors* of the Gospel, unacquainted with the plague of their own heart, are all the same. All such as are grieved, as well as those of old, whenever, and where-soever, salvation is freely and fully preached, in the alone name of JESUS, without complimenting their good works; but solely ascribing salvation by grace alone, to the LORD JESUS CHRIST.

But turn from such characters, to behold the blessedness of those servants, whom the LORD so highly honored. Oh! happy *Peter*, happy *John*! surely your prison became a palace, and your chains,

chains of gold, while the LORD was thus loading you with such distinguishing honors! I apprehend, that the *five thousand*, here said to have believed, were in addition to the *three thousand*, recorded on the day of *Pentecost*: so that both together, made *eight thousand*. Oh! the wonders of that wonder-working God the HOLY GHOST? Well might the Evangelist close his Gospel with saying, that the Apostles went forth and preached every where, *the LORD working with them, and confirming the word with signs following*. Mark xvi. 20. Reader! think what a melancholy contrast the present hour of the Church affords. Here we read but of two sermons, and what a harvest of souls were gathered in. And what multitudes of sermons are now preached, and no conversion follows. To what cause are we to ascribe it? Is it not because, unaccompanied with the ordination and blessing of God the HOLY GHOST? And can it be otherwise? If the HOLY GHOST be not honored. If men preach unsent by Him, and his presence be not implored, neither his blessing asked; no, nor his Almighty ministry acknowledged: can it be a matter of surprize, that *Ichabod* is on our Church doors, and *the glory is departed from Israel*? 1 Sam. iv. 21. Oh! that the LORD the SPIRIT would give us a little reviving in our bondage; that *he that hath ears to hear, may hear what the SPIRIT saith unto the Churches*. Rev. ii. 29.

5 ¶ And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes,

6 And Annas, the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.

7 And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?

What an awful Council this was become, composed of such awful characters. The Reader should be told, that this Council consisted, or ought to have consisted, of seventy Persons, the true Elders of Israel. It was first formed, by the LORD himself. See Numb. xi. 16, 17. But, now we find a motley crew; *Scribes*, and *Pharisees*, and *Sadducees*. For their character, as given by our LORD himself: See Matt. xxiii. throughout: See also Acts xxiii. 8. Before such awful characters, the highly honored servants of the LORD JESUS CHRIST was brought. And I would have the Reader remark the blessedness of being so brought, because it afforded the opportunity for the Apostles to preach, and the Church, in all after ages, to read the record of what they said, under the teaching of God the HOLY GHOST. And I beg the Reader to remark with me how upon numberless occasions the LORD permits, yea, appoints the malice of men, to proceed to a desperate length sometimes, for the greater manifestation of his glory, and his peoples' good. If the Reader will turn to a single verse in one of the Psalms, and beg of the Almighty Author of Scripture, even God the HOLY GHOST, to write it in the

tablets of his heart, to have recourse to as may be needed; he will find great blessedness in it. The verse is Psalm cv. 25. *He turned their heart to hate his people, to deal subtilly with his servants.* Oh! how often hath this sweet Scripture taught my soul to look through the cobweb malice of men; and to discern the hand of a gracious, wise, and love ordering LORD. Ezekiel i. 26, 27, 28.

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,

9 If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole;

10 Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, *even* by him doth this man stand here before you whole.

11 This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

12 Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

What a blessed discourse is here! Behold, Reader, the wonderful effects of the SPIRIT's influence. This is the same Apostle, whose timidity was such, when only confronted by a poor servant maid, that he was tempted to deny his LORD; and now, boldly chargeth the whole Jewish Council with the murder of CHRIST. Can your heart desire a more decisive proof, that the change was wrought by God the HOLY GHOST? See that Scripture, of Jesus's promise, Mark xiii. 11. And observe how the Apostle, by that sweet figure of the Stone, JEHOVAH promised to lay in Zion, would lead them to their own Scriptures, in confirmation of the truth as it is in JESUS. See Isaiah xxviii. 16. Matt. xxi. 42. Psm. cxviii. 23. And observe how the Apostle intimates, by declaring that there is salvation in no other, that their rejection of JESUS will bring on, and fulfil, that other Scripture, to the same amount, where the Prophet declares, that he shall be *a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to both houses of Israel.* Isaiah viii. 14. Blessed LORD JESUS! do I not daily see thy solemn words concerning this Stone fulfilled? *Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.* Matt. xxi. 44. LORD JESUS! do thou grant to my poor soul, that while thou art still *a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence*, to many who call themselves Christians, after the holy Name, but have never felt the power of thy holy SPIRIT, teaching them the plague

of their own heart; I may be enabled by thy grace, to build my whole hopes of salvation on thee, the Rock of ages: convinced, most fully convinced, that *there is salvation in no other; neither any other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved!*

13 ¶ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

14 And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

15 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves,

16 Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them *is* manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny *it*.

17 But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.

18 And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus.

19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

21 So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all *men* glorified God for that which was done.

22 For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed.

I pray the Reader never to lose sight of that most precious doctrine, that it was GOD the SPIRIT speaking in the Apostles, and by them: for without this steady eye to the LORD, we shall be apt to

ascribe the boldness of the servants, to their own strength; and forget the source from whence they derived it. I admire the different apprehension of words in the world's dictionary, from that of grace. Those doctors of the law, it is said, perceived that *those Apostles were unlearned and ignorant men*. Yes! In relation to human sciences, and vain philosophy, falsely so called, *Peter and John* had received no education. But the HOLY GHOST, in giving his testimony, concerning that *wisdom which is from above*, and which *maketh wise unto salvation through the faith which is in CHRIST JESUS*; speaks very differently. He saith, that the precious things of his inspired word, and which to carnal men are *hard to be understood*, it is *the unlearned and unstable*, (that is, in divine science,) *wrest as they do also the other Scriptures to their own destruction*. 2 Pet. iii. 16. And here was a striking proof of it! For while those great men stood confounded and ashamed, unable to say any thing in their own justification; the poor Apostles silenced, and overawed them all! Reader! doth not the same doctrine, and from the same cause, operate in the present hour? *The weapons of our warfare* (said Paul,) *are not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong holds*. 2 Cor. x. 4. And how otherwise should it be, that we sometimes see weak things of the world confound the things which are mighty, and foolish things confound what the world esteems wise; were it not that God hath chosen such for his instruments, to make manifest, that the excellency is of God, and not of men. Oh! the blessedness when men, taught and influenced by God the SPIRIT, come forth in the LORD's name, sent by the LORD's ordination, and crowned with the LORD's blessing upon their labors! 1 Cor. i. 27.

Reader! it is sometimes profitable, to get behind the curtain of carnal men's council, not indeed to learn their works, but to see how dreadfully alarmed they are. And here the HOLY GHOST hath given us a short, but full relation, what frequently passeth there. For be assured, the conference of those convicted minds, as here represented, is a true statement of what every day, more or less, passeth among the unawakened in the world. They could not deny the miracle as a matter of fact, neither disprove the greatness of it. And one might have thought, that with such a conviction before their eyes, they would have embraced the Apostles, and sought mercy from the LORD. Ah, No! the thing was impossible. Yea, so impossible, that God the HOLY GHOST hath caused the reason to be recorded no less than seven times in his sacred word. Isaiah vi. 9, 10. Matt. xiii. 14. Mark iv. 12. Luke viii. 10. John xii. 40. Acts xxviii. 26. and Romans xi. 8. And the same holds good for ever. And the LORD, at the very beginning of his Scriptures, with the first dawn of revelation, writes down, as with a pen of iron, and the point of a diamond, the unalterable cause: *I will put enmity between thee and the woman: and between thy seed and her seed*. Gen. iii. 15. John viii. 43, 44. 1 John iii. 8.

23 And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.

24 And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou *art* God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is:

25 Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?

26 The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.

27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together.

28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

29 And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,

30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.

What a beautiful and lovely picture is here drawn, of the primitive Church! Reader! do observe the expression; *their own company*. Yes! The whole Church is One, and so the Great Head of the Church describes her. Song vi. 9. And contrast this, to the account given of *Judas* the traitor, whose fall is immediately followed with the consequence, that *he might go to his own place*. Acts i. 25.

And I pray the Reader to notice the grace, which instantly appeared in this assembly of the faithful: the LORD the SPIRIT led their minds out in prayer. And what a Scriptural prayer it was? The LORD be praised, who caused it to be recorded, for the comfort and edification of the Church in all ages. Here is a double proof of the Almighty ministry of the HOLY GHOST, in that He who guided *David's* pen to write, taught their tongues and hearts to speak. A plain proof, that the same Almighty LORD presided over the Church in Old Testament days, as well as under the New Testament dispensation. And let not the Reader overlook, how uniformly those holy men of old, both in their prayers to the LORD, and their conversation with men, kept always in view, the LORD's purposes and decrees concerning the redemption by JESUS. Chap. ii. 23. Chap. v. 30. Chap. x. 38.

And is not this prayer more immediately directed to the Person of the HOLY GHOST, in his Office-character; and though (as all prayers

are,) offered up to the whole Persons of the GODHEAD through the Mediator, yet with a special eye to the office-work of the HOLY GHOST? Let it be remembered, that I do not decidedly say as much: I only ask the question. But, as we are told, that *no prophecy came in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the HOLY GHOST*; 2 Pet. i. 21: and the LORD is here addressed as speaking those words by the mouth of his servant *David*; Psm. ii. 1, 2. it should seem, to have been immediately a prayer to the HOLY GHOST. Moreover, the Apostles, in this prayer, particularly dwell upon the Person of the holy Child Jesus; and his being anointed: both which were the special acts of the HOLY GHOST. See Luke i. 35. and Luke iv. 18. And therefore, it was from God the SPIRIT, who, but a few days before, had baptized them, and called them by ordination to their ministry, that they now looked for all suited supplies of grace, to give them boldness, and to seal their authority, by the confirmation of miracles. Whether I am correct or not in this opinion, certain it is, that to God the HOLY GHOST the Apostles looked for the success of their labors. And it may serve to shew, how necessary it must be, in all the under pastors in the ministry of the Church, both to be satisfied that they have their commission *from* him; and *to* him to commit all their services.

31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

Reader! let you and I attend to the blessed contents of this verse, as not simply referring to the Church then in being, but to the Church of God in all ages. Surely such a testimony was designed to tell all the praying seed of *Jacob*; that the LORD, who is a prayer-awakening, is also a prayer-hearing, and a prayer-answering God. See Isaiah lxxv. 24. And every child of God should learn from hence, that the LORD's presence is always with his people, though the tokens of that presence be not shewn in the same way, of miraculously shaking the place of assembly. And as the company then present are said to have been all filled with the HOLY GHOST; so such renewings of the SPIRIT were intended to teach the Church, that as the HOLY GHOST's baptism of the Apostles at Pentecost did not supersede the necessity of fresh effusions of grace, so neither doth the regeneration of his people now render unnecessary constant supplies from the LORD. See Titus iii. 4, 5, 6. Oh! for the daily refreshings of the SPIRIT upon ministers and people!

32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart, and of one soul: neither said any *of them* that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

33 And with great power gave the apostles wit-

ness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus : and great grace was upon them all.

34 Neither was there any among them that lacked : for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

35 And laid *them* down at the apostles' feet : and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,

37 Having land, sold *it*, and brought the money, and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.

What a golden age to the Church must this have been! How sweetly the love of God in CHRIST wrought upon the heart, when the streams of such a fountain diffused themselves in all directions! And how graciously the LORD gave testimony to the word of his grace, when the Apostles were enabled to shew miracles in witness of the truth; and the people with one heart and soul shewing forth no less the miracle of mercy wrought in them by the HOLY GHOST. Oh! for the renewal of such *Pentecost* seasons, if it were the LORD's will and pleasure! Oh! for many, many such as *Barnabas* to arise, as *sons of consolation*, in the distressing times of the present day. And, oh! that the LORD the SPIRIT would return to this our sinful land, and thereby fulfil that sweet promise, that by a pure language *his people might all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.* Zeph. iii. 9. Nothing short of this can do to restore health to Zion. No arm, but the arm of JEHOVAH the SPIRIT, can cut *Rahab*, and wound the dragon. Isaiah li. 9. Without the outpouring of the SPIRIT, no heart of stone can be softened, nor the CHRIST-despising generation in which we dwell be removed. But, if the LORD in rich mercy will pour out of his holy SPIRIT upon us from on high, *then will our wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest.* Isaiah xxxii. 15. Reader! shall we not then say to the HOLY GHOST, in his own most blessed words, *Awake! awake! put on strength, O arm of the LORD! Awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old.* Isaiah li. 9.

REFLECTIONS.

LET us ponder well those precious things contained in this Chapter, which are so freely given to us of God! And let us particularly keep in remembrance, that all that is here recorded of the prosperity of the Church, arose from the blessed Person and Office-work of God

the HOLY GHOST! We behold him here, under many of those most gracious characters in which the LORD JESUS promised him before his departure. As the LORD the SPIRIT is the Founder, so is He the Governor, Preserver, Teacher, Comforter, Sanctifier of the Church in all ages. In every individual instance of blessing both ministers and people, his is to manifest the gracious act, and in glorifying JESUS, to take of the LORD JESUS, and to make known to his disciples. And amidst all the diversities of gifts, and all differences of administrations, and all diversities of operations, *all these worketh that ONE and the self-same SPIRIT, dividing to every man severally as he will!*

Oh! blessed and eternal SPIRIT, do thou now, as thou didst then, manifest thy love to the Church of JESUS! Come, LORD, into the midst of thy Zion, though the builders have set at nought the chief corner stone! Raise up a faithful ministry, who, receiving their ordination from thee, may as faithfully dispense thy word to the people. Let the sweet ascension-gifts of our risen and exalted SAVIOR, again come down to enlighten our Churches, and let that precious Scripture be again fulfilled in our day and generation, where it is said, that *He gave some Apostles, and some Prophets, and some Pastors and Teachers, and all for the perfecting of the Saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of CHRIST.* LORD, in mercy hear and do it; defer not, O my God! till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the SON of GOD, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of CHRIST.

CHAP. V.

CONTENTS.

We have here the awful Account of Ananias and Sapphira lying to the HOLY GHOST. Peter's Detection of them. The Apostles again imprisoned. The Angel of the LORD brings them out. They are brought before the Council, and after being beaten, are dismissed.

BUT a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira, his wife, sold a possession,

2 And kept back *part* of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back *part* of the price of the land?

4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

5 And Ananias hearing these words, fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.

6 And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried *him* out, and buried *him*.

7 And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.

8 And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.

9 Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband *are* at the door, and shall carry thee out.

10 Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying *her* forth, buried *her* by her husband.

We have here a most interesting record of two abominable hypocrites, whose crimes and punishment are circumstantially related, for the instruction and comfort of the Church in all ages. It is blessed to observe how God the HOLY GHOST watches over his Church, in causing such histories to be handed down to the people. Without such records, we might have been led to suppose, that in those happy days no characters of a contrary principle to the Apostles standard were to be found. But now we learn that the best of Churches, and the best of times, have their spots. In the ark, there was an *Ham*. Among the Apostles, a *Judas*. Under the first days of the HOLY GHOST's ministry, the LORD permitted *Ananias* and *Sapphira* to mingle for a space with the faithful. But so far are these things from proving injurious to the Church, that they ultimately minister to her glory.

Reader, let us first contemplate the dreadful state of the human heart. Here were two persons most fully convinced, as far as head-knowledge could carry conviction, of the truths of God, professing a belief they never felt, and to preserve an opinion among the faithful, consenting, apparently, to give up the whole of their worldly goods for the benefit of the Church of CHRIST; and yet all the while had not the least real love to JESUS, or his people. And are such instances singular? Alas! the reverse. Perhaps there is not now upon earth a single congregation of professing Christians, of any number, but what hath some of the same description. And doth not the LORD

overrule such events to his glory, and his people's welfare? Yes! for it tends to make the LORD's people jealous of themselves, when they discover such goats got into the sheepfold. It tends to humble the soul, under a sense of common corruption. And it operates most blessedly to the LORD's glory, when a child of God is thereby led to discover, that all the difference between one and another is all of grace.

Let us next learn from this picture of human depravity, to admire the tender love of the LORD to the Church, in qualifying *Peter* to the detection of it. By the power which the HOLY GHOST gave him of discerning spirits, the iniquity was found out, and the Church cleansed from the impurity. And thus the LORD watches over his people for good in all ages.

I beg the Reader particularly to remark with me, that *Peter* charged this man with lying to the HOLY GHOST. But why is it so specially said that the lie was to the HOLY GHOST? I apprehend on this account. Because conversion-work is the personal operation of God the HOLY GHOST? So that the whole, and every part of this man's conduct, was directly levelled against the HOLY GHOST. He never had been converted. He never had felt the love of God, and of CHRIST, in his heart. And therefore the deception was principally against God the SPIRIT. I pray the Reader, under this head, not to overlook how *Peter* speaks of the GODHEAD of the HOLY GHOST. In one verse, (verse 3,) he chargeth *Ananias* with lying to the HOLY GHOST. And in another, (verse 4,) he saith that lie was not unto men, but unto God. A plain proof, in *Peter's* view, that the HOLY GHOST is God.

One observation more meets us on this wonderful transaction, I mean the judgment of God, in instant death, both on the man and his wife. It must have been very awful; but it should seem that the LORD deemed it to be necessary. The honor of God the SPIRIT. The honor of the Church of CHRIST now more eminently forming. The dreadful alarm it must have given hypocrites, to keep them from the Church. The fears it must have awakened in cautioning the foes of CHRIST to be very careful how they molested the Apostles. And the terror in all the future ages of the Church it might afford, to preserve the faithful from numberless instances of deception. These were certainly among the causes for which the speedy judgment of the LORD fell upon *Ananias* and *Sapphira*; and for which they stand forth, and will stand forth to the end of the world, monuments of the LORD's anger. Reader! let you and I, in the contemplation, learn to bless God for his *unspeakable gift*!

11 And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

12 And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.

13 And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.

14 And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)

15 Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid *them* on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.

16 There came also a multitude *out* of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits : and they were healed every one.

It is easier to conceive than express the wonderful effect such events must have had on the minds of all that heard of them. Even the *Sanhedrim* for the moment seem to have been struck, so that, instead of apprehending *Peter* instantly, for the death of those liars, we hear that not only great fear came upon the Church, but upon all that heard of these things. And while multitudes were added to the Lord, not a soul of hypocrisy for a season durst join themselves to the Apostles. And of such veneration were the Apostles in the esteem of the common people, that they looked to them for healing to all their sick, and those vexed with unclean spirits, and we are told that they were healed every one. Reader ! ponder well the wonderful relation, and consider the blessed state of the Church in that season.

17 ¶ Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation,

18 And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.

19 But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said,

20 Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people, all the words of this life.

21 And when they heard *that*, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

22 But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told,

23 Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within.

24 Now when the high priest, and the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow.

25 Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.

26 Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned.

27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them,

28 Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

29 Then Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew, and hanged on a tree.

31 Him hath God exalted with his right hand *to be* a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

32 And we are his witnesses of these things; and *so is* also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

33 When they heard *that*, they were cut *to the heart*, and took counsel to slay them.

34 Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space;

35 And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.

36 For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.

37 After this man rose up Judas of Galilee, in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, *even* as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.

38 And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought:

39 But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

40 And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

Let the Reader in this place remark again, what hath been often noticed before in this *Poor Man's Commentary*, the hardened state of the mind, which nothing short of sovereign grace can cure. And in persons of the characters here spoken of, for whom no provision is made in a grace-union with CHRIST, the thing is impossible. 2 Tim. iii. 13. 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12. And solemn as the subject is, yet we see in the history of the characters here shewn, the righteous judgment of God in the appointment. The everlasting hatred they manifested to CHRIST while upon earth, and now to his Apostles and followers after his departure, shutting up their minds against all conviction, most plainly testified the influence of Satan upon their hearts. The Lord leaving all such to their own perverse wills, can be no impeachment of his justice. The Apostle hath very fully shewn this, in his opening of the Epistle to the Romans. *As they did not* (saith the Apostle) *like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind.* Rom. i. 28. This was only leaving a cause to

produce its own natural effects. This was but suffering them to remain in that state of unbelief and ignorance, which by their own obduracy they have brought upon themselves, and of consequence will be found in at CHRIST's second coming.

The opening the prison doors to the Apostles, and bringing them out, might have taught them, would they have listened to the loud voice accompanying the sovereign act, that the miracle was of God. And those Apostles not running away when brought out, as is the case with ordinary prisoners, carried a further conviction under whose protection they were. But all lose their effect with such hardened minds as are resolutely bent to resist all persuasion. Hence a judicial blindness follows. *Israel*, (that is, professing Israel, Rom. ix. 6, 7.) *would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lusts, and they walked in their own counsels.* Psm. lxxxi. 11, 12.

There is somewhat very sweet and striking in the angel's precept to the Apostles, *Go, stand and speak in the temple, to the people, all the words of this life.* Not, go, and hide yourself from the fury of your enemies. Not, go, and be idle, and give over what will expose you to persecution. But, go into the most public place, the temple, *stand* with firmness and intrepidity, and *speak to the people*, the LORD's people, the people whom JEHOVAH hath formed for himself, they shall shew forth his praise, Isaiah xliii. 21. all the words of this life, even eternal life, yea, CHRIST himself, who is life eternal: for he is the life and the light of men. By him, life and immortality is brought to light. For He it is, that by his incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection, hath destroyed death, spiritual death, and eternal death. And by the life, both spiritual and eternal, which in his own life-giving, soul-renewing communication, as an Head to his members, he communicates to his whole body the Church, he quickens them from sin to salvation here in grace; and from death to life hereafter in glory. *Go stand and speak to the people all the words of this life!*

I pray the Reader to remark the firmness of the Apostles: But let him not fail to keep always in remembrance the cause. Oh! what strength cannot the LORD impart; yea, what strength will he not impart to his people, when his glory, and his Church's welfare, are concerned?

I must not stay to enter into particulars concerning the history here recorded, of the faithfulness of the Apostles, and the malice of their persecutors. Indeed the whole is so sweetly and plainly related, that it can need no comment. Let the Reader not fail to observe, how *Peter* harps in all his discourses, on Covenant love, while he so often calls upon those he addressed, to attend to what the LORD JEHOVAH hath done, in this grand concern, as *the God of our fathers.* And how blessedly he points to JESUS, as a risen, and an ascended Prince and SAVIOR, for *to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins.* So that JEHOVAH's Covenant-love, and the Redeemer's fulness of grace, finally leaves all without excuse, who neglect so great salvation!

The indignation of the Council, the advice of *Gamaliel*, the beating of the Apostles, and the command with which they suffered them to depart, no more to speak in the name of JESUS; these open large subjects for improvement: and I pray the LORD the SPIRIT to give, both to the Writer and the Reader of this *Poor Man's Commentary*,

grace so to gather sweet instruction from the perusal. But I must not enlarge.

One point more, I would call upon the Reader particularly to notice in this Chapter; namely, the Apostles departing from the presence of the Council, when stripes had been laid upon them, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of JESUS. And so far were they from being overawed by the threats of their enemies, or paying the least respect to their commands, that *daily in the temple, and from house to house, they ceased not to teach, and to preach JESUS CHRIST.*

Reader! can your mind furnish to itself any thing more lovely, than such a view of primitive faithfulness, in those first earnest laborers in the Church! They were nothing intimidated by their adversaries, nothing terrified or distressed. Both publicly in the temple, and in every private house wheresoever they came; not LORD's days only, but every day; and not now and then, but unweariedly, their teaching, as well as their preaching, was all of JESUS CHRIST. The LORD JESUS was with them, both text and sermon; they found enough in him for endless discourse. Oh! that those glorious days would return, when CHRIST and CHRIST alone, JEHOVAH'S CHRIST, and JEHOVAH's chosen, may fill every pulpit, occupy every house, warm every heart, and flow from every tongue, in his Churches, and among his people! LORD! the SPIRIT, in mercy to thy Church, hasten the hour, when *the Redeemer shall arise out of Zion, and turn away ungodliness from Jacob! Come my beloved, (saith the Church,) and be thou like to a roe, or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices!*

REFLECTIONS.

WHAT an awful delusion, must that delusion of the mind be, which like *Ananias and Sapphira*, is trifling with God? What an horrible state to be *feeding on ashes, when a deceived heart hath turned the sinner aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, is there not a lie in my right hand?*

Blessed LORD! let my soul be relieved and comforted, when turning from the view of the *Ananias's* and *Sapphira's* of the present generation, I behold the zeal and honesty, the faithfulness and diligence of thy servants the Apostles in their day, holding forth the word of this life. Endued with the SPIRIT from on high, let me admire the burning fervor of *Peter's* mind, in punishing by divine authority, the daring lie of such awful characters, committed against GOD the HOLY GHOST. And cause me, thou dear LORD, to see how the LORD honors them, whose delight it is to honor the LORD. Oh! for such a portion of the same spirit, as actuated the mind of *Peter*, to be poured out on all the faithful ministers of the sanctuary, that they may teach and preach JESUS CHRIST, *and be instant in season, and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long suffering and doctrine.*

And LORD, to all the persecutions and malice of their enemies, may an holy indifferency manifest, that they are borne up and supported by thee; that though *troubled on every side, yet not distressed; or if perplexed, yet never in despair; that they may always*

bear about the dying of the LORD JESUS; that the life also of JESUS may be made manifest in their body. And do thou LORD to all the prison frames, and bondage exercises of thy Church and people, give them to see the Angel of the Covenant always at hand to bring them out. Yea, let every eye of thy redeemed family be directed by God the SPIRIT, to be looking to Him, who is exalted as a Prince and Savior, to give repentance to his Israel, and remission of sins. Precious JESUS! send down all thine ascension-gifts, and bless thine whole Church with the manifestation of thyself, until CHRIST be formed in every heart the hope of glory.

CHAP. VI.

CONTENTS.

The Church of CHRIST requiring it, Deacons are chosen. Stephen being elected, and speaking by the SPIRIT, is opposed by many.

AND in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.

As the last chapter opened with an account of the corruption which had crept into the Church, in the awful instance of *Ananias and Sapphira*, so here again we enter upon this chapter, with the relation of other taints of our Adam-nature transgression, in the murmuring and dissatisfaction breaking out in the Church. Reader! it will be our mercy to gather, under the HOLY GHOST's teaching, improvement from it, in learning, that the purest moment of the Church, in this time-state of her being, (for such, surely, this æra was,) is not free from sin. And, oh! how blessedly do such convictions preach CHRIST. Yes! thou dear LORD! well is it for thy people, that thy name is *the LORD our righteousness!* Jerem. xxiii. 6. Isaiah xlv. 24, 25, 1 Cor. i. 30, 31.

It should seem from the account here given, that so numerous was the Church of the LORD now become, that the alms collected from the more affluent of the people, were not enough for the daily supply of the more needy. And it is more than probable, from the infirmities of a poor fallen nature, partiality might have been shewn in the distribution. Be this as it may, there arose a murmuring by the Grecians, (by which, I suppose, is meant the Jews of *Greece*, to distinguish them from those of *Judæa*,) on this account, which no doubt much disturbed the harmony of the Church. Reader! do not overlook the merciful designs of the Great Head of his Church, in disposing the inequalities of life in the outward circumstances of it. I do not doubt, but that the LORD made much good spring out of this seeming evil, among CHRIST's redeemed ones, who found themselves neglected. For if the unkindness of men, even of brethren, inclines the heart to look more to the LORD and less to man, the very sorrow is made sweet. JESUS would not, for he needed not, have made his

Church poor, had not poverty best suited her present time-state of being. Sweet is that scripture, pray turn to it, for it suits the Church of JESUS in all ages; *I will also leave in the midst of thee, an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD.* Zeph. iii. 12. Depend upon it, that it is our affliction and poverty, both in spirituals and temporals, which minister most advantageously to keep the heart near JESUS. For amidst all the love we seem to have to Him, if at any time we get out of this conscious need of JESUS, we find the same risings of pride as Israel of old, and say as she did, *we are lords, we will come no more unto thee.* Jerem. ii. 31.

2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples *unto them*, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

The twelve Apostles, including *Matthias*, are here engaged in making suitable arrangements for the correcting of the present, and any future errors which might arise in the Church. And, from this authority it should seem, first sprung that order, which all well regulated societies in the faith have since observed, in the appointment of subordinate offices to the ministry in the Church. *Moses*, at the suggestion of *Jethro*, adopted somewhat of the same plan in his days, Exod. xviii. 14, &c. How truly Apostolic was this advice? How affectionately, as to brethren, was it delivered? And what a lovely view doth it afford of CHRIST'S Church, in this blessed age of the Apostles? *We*, (said they,) *will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.* As if, (and which in one sense is literally the case,) their very persons, as well as their time and labors, were not their own. For though Apostles, their eminency consisted not in rank, but in usefulness. JESUS their LORD, while loving their persons, loved their office no further than as it ministered to his glory, and the feeding his sheep. John xxi. 15, 16, 17. *Peter*, to whom CHRIST gave this charge (and thrice repeating it, as if to intimate the importance of it,) in his last exercises of his Apostleship, dwelt upon it very sweetly; *The elders which are among you*, (said he,) *I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of CHRIST, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.* 1 Pet. v. 1—4.

5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch :

6 Whom they set before the apostles : and when they had prayed, they laid *their* hands on them.

7 And the word of God increased ; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly ; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Reader! behold here again, what a lovely representation is made of the Church! As in the preceding verses we stood to admire the Lord's Apostles in the department of their office, let us pause a moment now to contemplate the beautiful order of the people. The saying of the Apostles, we are told, *pleased the whole multitude*. And if we call to mind, how God the HOLY GHOST all along, from the day of *Pentecost*, had been calling CHRIST's redeemed ones from the darkness of nature to the light of grace; we shall find, that the Church was indeed a multitude little short of ten thousand: (see chap. i. 15. ii. 41. iv. 4. and v. 14.) and yet all were pleased with the Apostles' proposal. What a delightful view it affords of the Church of Jesus! And, though it is not said, yet we may reasonably conclude, such was the love of the whole Church to the persons and labors of the Apostles, that while they were giving themselves to prayer, as well as the ministry of the word, the people were not unfrequently at prayer for them. *Paul*, in his days, was so sensible of the blessedness of being borne by the arms of the Church, in the prayers of the people before the mercy-seat, that he desired the brethren to pray for him, and his fellow labourers. 1 Thess. v. 25. 2 Thess. iii. 1. Heb. xiii. 18. And it must be in all ages of the Church a blessed thing, and more especially in times like the present, when the people lodge much prayer, and daily add to the stock before the Great Head of his Church, that the labors of his poor servants be commissioned and owned by the LORD. It hath been said, and I see no ground to doubt the truth of it, that many a minister of CHRIST, hath found the blessed effects of his peoples' prayers, in the grace and abilities he hath at certain seasons received from the LORD. Certain it is, that if a Church is looking for blessings from the LORD, in the ministry of his word; it would be well to be looking at the same time, that the LORD would bless the messenger which brings them; that both minister and people may be blessed of the LORD, and send up their thanksgivings together.

The seven men here chosen by the Church, if we may judge by their names, were all taken from the Jews of Greece, for there is not one Hebrew name among them. And it may serve to shew, how much the whole body of the people were earnest, that the murmuring which arose from that quarter should have a full redress, since those

who were appointed to this part of government, were all taken from their own people. Reader do not fail to observe, how the stratagems of Satan were defeated by his own weapons, since the very plan he devised to separate believers, became the means of uniting them more closely together, in forming a body of holy men, and full of the HOLY GHOST, to listen to the sorrows and enquire into the wants of the LORD's family, that they might be softened and relieved.

I do not think it necessary to detain the Reader, with dwelling on the names and characters of the seven men here chosen. Indeed, excepting the first of them, *Stephen*, (and of him I shall have occasion to speak somewhat particularly, in the close of this and the following chapter,) the HOLY GHOST hath recorded no more than their names. So that, where the LORD is silent, it should seem to be our wisdom to be silent also. But I beg the Reader to notice, the method the church was pleased to adopt, for their being ordained to their office, in setting them before the Apostles, and after prayer, the Apostles laying their hands on them. And let it not be overlooked, that when the Apostles directed the Church to look out seven men from among them, they were supposed to be brethren; that is, persons regenerated by the HOLY GHOST; *holy brethren*, as they are elsewhere called *partakers of the heavenly calling*. Heb. iii. 1. In those days, none would have been chosen into the humblest office of the ministry, who was not himself a partaker of grace, and savingly called by the HOLY GHOST. For how should a dead sinner minister in the life-giving word and doctrine? Neither can any man have a feeling affection for the Church of CHRIST's body, as a body, who hath never himself by regeneration, *tasted that the LORD is gracious*. 1 Pet. ii. 1—5. These men, therefore, were themselves brethren, and by regeneration, *made partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust*. 2 Pet. i. 4. And yet we see, that while without this work of God the SPIRIT upon their souls, they would not have been qualified for the office the Apostles had directed; they were not permitted to enter upon it without prayer, and the laying on of the Apostles' hands. See Numb. xxvii. 18. to the end. Oh! that the entrance into any, and every department of CHRIST's sheepfold, was never made but by the door, CHRIST himself, and by the porter, which is God the SPIRIT by regeneration. Very awful is that scripture, in every instance, where this is not the case. John x. 1, 2, 3.

What a short, but blessed account, this passage closeth with; of the increase of the word; the multiplying the number of true believers; and what is more extraordinary, the great company of the Jewish priests, (for there were no other in those days in *Jerusalem*,) which joined the faithful. But what cannot the LORD the SPIRIT accomplish? There is a provision in the covenant which never fails. Psm. cx. 3. John vi. 37. xvii. 2. Reader! it is by the virtue and efficacy of this covenant, *ordered in all things, and sure*; faithful ministers of the LORD JESUS, as well as the Apostles in those early ages of the Church, labor in the word and doctrine; and like the great father of the faithful, *against hope believe in hope*. Rom. iv. 18.

8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

9 ¶ Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called *the synagogue* of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia, and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and *against* God.

12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon *him*, and caught him, and brought *him* to the council,

13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous *words* against this holy place, and the law :

14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

15 And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

We here enter upon the interesting history of *Stephen*, the first of the seven brethren, in the government of the Church under the Apostles, and the first martyr in the Church of CHRIST, after the descent of the HOLY GHOST at *Pentecost*. It is evident, that *Stephen* preached, as well as did *wonders and miracles among the people*; for we read, that those who opposed him, *were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit, with which he spake*. But the most important point for us to consider is, what blasphemy it was, with which these foes to CHRIST, and to his people, charged him? I conceive this to be no unimportant point. For if, as I am inclined to believe, *Stephen* died a martyr to the GODHEAD of the LORD JESUS, it will throw a light upon this part of the Church's history, and serve to teach us, that this glorious truth, which is the very foundation of our holy faith, was then, as in modern times it hath since been, what infidelity most revolts at.

If the Reader will gather into one point of view, the several charges before the council brought against *Stephen*, and consider them a little attentively, he will perceive that the whole together were *four* in number. *First*, Blasphemous words against *Moses*. *Secondly*, Against God. *Thirdly*, Blasphemous words against this holy place, meaning most probably, the temple; or, perhaps, the city of *Jerusalem*, called the holy city, in which the temple stood. Matt. xxvii. 53. And, *fourthly*, Against the law. Now, by ana-

lyzing these several and distinct charges, and examining them, one by one, under their respective heads, we shall be enabled to form a clear apprehension of the ground upon which the council acted, when stoning *Stephen*, according to the Jewish law, for the supposed blasphemy.

And, *first*, concerning the blasphemous words against *Moses*. It is, indeed, an extraordinary, and to this time an unheard-of accusation, to talk of blasphemy against a man. For nothing can be called blasphemy, except it hath the LORD for its object. Blasphemy, is peculiarly, and specially, a sin against Him. But here was the drift of their resentment. *Stephen* had said, that the LORD *Jesus* would change the customs, that is, the rites, which *Moses* had delivered to the people. Indeed, the LORD had done it. Those rites were only shadowy representations, and *CHRIST* himself was the substance; and as such, the whole of *Moses's* institutions, having accomplished the end for which they were originally appointed, did of themselves cease. But, as this doctrine implied, that *Moses* was the servant of *CHRIST*, and consequently *GOD*; He who was with the angel, (as he told them in the following chapter,) when speaking to *Moses* from the bush; (chap. vii. 38.) the conclusion became undeniable, that *CHRIST* was *GOD*; and this they deemed blasphemy. I pray the Reader to turn to Heb. iii. 5, 6.

The *second* charge of blasphemy against *GOD*, could have been no other than the ascribing divine honors to the LORD *JESUS CHRIST*. And if the Reader will in this place, by way of ascertaining more clearly the matter of fact, anticipate in some measure *Stephen's* history, by turning to the close of it, towards the end of the next chapter, (verses 56, 57, 58.) he will immediately perceive, by what this faithful servant of the LORD then said, how firm his mind must have been in the belief of *CHRIST's* GODHEAD. We there find him exclaiming in a rapture of holy joy, and regardless of all around him, that he saw the LORD *Jesus* in person, as the *Shechinah* in the Old Testament, which manifested the presence of the LORD, used to appear; and nothing could be more decisive in proof, that *Stephen* considered *CHRIST* as *GOD*. Indeed his enemies themselves so interpreted *Stephen's* words, and as such, unable to suppress their indignation, they dragged him instantly from before the council, and stoned him with stones till he died. Nothing, surely, can be more full in point, that *Stephen* died a martyr to the profession of the GODHEAD of *CHRIST*. See Levit. xxiv. 16, 23. 1 Kings xxi. 13. Deut. xvii. 2—7.

For the *third* of those charges against *Stephen*, namely, blasphemous words in relation to the temple, or the city, we may consider this as in some degree included in the former, being by a necessary consequence implicated in it. For, if the LORD *Jesus* would destroy the temple, it implied the divinity of his nature in the deed. Indeed *CHRIST* had predicted the destruction of it, Matt. xxiv. 1, 2. But then it was for rejecting him. Luke xix. 44. And, therefore, here also was an indirect acknowledgment of *Stephen's* faith in the GODHEAD of the LORD *JESUS*. *Stephen*, as a Jew, would have been equally shocked, as those carnal Jews were, at the idea of any one destroying their beloved city and temple. But *CHRIST* as *GOD*, in the faith of *Stephen*, not only reconciled that, and every other event which the LORD appointed, but gave him an holy joy, in contemplating the sovereignty of *JESUS*.

And, *lastly*, for the *fourth* of those charges; blasphemous words against the law; the very introduction of the Gospel, in superseding the law, became blasphemy in the extreme, in the eyes of a Jew. And as none but He who gave the law could have authority to do away the law, by so much, while *Stephen* asserted that CHRIST would change the customs, which Moses delivered; plainly he asserted also, that CHRIST was God. So that each, and every one of those charges, to which they annexed the crime of blasphemy, most evidently prove their views of the faith of *Stephen*. He stood forth a firm champion for the GODHEAD of CHRIST; and it was for this supposed blasphemy, for which he was stoned. Indeed, in the very moment of his death, he committed his soul into the hands of the LORD JESUS as God. LORD JESUS! (said he,) *receive my spirit?* chap. vii. 59.

I stay not to notice, (though highly meriting our notice, in respect to the LORD's tender regard to his faithful servant,) what is said in the close of this chapter, of the bright countenance of *Stephen*, like an angel, which all in the council, it is said, beheld. I cannot speak upon it with any decision. As such, I rather decline any observations, than to run the hazard of speaking presumptuously. But, I would just humbly ask, might it not have been similar to the case of *Moses*, when in the Mount. Exod. xxxiv. 29, 30. And, if so, were not both instances, *Moses* and *Stephen*, from the same LORD JESUS? But, as God the HOLY GHOST hath not been pleased to record any thing further than the fact itself, it becomes us not to enquire. But of one point we are taught, and in which we cannot err. *Stephen* was here engaged in his LORD's cause; and for the testimony of JESUS, he was brought before the council. Hence CHRIST's promise. Luke xxi. 12—15. Very blessed is it, therefore, to discover, as in the case of *Stephen*, that a suited grace is always dispensed, as the circumstances of the LORD's tried ones shall require. *As thy day is, thy strength shall be.* Reader! let you and I take occasion from this view of *Stephen*, to calculate upon it for every hour of need, and especially like his, for the hour of death. Oh! for the LORD in that season to be eminently present, as he assuredly will, with all his redeemed. LORD! *lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon my soul!* that *when I awake up, I shall be satisfied with thy likeness, and behold thy face in righteousness!*

REFLECTIONS.

READER! ponder well even in this golden age of the Church, how tarnished with abuse the LORD's mercies were, when murmurings arose from partial ministrations of the good things of God's providences. Behold from it, my soul, and learn what a mass of corruption, the un-renewed part of our fallen nature is, and what a handle Satan makes of it to interrupt the peace of the Church! But learn also, how the LORD the SPIRIT takes occasion therefrom, to raise improvements for his people. The appointment of inferior officers in the Church of CHRIST, took its rise from hence. And in how many instances, have they since that time, proved a blessing. But what a sweet relief ought such views of the imperfection of the best of Churches bring to the mind, in the recollection, that amidst all the errors of men, the

LORD's truth is the same; and, however brethren, through the infirmity of a fallen nature, may neglect one another; JESUS never overlooks, or neglects his people. Precious LORD JESUS! let me never lose sight of this.

Happy and prosperous is that Church of CHRIST, where men of good report, and full of the HOLY GHOST, minister in her government, and are helpful to the LORD's family. And blessed must be those ordinances, where faithful pastors, like the Apostles, give themselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. Not serving tables, and mingling with the carnal, and learning their works; neither as being lords over God's heritage; but being ensamples to the flock, in word, in conversation, in faith, in charity.

Oh! for the faith of *Stephen*, to be valiant for the truth, amidst all the libertines of the present day. JESUS will own and bless all such. Their witness is in heaven, and their record on high. And, though a brightness like that of *Stephen*, may not, because it is needed not, shine upon their countenances, to the view of their foes; yet, the LORD will cause their eyes to be so directed to Him in faith, that their souls will be enlightened, and their faces shall not be ashamed.

CH A P. VII.

CONTENTS.

The History of Stephen is continued. He preacheth before the Council; is interrupted in the Midst of his Discourse by his Enemies; dragged forth from before the Council, and stoned.

THEN said the high priest, Are these things so?

The chapter opens with the demand of the high priest, that *Stephen* should answer to the charges brought against him; or rather, he takes the matter as already granted, and saith, *are these things so?* Not in the least overawed by the wonderful sight, which he, and all that sat in the council saw, (as related in the foregoing chapter,) in the glory like an angel on *Stephen's* countenance; the faithful servant of the LORD, was, in the mind of this time-serving high priest, already condemned. He only waited to hear somewhat, which might, with a little more plausibility, call forth his sentence. Under these impressions, he cried out, as with an holy indignation, *are these things so?*

2 And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran,

3 And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee.

4 Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell.

5 And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not *so much as* to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when *as yet* he had no child.

6 And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and intreat *them* evil four hundred years.

7 And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place.

8 And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so *Abraham* begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac *begat* Jacob; and Jacob *begat* the twelve patriarchs.

9 And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him.

10 And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

11 Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance.

12 But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.

13 And at the second *time* Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh.

14 Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to *him*, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls.

15 So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers,

16 And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor, *the father of Sychem.*

We have reason to bless God the HOLY GHOST, not only for the occasion which gave rise to this precious discourse of *Stephen*, but for causing it to be recorded. For, although we have the whole history before, in the word of God; yet the manner in which *Stephen*, under the full impressions of the HOLY GHOST, (see chap. vi. 5. and chap. vii. 55.) delivered this sermon, hath thrown a light upon some parts of it, in a most blessed and interesting manner, and which I hope the LORD will enable us to perceive, as we prosecute the subject.

Stephen begins in a respectful manner, such as became him. For, although the present *Sanhedrim* was composed of very different characters from those holy men of old; which, at the first institution of the order were appointed and consecrated of God; (compare Numb. xi. 16, 17. with Acts iv. 5, 6, 7. see also the Commentary on those verses;) yet the order was the same, being of the LORD's appointment. And this holds good in all ages, and upon all occasions. Rom. xiii. 1. I admire the expression *Stephen* useth, when he calleth the LORD, *the God of glory.* And I would humbly ask, whether *Stephen* did not mean the same glorious Person as appeared to *Moses* in the bush, and which he takes notice of in his discourse, (verse 30.) For the appearing to *Abraham* at the time *Stephen* speaks of, and the appearing to *Moses* in the after age of the Church, at the bush, were both on the same covenant concern; and in both, the LORD called himself by the same name. Gen. xv. 18. Exod. iii. 6. And who this glorious person was, cannot be far to learn. *Stephen* himself hath explained, (verse 38.) He calls him the *angel which spake to Moses in the mount.* Now that angel which spake to *Moses* in the mount, expressly called himself JEHOVAH. See Exod. iii. 6. And CHRIST is both the covenant himself, and the angel or messenger of the covenant. Isaiah xlii. 6. Mal. iii. 1. And had this not been the case, in both these transactions, with *Abraham* and *Moses*, as well as upon numberless other occasions, when this angel is said by *Stephen*, (verse 38.) to have spake not only to *Moses*, but to *our fathers*, how could the LORD JESUS tell the Jews, as he did tell them, that *they had never heard the FATHER'S voice at any time, nor seen his shape?* John v. 37. It appears to me I confess, that this decision of the LORD JESUS becomes an unanswerable argument, (in addition to the many other collateral testimonies we have,) that both the manifestations and words, which were made to the old Church before the incarnation of CHRIST, were by Him, who in the fulness of time, was to openly tabernacle, in substance of our flesh, among his people, and intended as so many intimations, to keep alive the expectation of that glorious event, in the minds of the LORD'S people.

Stephen having thus opened his subject at that part, where alone it could be opened, beginning with *the God of glory*; he takes up the history of the Church at the revelation of the covenant with *Abraham*, and refers his hearers to the well-known circumstances of the opening of that Covenant-transaction, in the call of *Abraham*. I need not

follow *Stephen* through the whole of what he hath rehearsed within the compass of those few verses. The whole particulars are all upon record in the life of the patriarch. But I would rather call upon my Reader to remark with me, the several very interesting things *Stephen* hath stated, in respect to *Abraham*; and which, more or less, belong to all *Abraham's seed*, which are also heirs according to the promise, Gal. iii. 29.

The LORD called *Abraham* from his father's house, and from his kindred. The LORD, though promising to give the land, to which he called him for an inheritance to him, and to his seed after him; yet for a long space gave him no possession there, no not a foot's breadth. The LORD, though promising that his seed should be as the stars of the heaven for multitude, yet, for many a year, suffered him to go childless, Gen. xv. 1—6. And even when *Ishmael* was born, the LORD taught him, that this son of the bondwoman, was not the heir, in whom the promise was to be vested, and from whose seed after the flesh the promised seed should come. Gen. xvii. 18—21.

Pause, Reader, and contemplate the subject spiritually as it is with all the LORD's people; and then say, are not *Abraham's* children, after the faith, more or less, exercised the same? The call of *Abraham* was a pattern how the LORD, in after ages, would call the spiritual offspring of his dear SON, Isaiah xlv. 3, 4, 5. They are also called, from their father's house, and from their kindred, in the Adam-nature of a fallen state; and are commanded to forget their own people, and their father's house, when sovereign grace hath opened their eyes to a sense of sin, and a desire of salvation, Psm. xlv. 10. And as *Abraham*, at the call of God, *went out not knowing whither he went*: so *Abraham's* seed are exercised the same way. By faith like him they are going forth in the strength of CHRIST, looking for a city which hath foundations whose builder and Maker is God, Heb. xi. 8, 9, 10. And how sweet are discovered, in the after fruits of faith, the many exercises of the LORD's tried ones? There can be no real trust in the LORD without faith. Heb. xi. 6. Untried faith is in reality no faith. While the LORD acts only as a *promising* God; our knowledge of Him, and our dependance upon Him, can only be by faith. But when this promising God becomes a *performing* God, faith then is lost in enjoyment. So that in fact, during the time of waiting, is the only time for the exercise of this precious gift of a Covenant God in CHRIST. And, Reader! let me detain you one moment longer to observe, that it is on this account faith is so highly spoken of by God the HOLY GHOST, in his blessed word. We read of the *precious blood of Christ*. 1 Pet. i. 19. Of the *exceeding great and precious promises*. 2 Pet. i. 4. And with these (wonderful to tell) is named, *precious faith also, more precious than gold*. 1 Pet. i. 7. And what can be more precious, as a fruit, and effect, of the LORD's grace, in the heart of his redeemed, than when a child of God, like *Abraham*, the great father of the faithful, *against hope* is enabled to *believe in hope*. Rom. iv. 18. Oh! for grace to be so wholly emptied of self, as to be always living *upon CHRIST*, walking *with CHRIST*, and trusting in CHRIST! Sweet faith! LORD increase our faith! See 1 Pet. i. 7. and Commentary.

In prosecuting *Stephen's* sermon, I would beg the Reader to observe

with me, how this faithful servant of the LORD takes notice of the LORD's grace, in giving *Abraham* the outlines of the Covenant, which was to run on so, many hundred years before the promised seed should come, to whom the promise was made, and in whom the whole was to be fulfilled. There is somewhat very blessed in this; and merits our concern. *Abraham* himself was not to live to see the accomplishment. Neither *Isaac*, nor *Jacob*, the heirs with him of the promise. Neither the patriarchs which followed. But what of that? Though so long an interval was to take place, the thing was the same: and the promise itself certain and sure. The Covenant of circumcision was appointed as an outward sign, or seal, to carry on the assurance of it from father to son. Hence, with this scriptural rite, the Patriarchs handed down in successive generations, this great promise of God, as more precious, yea, infinitely more precious, as the blessed Charter of grace, than rich men transmit to their heirs the titles of their estates, and all their perishing treasures.

And these things induced in the hearts of the Patriarchs, through divine teaching, an holy familiarity and acquaintance with the person, work, and glory of CHRIST the promised seed. *Abraham saw the day of CHRIST afar off, rejoiced, and was glad.* John viii. 56. *Isaac* lived and died, in the full assurance, not only of his own personal interest in the same, but that *in him the promised seed should be called*: and by faith, blessed *Jacob and Esau*, concerning things to come, Heb. xi. 18—20. (See Commentary there.) And no less *Jacob*, when he was a dying, by faith, in the same glorious expectation, blessed both the sons of *Joseph*, and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff, Heb. xi. 21. In short, so did all the fathers in succession. They all lived, and they all died, as they had lived, *in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them.* They cherished the blessed hope; carried it about with them wherever they went, as in their arms, and wore it close to their heart. And thus, *the father to the children made known the LORD's truth!* Isaiah xxxviii. 19. See also Gen. xlviii. 21. l. 24, 25.

Reader! do not dismiss this part of *Stephen's* sermon, in the view of the patriarchs, and their faith in CHRIST, without first enquiring whether you are among the *followers of them, who now through faith and patience inherit the promises.* Remember, that the promise to which these holy men of old looked, and which they died in the full assurance of, hath been for many hundred years since fulfilled, in the person and work of the LORD JESUS CHRIST. And now in the possession of those blessed truths, which their faith had in view, but which we have seen accomplished; our faith is now exercised, in looking forward to the sure expectation of all these blessings, resulting from the whole, in grace here, and glory hereafter. Reader! it is precious faith, when *we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.* Romans v. 2.

I pass over the several records of the Patriarchs, in what *Stephen* hath just glanced at, in those verses, of their going down into Egypt. For, although the events themselves are highly interesting, and would well recompense a long and close attention to them; yet they would far exceed the limits I am constrained to observe, in this *Poor Man's Commentary.*

17 But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt.

18 Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph.

19 The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil intreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end that they might not live.

20 In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months:

21 And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son.

22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.

23 And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.

24 And seeing one *of them* suffer wrong, he defended *him*, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian:

25 For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not.

26 And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another.

27 But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler, and a judge over us?

28 Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday?

29 Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a

stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons.

The time of the promise here alluded to, doth not mean the coming of the promised seed; for this was yet far remote: but the promise, which was to take place, at the end of the *four hundred years*; when the LORD would deliver his people, out of the afflictions of *Egypt*, and judge that nation (verses 6, 7). And how exact the LORD was to his promise, the HOLY GHOST hath caused it to be recorded, with peculiar marks of distinction; and enjoined the perpetual remembrance of it, in his Church. *Exod. xii. 41, 42.* If the Reader finds some little difficulty to reconcile the two different dates of years spoken of on this occasion; that difficulty will cease, by recollecting that the commencement of reckoning, doth not begin at the oppressions of *Egypt* over *Israel*, for those cruelties were not exercised until after the death of *Joseph*. And indeed, the whole sojourning of *Israel* in *Egypt*, could not have been more than two hundred and forty years. See *Gen. xxv. 26.* and *Gen. xlvii. 9.* and *Gen. i. 26.* But when, as in this Chapter, and at the promise first given, *Gen. xv. 13. 16.* we are to reckon *four hundred years*; the account of reckoning begins after the birth of *Isaac*. And for the thirty years the account is taken from *Abraham's* first sojourning in *Egypt*. *Gen. xii. 10.* with *Exod. xii. 40.*

The deliverance of *Israel* from *Egypt*, beside the history as a matter of fact, and beside the personal mercy of the redemption, to the children of God *then*; was a sweet type of the LORD's *Israel now*, and in all ages of the Church; being brought out of the *Egypt* of sin, by the Person, work, and glory, of the LORD JESUS CHRIST. In all, and every instance of the Church's bondage, God in Covenant speaks over again the same words, as he graciously said to *Abraham*: *The nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God. They shall come forth, and serve me!* What a reviving thought to bondage souls!

If I detain the Reader for a moment in this place, it shall only be to remark, what a beautiful type of the LORD JESUS *Moses* was, in numberless instances, in relation to his Church and people. The HOLY GHOST, by his servant *Paul*, in his Epistle to the Hebrews; Chapters iii. and xi. hath thrown great light upon this Scripture history, concerning *Moses* and the Church; and especially, in relation to his being in many points, a type as well as a servant of his Almighty LORD, and SAVIOR.

One feature, I particularly beg to notice to the Reader, concerning this man, which to me I confess is striking. *Stephen* saith, in his account of him, that *he supposed his brethren would have understood, how that God by his hand would deliver them.* Now, we find no notice taken of this apprehension in the mind of *Moses*, in the history which we have of him at large in *Exodus*. Nay, on the contrary, when in the after days of *Moses's* life, and when at the bush, the LORD called him to this service, we find a strong reluctance on the part of *Moses*, to go upon so arduous an undertaking. It was very gracious, therefore, in God the HOLY GHOST, to put it into the heart and mouth of *Stephen*, to tell the Church this concerning *Moses*; for

it opens a very interesting train of thoughts in the mind, and which under divine teaching, cannot fail of becoming highly profitable. In the relation we have of Moses's history, Exod. ii. 10, 11. the chasm, from *Moses* being brought from the time of nursing by *Pharaoh's* daughter, to his being grown, is not filled in with any date; and we are left to form our own conjectures, how long it might have been from his being brought to *Pharaoh's* daughter, to the time that it came into his heart to visit his brethren. But the LORD the SPIRIT was pleased to think it important, that the Church should know; and therefore by *Stephen* we are told, that he was forty years old, when this event took place. Here then evidently we behold, the first impulse breaking out in the mind of *Moses* under the LORD, of his relationship to *Israel*, and that *Israel* in CHRIST. And I pray the Reader yet further to remark, the very words which GOD the HOLY GHOST useth, for they are striking: *it came into his heart, to visit his brethren.* How? I would humbly ask, but by the SPIRIT of the LORD. He was now in the Court of *Pharaoh*. An adopted son of the King's daughter. But *Moses*, though all this while, for forty years, insensible as it should seem, to the afflictions of his people; yet *could not but know himself by the marks of circumcision in his flesh* of the seed of *Abraham*. These things were smothered, hid away, from the observation, or knowledge even of those in the Court of *Pharaoh*, who knew his origin; yea, probably *Moses* would have wished while unawakened by grace, to have forgotten them himself. But, when the LORD put it in his heart, he felt the full tide of *Israel's* stream, in love to return; and from the same Almighty teaching drew conclusions, that the GOD of *Abraham*, which prompted him to deliver his oppressed brethren, must have taught them also! Reader! what a train of the most precious thoughts arise from hence, in proof of grace-union in CHRIST, and sometimes breaking out in a way perfectly undescribable, in confirmation of it, even before any open work is wrought in the soul by regeneration, as in the instance of *Moses*, to make us sensible whose we are, and to whom we belong! Reader! Is it not sweet to you? It is to me indeed!

30 And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush.

31 When *Moses* saw *it*, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold *it*, the voice of the Lord came unto him,

32 *Saying*, I *am* the God of thy fathers, the God of *Abraham*, and the God of *Isaac*, and the God of *Jacob*. Then *Moses* trembled, and durst not behold.

33 Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground.

34 I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.

35 This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send *to be* a ruler, and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush.

36 He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

37 This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear.

38 This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness, with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and *with* our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us;

39 To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust *him* from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt,

40 Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for *as for* this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.

41 And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

42 Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices *by the space of* forty years in the wilderness?

43 Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch,

and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them : and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.

44 Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen.

45 Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David ;

46 Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.

47 But Solomon built him an house.

48 Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands ; as saith the prophet,

49 *Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool : what house will ye build me ? saith the Lord : or what is the place of my rest ?*

50 Hath not my hand made all these things ?

Reader ! pause to remark, a *second forty years* in the life of *Moses* had run out, before those visions of God began, which took place at the bush. What a wonder-working God is Israel's God, in relation to his dealings with his people ? We find, that at all ages, at all occasions, and in all departments of life, the manifestations of his love, in the first calls of his grace, have been, and still are, made known. No time, no place, nor circumstances, can preclude their operation. The charter of grace runs in very certain terms : *All that the FATHER giveth me shall come to me. John vi. 37. In that day that the great trumpet shall be blown, they shall come which were ready to perish. Isaiah xxvii. 13.*

I have already, in the opening of this Chapter, made it appear very plain, that it was the Son of God which spake to *Moses* from the bush : (see verses 2—16. and the Comment upon the passage :) but in this place I would beg to add a short observation further. The inspired writer of the book of *Exodus*, Chap. iii. 4. saith, that God *called unto him out of the midst of the bush.* And here *Stephen* confirms the same, when he saith, that the words spoken were in a Covenant manifestation, as *the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.* So that it was not simply God, but God in Covenant ; not only the glory of God in the person of CHRIST, but the glory of God's grace in him. John i. 18. And I would not have the Reader overlook, or forget, that this manifestation had such a strong and lasting impression on the mind of *Moses*, that when he came

to die, and as he blessed the tribes of Israel before his death, he dwelt with more affection upon this discovery of Covenant-love to his soul at the bush, than upon any other circumstance in his whole eventful life. As he pronounced his dying benediction, (and which was partly prophetic,) upon the tribe of *Joseph*, the blessings he prayed for were all founded *in the good will of Him that dwelt in the bush*: Deut. xxxiii. 16. meaning God in flesh; CHRIST sealing all the blessings of the Covenant. *Moses*, by faith, beheld the SON of God then in our nature, as in a bush not consumed, because God dwelt in it: and finishing in that nature the whole purposes of redemption. Reader! first impressions of God's revelations in CHRIST are precious things. A child of God will think of them with holy joy, in the last hours of his dwelling in a body of flesh. And not unfrequently will they arise warm in the soul, when all the powers of nature are growing cold, in approaching death.

One word more, on this passage. When the LORD speaks of having seen the affliction of his people, in *Egypt*, having heard their groanings, knew their sorrows, and was come down to deliver them; in the commission given to *Moses*, we must look to an infinitely greater than *Moses*, and behold the LORD JESUS CHRIST. It is JESUS which is come down to deliver his people, from more than the Egyptian state of bondage, even from the captivity of sin and hell, and everlasting destruction. And the LORD's people are indeed his people, by every tie which can make them so; from the everlasting betrothing of the Church, through all the time-state of the present existence, and leading into the eternity, which is to follow.

I admire the grace of the LORD, in repeating the assurance, of having perfect knowledge of his peoples' sorrows. *I have seen; I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt.* Reader! think how since that period, the LORD hath given his Church a more palpable conviction, of the interest he takes in all that concerns his redeemed; in not only knowing, and seeing their afflictions, but by a fellow-feeling, taking part with them in all that belongs to them. *Whoso toucheth you, toucheth the apple of his eye.* Zech. ii. 8. *In all their affliction, he is afflicted.* Isaiah lxiii. 9. Heb. v. 1, 2.

And there is a world of tenderness in the expression, *my people*. For it not only implies a peculiarity, whereby they differ from all the world beside; but a property, a right, which in every point, distinguishes them from every other nation, under heaven. It is indeed a name, to signify the LORD's right in them, and their right in all that belongs to the LORD, by virtue of their relationship, and a oneness of nature in him. Sweetly sung the Church to this union, when she said, *I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine.* Song vi. 3.

I forbear to enlarge on the several other parts which *Stephen* brings forward, in reciting the outlines of the history of the Church. Indeed it cannot be necessary, as the word of God hath the whole very largely set forth, in its proper place. And the subject is too plain to need a comment. If the Reader wishes any further scriptural testimony, in confirmation, I would recommend him, to consult some, or all, of the following scriptures. Exod. xix. 3, 9, 10, and Exod. xx. 2. Deut. v. 2, 3, 4. Exod. xxxiii. 11. Psm. lxxxiii. 18. Exod. xxiv. 18. 1 Kings viii. 27. Isaiah lxvi. 2—13.

51 Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers *did*, so *do* ye.

52 Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:

53 Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept *it*.

54 ¶ When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with *their* teeth.

55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,

56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,

58 And cast him out of the city, and stoned *him*: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon *God*, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

I beg the Reader to be very particular, in observing the charge which *Stephen* brings, of his opponents' resisting the Person, and offices, of the HOLY GHOST. And I no less beg of him to observe, that he brings the same charge against their fathers. Hence, it will undeniably follow, that it was God the HOLY GHOST, who presided over the Church, as well under the Old Testament, as the New. The Reader should carefully cherish those sweet testimonies, to the Almighty agency of the HOLY GHOST; (and especially in an age like the present,) as peculiarly blessed. And I pray the Reader to observe, how blessedly and decidedly *Stephen* speaks, to the character of the

LORD JESUS, when calling him the *Just One*; a well known name among the Israelites, of the *Messiah*. Zeph. iii. 5. Zech. ix. 9. Acts iii. 14. Acts xxii. 14.

Let the Reader remark, for it is well worthy to be remarked, how very differently this sermon of *Stephen's* wrought, from that of *Peter's*, on the day of *Pentecost*. Chap. ii. 37. Here, the bitterness of their hearts was so great, that it could not be concealed, for they gnashed upon him with their teeth. There, the blessed contrition which followed shewed itself, in an earnest cry of the soul; *Men and brethren what shall we do?* And doth not the Reader immediately discover the cause? *Stephen's* sermon, was not a jot more pointed than *Peter's*; for in both, they were charged with murdering CHRIST. Acts ii. 23. But the mighty difference, in the effect of the preaching, arose from the work of GOD the HOLY GHOST, in the *one* instance; and the want of that Almighty work, in the *other*. Here lay all the difference. And, as *Stephen* told his auditory, this was the cause all along, with their fathers, as with them, *resisting the HOLY GHOST*. I very earnestly beg the Reader to consider well the subject. If men, and especially ministers, were but truly sensible of those things, with what earnestness would they seek the influences of the HOLY SPIRIT, from whose grace alone it is, that the word preached, can become profitable in them that hear it. Oh! thou Almighty LORD of thy Church! *do thou direct my heart into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for CHRIST*. 2 Thess. iii. 5.

There are many very blessed, and precious things, in this closing scene of the death of *Stephen*, highly meriting our closest attention; but I can only detain the Reader to mention them. His being *full of the HOLY GHOST* means, fresh manifestations and renewings of the HOLY GHOST, shed upon him more abundantly, to prepare him for the cruel, and painful death, which he was called to. It is not without a well-founded hope, (and this example serves in proof,) that special and peculiar exercises of the LORD's people are supported, with more than ordinary grace. A dying hour, is sometimes eminently sanctified with living enjoyments in the LORD. Deut. xxxiii. 25. Zech. xiv. 6, 7. What a gracious act of the LORD JESUS, was this manifestation of himself to *Stephen*, in such a moment? I pray the Reader both to mark the grace of the LORD to his servant; and no less to consider the revelation thereby made to the Church, as it really is, the fullest confirmation of his eternal power and GODHEAD. Let the Reader notice, how *Stephen* speaks of him, in his Mediator-character and office, while describing him as the *Shechinah*, in proof of his divine nature. And I beg him not to overlook the LORD's posture of *standing*; as if in readiness, both to receive *Stephen* to his arms, and to execute judgment upon his enemies. And I request the Reader the rather to notice this posture of the LORD JESUS, because, as far as I recollect, after the ascension of JESUS he is always spoken of as *sitting*, to receive his people, and to behold the destruction of his foes. Mark xvi. 19. Psm. cx. 1. *For the right hand of God*. See Ephes. i. 20.

I have already (Chap. vi.) stated the circumstances relating to the stoning of *Stephen*, as a full, and decided testimony, in proof that he died a martyr, for his asserting the GODHEAD of CHRIST. Hence I add nothing further on that subject in this place. But I must detain

the Reader, to call his attention for a moment, to what is said of *Saul*, who afterwards became the great Apostle *Paul*. This is the first account we have of him in Scripture. And here we find him, noted by the HOLY GHOST, as receiving the clothes of the witnesses, which stoned *Stephen*. *Paul* himself, when afterwards speaking of this awful transaction, saith, that *he was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him*. Acts xxii. 19, 20. Reader! what did the grace of GOD accomplish in this man? And what cannot the same grace accomplish in every heart of his people? How sweetly the Chapter closeth, in the relation of the death of *Stephen*? A loud voice like his LORD! And the humble imitation of the LORD's example, praying for his murderers! And was not CHRIST's prayer heard, and answered on the day of *Pentecost*? Acts ii. 36, 37. And in the conversion of *Paul*, was *Stephen's* prayer forgotten? Reader! mark the expression of the HOLY GHOST, respecting *Stephen's* death: *he fell asleep*. Remember! it is the language of GOD the SPIRIT, when speaking of the dead, which die in the LORD, to say, *he fell asleep*. Oh! how different, both in life, and death, are the living and dying in the LORD, from those who know not CHRIST! The dead in CHRIST are as much in union with CHRIST in death as life. For though death changeth the place, yet not the state. *They sleep in JESUS*! 1 Thess. iv. 14. Rev. xiv. 13. Rom. xiv. 8, 9. And mark *Stephen's* last words. *Calling upon GOD and saying LORD JESUS*. So then JESUS is GOD.

REFLECTIONS.

READER! let you and I bless GOD the SPIRIT, for this most precious sermon of his servant *Stephen*. Surely GOD the HOLY GHOST would not have caused it to have been so fully recorded, (since we have already the whole subject contained in it, at large in the scriptures before written,) had not this Almighty Teacher in the Church intended from it some sweet instructions, and which are here very particularly set forth. It is our mercy therefore to attend to them, and bless the LORD for his grace in giving them. And what a light is thrown upon the history of *Moses*, by *Stephen's* sermon, in that part of it (which without this information we should not have known,) of his early apprehension, that the LORD would use him, as an instrument, for the delivery of his brethren? And what a blessed proof we draw from *Stephen's* sermon, in addition to the other relations we have in Scripture, that it was the LORD JESUS, which spake to *Moses* from the bush. Reader! these are sweet things. May you and I learn to prize them very highly; and bless GOD the HOLY GHOST, in having given them to us, by his servant *Stephen*.

Precious LORD JESUS! be thou eternally loved, and praised, for the grace manifested to thy dying martyr, in such a season of peculiar trial. Oh! let thine whole Church, from age to age, be refreshed in the sweet assurance, such a memorable instance affords, of thy continual presence with thy people. May my soul, and the souls of all thy redeemed, learn from it, how we are to commit our departing spirits into thine Almighty hand, in the hour of death, as unto a faithful Creator!

C H A P. VIII.

CONTENTS.

The Church under Persecution; which affords Occasion to Philip to preach CHRIST in Samaria. Peter and John visit Samaria. The awful History of Simon Magus. Philip preacheth to an Æthiopian, and baptizeth him.

AND Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison.

4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad, went every where preaching the word.

5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.

8 And there was great joy in that city.

The opening of this Chapter, is connected with the history of *Stephen*, in the preceding. And it appears very plain, from what *Paul* related to *Agrippa*, Acts xxvi. 10, 11. that *Stephen's* death was followed with many others, in which *Paul* took part. And no doubt the HOLY GHOST hath caused this record to be made of *Paul*, purposely to magnify the exceeding riches, and freeness of grace, in such an illustrious display of it, as was manifested in the after conversion of *Paul*. See also Acts xxii. 4, 5. Gal. i. 13. As to those which were scattered abroad, it should seem to have been some of the seventy disciples, or probably some of the newly converted believers at the day of *Pentecost*. For we find, verse 1. that the Apostles remained firm at *Jerusalem*. And (verse 14.) they sent *Peter* and *John* to *Samaria*,

when they had received tidings of *Philip's* ministry in that city. It is more than likely, that however the *Sanhedrim* ventured to attack the disciples, they were overawed at present, not daring to touch the Apostles. The death of *Ananias and Sapphira*, was still before them. But, let the Reader observe, how much this persecution ministered to the promotion of the Gospel. And this was, as *Jesus* had appointed. See Matt. x. 23. Acts i. 8. Oh! could the enemies of *CHRIST* and his Church, but be made sensible, how the *LORD* overrules their malice to his glory, in causing them to become the very instruments, to bring about the reverse of what they intend, how would they sometimes shudder? Psm. lxxvi. 10.

The Reader will recollect, that about four years before, the *LORD* *Jesus* had visited *Samaria*. At which time the *LORD* had wrought the conversion of many of the people. John iv. 39—42. *Philip's* ministry differed from his Master's, in that *Philip* wrought miracles in *Jesus's* name, in confirmation of the truth: but we read of no miracle wrought by *Jesus*, when there. But I beg the Reader not to overlook, the comprehensive manner of *Philip's* preaching: *CHRIST*. Yes! all preaching is folded up in *CHRIST*. *JEHOVAH'S CHRIST*: is the One, and the only One Ordinance of heaven. Acts iv. 12. And let the Reader further observe, what powerful effects followed *Philip's* preaching, while *CHRIST* was the whole sum and substance; text, sermon, and application! We are told, that unclean spirits came out of many; and palsies, and lameness were healed. And might we not hope, that if the *LORD* the *SPIRIT* were to commission preachers now, as *Philip* was commissioned then, to preach *CHRIST*; would not the same blessed effects, spiritually considered, follow? Oh! ye ministers of the *LORD* *Jesus*! see to it, that *Philip's* plan be your plan: if ye hope the same blessings to follow, Preach *CHRIST* to the people! Devils, and all unclean spirits, must be dispossessed, when *GOD* the *HOLY GHOST* sends the word, and *CHRIST* is preached by his power.

9 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of *Samaria*, giving out that himself was some great one:

10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.

11 And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.

12 But when they believed *Philip* preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of *Jesus Christ*, they were baptized, both men and women.

13 Then Simon himself believed also; and

when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

14 ¶ Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:

15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:

16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

17 Then laid they *their* hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money,

19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.

20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.

23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

24 Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.

25 And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

I pray the Reader not to overlook, how the Church of God, in all ages, was broken in upon, by ungodly men. Here is a Sorcerer, and like another *Balaam*, one that used enchantment, rising up among the people, and professing great things. And this man carries matters with so good a face, that at the preaching of *Philip*, he puts on the appearance of being converted; and is said to *have believed*, that is, in head knowledge, and no further, he was convinced of the truth as it is in *JESUS*. And so plausible, even to *Philip* himself, (who was commissioned to work miracles, but not to read hearts,) appeared his conversion; that he was baptized, as well as others. But when *Peter*, and *John*, came down to *Samarita*; and the same miraculous gifts of the HOLY GHOST was poured out upon those whom the LORD had secretly inclined their hearts to the faith that is in *CHRIST JESUS*, as were given at *Pentecost*; then the detection of the hypocrisy of this awful character took place. For, as soon as he saw, through laying on of the hands of the Apostles, that the HOLY GHOST was given; he took for granted, that this power, as he conceived the Apostles possessed in themselves, would be more profitable if he could obtain it for gain, than his sham tricks had been, which he had before practised; and therefore he offered the Apostles money, that he might exercise the same privilege. Reader! pause and contemplate the extreme awfulness of such a character. To what a length men may run, and impose upon others, yea, and through the deceitfulness of sin, impose not unfrequently upon themselves also? How many of the character of *Simon Magus*, have been, and now are, in the midst of professing Churches, who can calculate? It is a solemn consideration; and enough to excite (as no doubt the LORD the SPIRIT designed it should) jealousy in every congregation! Neither would any truly faithful souls desire but to be jealous, with a godly jealousy; over themselves and others. Gold, never shrinks from the trial of the hottest fire. It is only tinsel, which cannot bear the furnace.

Ministers of *CHRIST* ought never to be discouraged, when at any time, unprincipled characters, like *Simon Magus*, creep in among the faithful. *CHRIST* himself had a *Judas* in his twelve. And *Philip* here baptized an infidel. In all ages of the Church, it hath been so; yea, it is profitable to the LORD's people, that it should be so. Such detections of hypocrites, when they take place, make the faithful truly jealous over themselves. And seeing that men, even the greatest men, like *Philip*, cannot discover hearts, the humble believer is hereby led to look to the LORD. And his language is: *Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.* Psm. cxxxix. 23, 24.

Reader! are you truly in earnest to know the ground upon which you stand? Though men cannot judge for you, the LORD's grace will enable you to judge for yourself. Look inward for divine teaching; and judge not by things outward, how promising soever they may appear. The witness of God the HOLY GHOST, in the heart and conscience, by his regenerating grace, is, in the place of a thousand arguments void of it. A man may learn, as *Simon Magus* did, by the preaching of *CHRIST*, who *CHRIST* is; and in head knowledge soar very high. But a soul-renewing apprehension of *CHRIST*, can only be learnt from God the HOLY GHOST. And when any one of those pre-

cious souls, whom the FATHER hath given to the SON, hath been awakened from the death of sin, by the regenerating power of the HOLY GHOST: when from feeling, and knowing, by that Almighty Teacher, the plague of his own heart, he hath passed under the rod of the Covenant: the sentence of death in himself, and the sentence of condemnation under God's holy law, which he is conscious he hath broken; when these precious effects are inwrought in the soul, by the power of the HOLY GHOST: there can be no deception here. And when he that thus convinceth of sin, hath convinced also of CHRIST's righteousness: when JESUS in his person, grace, and glory, is set up in the soul; and the heart is secretly and sweetly led to look to him, and to rely upon him for salvation: no soul deceptions can take place here, for such an apprehension of CHRIST, brings with it a sweet communion with CHRIST; and the believer is made to *abound in hope, through the power of the HOLY GHOST*. Rom. xv. 13.

I must not take leave of the awful character of *Simon Magus*, whose history hath given occasion to the observations I have offered upon it, without first remarking to the Reader, what *Peter* said to this man, after he had told him, that *he had no part, nor lot, in this matter*; that is, no part nor lot in CHRIST, neither in the gifts of the HOLY SPIRIT. The Apostle bid him *repent of this his wickedness*; meaning his awful offer of money, to purchase the gifts of the HOLY GHOST: concluding, (as it should seem,) that, added to the natural state of original and actual sin in the Adam-nature of universal apostacy, this sin of his was little short of the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the HOLY GHOST. Let the Reader pause over this view of the subject. And then let him ask, what tremendous judgment may be supposed to follow in the numberless cases of modern times, where the sale of ministerial appointments (and from this man's history called *Simony*,) have been carried on for money!

One word more on this awful instance of hypocrisy, in the case of *Simon Magus*. When *Peter* bid him repent of this sin, the Apostle could not mean, that he had power to change his own heart; or that he could practise a Christian grace, which alone comes from God's gift, and CHRIST is exalted to bestow. Neither could he mean, that one, whom he had before said had neither part nor lot in this matter of CHRIST, would even receive repentance unto life. But the repentance *Peter* spake of, was the repentance of this particular sin; for he puts a *perhaps* upon it: that this aggravated transgression might not bring a further load of guilt upon his head. And what *Simon Magus* in the answer he gave to *Peter* said, is to the same effect. He desired, as *Pharaoh* desired *Moses*, that he would pray for him. But, like *Pharaoh*, the heart remained hardened. He dreaded the punishment likely to follow, and would have avoided it. But we hear no cry of soul in either, for a change of heart. Exod. x. 17.

26 ¶ And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south, unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.

27 And he arose and went: and, behold, a man

of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship,

28 Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.

29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

30 And Philip ran thither to *him*, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?

31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.

32 The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth:

33 In his humiliation his judgement was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.

34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

36 And as they went on *their* way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, *here is* water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch: and he baptized him.

39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing,

40 But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Cesarea.

We have great cause to be thankful, for the insertion of this very interesting record, in this book of GOD; as it forms so beautiful a comment upon that part of *Isaiah's* writings, what hath been, and ever must be, dear to the Church: I mean the fifty-third Chapter of his Prophecy. Though we might have discovered, under divine teaching, much of CHRIST, in what the Prophet hath there written; yet we might have hesitated, in decidedly asserting, as we now do, and from an authority not to be questioned, that the Prophet wholly referred to the LORD JESUS CHRIST, in all that he hath there delivered. And was it not gracious then in GOD the SPIRIT, to put the matter beyond all doubt, when he commissioned *Philip*, and taught him from the same Scripture, to preach JESUS?

By the ministry of an Angel *Philip* is directed to go towards the wilderness of *Judæa*. It is very blessed, when ministers are sent forth by an immediate call of the HOLY GHOST. It becomes the most infallible testimony of success. Acts xvi. 9—14. 1 Thess. i. 9, 10. The wilderness, in this case, shall blossom as the rose. *Isaiah* xxxv. i. This *Æthiopian*, though he had been at *Jerusalem*, was returning as dark, and ignorant, as he came. But the LORD, though he found not CHRIST in the temple, was pleased to send a special messenger after him, that he might find him in the desert. And frequently the LORD throws a damp upon ordinances, in order to teach his people, that it is not by means of grace only, the LORD doth always work. The LORD hath blessed, and doth bless the means: and his people are commanded to make use of them, and attend them: but they are not unfrequently led to see, that the LORD works *without* them, as well as *with* them, according to the purposes of his own holy will and pleasure.

Every thing in the relation of this sweet scriptural record is beautiful and interesting. The HOLY GHOST directing *Philip* to go near to the chariot, and converse with the *Æthiopian*: the teachable mind which the LORD had given to this man: the having the Prophecy of *Isaiah* with him in his chariot, that *Philip* might preach from; and the portion which the man had been reading; all these, were in the predisposing circumstances of the LORD, to bring about the great event, which the LORD all along had intended. And it is very blessed sometimes to see, how corresponding things are made to meet together, in the accomplishment of the LORD's purpose. It were unnecessary to offer any comment upon this blessed portion of *Isaiah's* prophecy. The whole life and ministry of the LORD JESUS, and especially the concluding scenes of both, at his crucifixion and death, are direct in point; and so compleat a paraphrase of the prophecy, as

if it had been written after the events took place, instead of a prediction, so many hundred years before.

The question of the *Æthiopian*, to whom it referred, was highly proper, and which gave occasion to *Philip* to preach JESUS yet more fully. He took for his text these words of the prophet: but no doubt he amplified the subject, and held forth the LORD in all the endearing features of character. But what I chiefly wish may be impressed on the Reader's mind is, what GOD the HOLY GHOST hath said, and on which too much emphasis cannot be laid, *then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him JESUS.* Reader! do not overlook the whole burden of *Philip's* preaching was JESUS. This was his text and sermon in the city of *Samaria* (ver. 5) and the same was his text and sermon in the desert of *Judæa*. He found enough in this one text, and subject, for every preaching. Oh! that all modern Preachers could, and would, do the same.

What a short but comprehensive system of faith *Philip* made of it. And yet how very full, and to the point. In the belief of JESUS CHRIST the SON of GOD, is contained all the grand and leading doctrines of the everlasting Covenant. The separation of *Philip* from the *Eunuch* is very striking: and serves to teach us, that when the LORD's purposes are accomplished, it matters not how the instrument performing the LORD's will is removed. *Philip* was found at *Azotus*, about thirty miles distant, if, (as some suppose,) *Ashdod* was the same place, 1 Sam. vi. 17. And the *Eunuch* went on his way rejoicing. A new light shined in upon him; and a new life the LORD enabled him to enter upon. Well might he *rejoice in hope of the glory of God!*

REFLECTIONS.

READER! behold in this chapter a true representation of the church of JESUS in all ages. In *one view* persecuted, and while the friends of the bridegroom are cast down, the enemy triumphing with an high hand. In *another*, like *Samaria*, where the word of GOD is faithfully preached, and graciously received, there is great joy in that place. See, opposed to the faithfulness of *Peter* and *John*, the sorcery and hypocrisy of *Simon Magus*; and mark in all churches similar effects, from the contrast of grace and corruption; CHRIST and Belial.

Blessed JESUS! let the sweet view here afforded, of thy watchful eye over this *Æthiopian*, who came from a vast distance led by thy grace to seek the LORD, in sending a special messenger after him, be uppermost in the thoughts of thy people. JESUS hath said, and this sweet scripture confirms it, *all that the FATHER hath given him shall come to him.* And rather than one of CHRIST's little ones shall perish for lack of knowledge, the LORD will meet them in the desert; and when ordinances fail, the LORD will work without them. Oh! for grace, that all the ministers of the LORD's sending, may, like *Philip*, preach CHRIST to the people. And oh! that all, to whom the LORD shall reveal himself, as to this *Ethiopian*, may, like him, *go on their way rejoicing!*

CHAP. IX.

CONTENTS.

The wonderful History of Saul's Conversion. The Effect it had upon the Jews. Peter healeth Eneas, and raiseth Tabitha from the dead.

AND Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,

2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

The HOLY GHOST hath most graciously shown, in the history of *Saul of Tarsus*, to what a desperate height the human mind void of grace is capable of advancing, in malice and hatred, against the LORD, and that the church of CHRIST might learn, that there is no difference between one man and another, in the Adam-nature in which all are born; the LORD the SPIRIT hath here shewn in the example of one of the most eminent servants of JESUS, as he afterwards proved, what our state would do, while unawakened, and unregenerated, before the LORD: and what the LORD enables his people to do when called by sovereign grace from darkness to light, and from the power of sin and Satan to the living God. I pray the Reader to enter upon the wonderful history here before us with prayer to the LORD the SPIRIT, that all his gracious designs in giving this relation to the Church, and frequently repeated as it is, may be blessed both to the Writer and Reader of this *Poor Man's Commentary*; that in the perusal of it, *we may be made wise unto salvation through the faith that is in CHRIST JESUS*. See Acts xxii. and xxv. Gal. i. 1 Tim. i. 12, 16.

It should seem, that *Saul* at this time, had fairly routed all the preachers of the Gospel, which were at *Jerusalem*, excepting the Apostles; and that he made no attack upon them, we can only refer into the LORD's sovereignty, such as JESUS exercised when on earth, in their personal protection. (See John xviii. 8. and Commentary upon it.) And now the fury of his heart led him, as he said elsewhere, (Acts xxii. 4. and Acts xxvi. 9, 10, 11.) to persecute them even unto strange cities; determining, if it were possible, to exterminate CHRIST and his Church from the earth. Reader! pause and contemplate the subject, for it is exceedingly momentous. Who should have thought, that in the very moment this man was thus aiming destruction at the LORD's people, that he was himself a chosen vessel of CHRIST, and had been so from all eternity? Who that heard the blasphemy of the man, and beheld the bitter cruelties he exercised on the LORD's redeemed ones, compelling them to blaspheme, Acts xxvi. 11. could have conceived, that the very mouth which breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the

LORD, should soon preach CHRIST in all his fulness and glory; and to feel the salvation of souls so near his heart, as *to wish himself accursed from CHRIST for his brethren, his kinsmen after the flesh.* Rom. ix. 3. But what cannot the grace of God accomplish? What will it not accomplish, rather than one, whom the FATHER hath given the SON in an everlasting covenant which cannot be broken, should perish? Reader! I pray you at every step you take in this wonderful history, figure to yourself that you hear the man, whose conversion the HOLY GHOST hath here so sweetly recorded, proclaiming in his own words, *For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first JESUS CHRIST might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them, which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.* 1 Tim. i. 16.

I stop the Reader in the midst of the history, to beg him to remark with me, that it is evident, both from the stoning of *Stephen*, the binding unto prison, and death, men and women, and *Saul's* going to *Damascus* for the same purpose, the power of the *Sanhedrim* was not totally gone. But if he compares this part of *Saul's* history here, with that part of it we meet with when he stood before the council to answer for his life, as related Acts xxii. and when the chief captain rescued him from them; he will perceive that a change had then taken place. And if he will prosecute the subject a little further, (and it is a subject of some moment to ascertain the point,) he will discover, that the *Sanhedrim* now no longer exercised their authority in cases of life and death. For when *Festus* declared *Paul's* cause to *Agrippa*, he made this remarkable observation: *It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.* Acts xxv. 16. And what a beautiful proof this is, in confirmation of *Jacob's* prophecy, of the departure of the sceptre from *Judah* now CHRIST the *Shiloh* was come, and the gathering of the people to CHRIST was taking place in the earth! Gen. xlix. 10. See Commentary on Acts xxv. 16.

3 And as he journeyed, he came near *Damascus*: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*

Saul had made a vigorous pursuit in his journey, for he drew near to *Damascus* we are told, which was a distance little short of an hundred and fifty miles from *Jerusalem*, when stopped in his mad career. Thus far the LORD permitted him to go, and no further; and here was the proud waves of his boiling anger restrained. I have often thought, when pondering over this history, what a trembling state the poor timid disciples of *Jesus* must have been in, at *Damascus*, when they knew that this dreadful persecutor was hastening towards them, and that he was just at hand! And I have as often thought how sweetly *Jesus* hath taught his people from it, upon all occasions of exercise,

to bring all their anxieties to him, and in such a view as this, (and many more there are in scripture to the same amount,) leave every event with the LORD. See Isaiah xxxvii. Dan. iii. 17, 18. And I believe, if the LORD's people would learn to make just calculations of the LORD's dealings with them, they would find, that the seasons of more than ordinary distresses, have proved in the end, some more than ordinary seasons of special mercies. JESUS hath taken occasion from them, to make them more sensible of his presence and love. *There is a time to favor Zion.* Psm. cii. 13. And what time so blessed, as when the enemy threatens? What hours more precious to hear the love-calls of JESUS, as when the world storms, or our own hearts are misgiving? See that sweet scripture, Mark iv. 37—40.

But to proceed. The first act of sovereign grace here said to have been manifested to *Saul*, was a *light from heaven*. He afterward, when speaking of it, described it as above the brightness of the sun, though it was now mid-day, Acts xxvi. 13. And the next thing we hear was, that he fell to the earth. He was unhorsed at once, and the LORD struck him to the ground. And what a mercy that he had not struck him to hell. No doubt that in the after stages of life, when he looked back upon this transaction, he often thought so. Reader! so may every man; so may you, so may I, when we tremblingly look back, and ponder the days and years of our unregeneracy! Oh! the melting subject! To think of being preserved *in* JESUS CHRIST, while fighting *against* JESUS CHRIST. Jude i.

But what must have been the feelings of *Saul* when JESUS called him by name, yea twice, *Saul! Saul! why persecutest thou me!* That this was CHRIST, speaking in his human nature from heaven to *Saul*, is most evident by what followed, and which will presently be proved. But in the mean time, I pray the Reader not to overlook, nor hastily pass away from the very blessed manifestation, the LORD JESUS here made of himself. There is a great sweetness of expression, both in the LORD's calling *Saul* by name, and doing it twice, to express his earnestness and love. And there is a most blessed manner in our dear LORD's expostulation with *Saul*, in telling him, that his cruelties to his people were cruelties to himself. *Saul! Saul! why persecutest thou me?* Reader! never forget this. JESUS is himself persecuted whensoever one of his little ones is offended. *Whoso toucheth you, toucheth the apple of his eye.* Zech. ii. 8. If this was properly considered by the world, how would they tremble to afflict the LORD's people? The foot cannot be crushed, and the head not feel. And what a scripture of alarm is that, *For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD!* Psm. xii. 5.

5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: *it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

6 And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? and the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

Nothing surely can be more simply, and yet more beautifully related, than this wonderful action. Though it is a work wholly supernatural, in the LORD himself speaking from heaven to a poor sinner fallen to the earth, with the splendor of the glory which shone upon him; yet, through grace, we are enabled to enter into a proper apprehension of the whole scene. The LORD though overwhelming both the body and mind of *Saul* with shame and fear, yet gave him strength to put forth the earnest question of enquiry, and to ask who it was that thus condescended to speak to him. No doubt, the same Almighty power which shone *without*, shone no less *within* the mind of *Saul*, that when he said, *who art thou LORD?* his heart told him that it must be JESUS. He humbly and tremblingly put the question, but dreaded the answer. And when the LORD said, *I am JESUS whom thou persecutest!* what must have been the terrors of his soul? For although the LORD spake no doubt with tenderness, (for JESUS cannot speak to his own, but with tenderness as JESUS,) yet the self-reproaches, and self-condemnation, rushing like a torrent through every chamber of *Saul's* mind, could not but carry all before it, and must have left him a wreck of distress before the LORD. The only astonishment is, (and indeed can be ascribed to no other cause, but grace supporting him,) that he had not given up the ghost through anguish of spirit.

I admire the very blessed manner, and I think that the Reader will admire it also,) in which the LORD JESUS spake to *Saul*, in calling himself JESUS. Had he said, as he might have said, *I am the God of thy Fathers, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob;* *Saul* might have pleaded, that his persecution of the Church of CHRIST was out of zeal for the LORD's glory. But when from this *Shechinah*, JESUS himself spake to him as *Abraham's* God, and called himself JESUS, the weapons of all warfare fell at once from his hands, and all self-defence was taken away. And no doubt he lay trembling on the earth, expecting that the next words of the LORD would be to sentence him to hell.

Reader! pause, admire, and adore, the wonders of grace! For the same as was manifested here to *Saul*, is, and must be manifested, more or less, to every child of God. *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.* And when a child of God is recovered from the *Adam*-state of a fallen nature, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God; then to look back and review the wonderful mercy shewn him in all the properties of it, opens such a prospect, as cannot but melt down the soul to the very dust before God. The freeness of it, the seasonableness of it, the greatness of it, the unexpected, unlooked for, yea, unthought of, nature of it, and its everlasting, unchanging property; these fill the soul with *a joy unspeakable and full of glory!* Oh! the wonders of distinguishing grace! That when sinners deserve wrath, they find mercy. And when in themselves they are hastening to hell, the LORD is bringing them in CHRIST to heaven!

7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought *him* into Damascus.

No doubt, the whole party which were with *Saul*, were men of the same description as himself; but we read of no work of grace wrought upon their hearts. They stood speechless, and heard a voice; were overawed with what was going on; but unconscious of any thing more. Reader! so hath it been in all ages of the Church, so is it now, and so must it be for ever. When the voice from heaven, which was heard by the Jews at CHRIST's baptism, declared him to be the beloved SON of GOD, it had no effect upon them. Matt. iii. 16, 17. When again, just before his crucifixion, GOD the FATHER answered CHRIST's prayer to glorify his SON, and said, *I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again*; though some thought that it thundered, others that an angel spake to JESUS, yet no one change was wrought by it, upon a single heart of those men. John xii. 28, 29. Nothing short of the work of GOD the HOLY GHOST upon the heart, can change the heart, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of GOD in the face of JESUS CHRIST. 2 Cor. iv. 6.

9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

I should not have thought it necessary to have paused over those verses, with any other remarks, than merely to have observed, that the LORD's account of the manner in which those days were spent by *Saul*, was in prayer, (see verse 11.) But as from hence, it hath been argued by some, that in every saving conversion of the heart to the LORD, there must be, according to *Saul's* example, three days fasting and agonizing, (as it is called;) I conceive that it would be proper, rather to enquire what GOD the HOLY GHOST hath said on this important subject, than what man teacheth; and here also, as in other cases, to compare spiritual things with spiritual.

Now very certain it is, that though *Saul*, and it may be many beside, have lain a longer time than others in the pangs of the new birth; yet GOD the HOLY GHOST hath caused to be recorded many instances of an act of grace producing an immediate change of heart, from death to life, and from the power of Satan to the living GOD. *Matthew* the publican, yea all the Apostles at once followed JESUS at his call. *Lydia's* heart was instantly opened by the LORD, and we hear of no delay, nor pangs of the new birth. Even the *Sailor* at *Philippi*, though convulsed at midnight, was made joyful in CHRIST before the morning. Acts xvi. 14, 25—34. And the Church of the *Philippians* are said to have been in the fellowship of the Gospel from the first day until now. Phil. i. 5. And the Church of the *Thessalonians* in like manner are said to have received the word in much affliction, with joy of the HOLY GHOST. 1 Thess. i. 6. So that, whatever men may say of such things, very evident it is, that the LORD hath not said it. The LORD the HOLY GHOST works as an Almighty Sovereign, when he calls any by his grace. And while some are long in the state of unawakened nature; and others, early called to the knowledge of the LORD; yet in every case of a saving conversion of the heart to GOD; all these worketh that One and the self same SPIRIT dividing to every man severally as he will. For as in the birth of nature, it is not the violent pains or the ease which determine the child to be born; but the safe delivery and the reality of life in

the babe which constitutes the birth; so in grace, the cry of the soul, and the hungering and thirsting for CHRIST; these are the sure signs of the new birth, in which *the SPIRIT witnesseth to the spirits of the LORD's people, that they are the children of God.* Rom. viii. 16.

10 ¶ And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, *I am here, Lord.*

11 And the Lord *said* unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for *one* called Saul, of Tarsus; for, behold, he prayeth,

12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting *his* hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

13 Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:

14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him, said, Brother Saul, the Lord, *even* Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

19 And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.

It is wonderful to observe, by what instruments and means, the LORD is pleased sometimes to work. According to our view of things, we should have supposed that the LORD would have sent *Saul* back to Jerusalem to the College of the Apostles, for whatever instruction the LORD was pleased to appoint him; and not send for this poor timid *Ananias* to be his servant in this business. Nay, one should have thought, that after the LORD JESUS himself had called to *Saul* from heaven, he would have needed no ministry from others upon earth. But here, as in numberless instances, God's *thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are our ways his ways*, Isaiah iv. 8.

It must have been a cutting word, though full of tenderness in *Ananias*, when at the first interview, yea, and the first word which he spake to *Saul*, he called him, Brother! The conscious breast of *Saul* could not but have felt it very sensibly. And it must have been what *Saul* in after days himself called *heaping coals of fire upon his head*, in melting down all anger in *overcoming evil with good*, (Rom. xii. 20, 21.) when *Ananias* added the precious name of JESUS, and said, the LORD, even JESUS, which appeared unto thee in the way, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the HOLY GHOST. Who shall describe the blessedness of this interview between *Saul* and *Ananias*? Who shall speak of the new feelings in *Saul's* heart, and the joys of both, when *Saul* first opened his eyes, and they saw each other? But, Reader! think what feelings of the soul must that be to every redeemed one of the LORD's, when at death, the spiritual eye first sees Jesus, that *brother born for adversity*! What sensations must the first glimpse of Him in the eternal world occasion, when from faith to sight, the soul sees him as he is, and is then brought home to dwell with him for ever!

20 And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

21 But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?

22 But *Saul* increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

23 ¶ And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:

24 But their laying await was known of *Saul*. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.

25 Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.

26 And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.

27 But Barnabas took him, and brought *him* to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus, in the name of Jesus.

28 And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.

29 And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him.

30 *Which* when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Cesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.

31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

I beg the Reader to observe, (for it is highly important to be observed,) how immediately *Saul* preached CHRIST, and in that preaching, proclaimed his GODHEAD. Well he might indeed, having been both converted and ordained by the LORD himself, without human instruments, and without human forms. And so he tells us: *I certify to you, (said he,) brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of JESUS CHRIST.* Gal. i. 11, 12. So, then, if *Saul* was never taught it by man, and yet was taught it by JESUS CHRIST, can any form of words more decidedly speak *Saul's* sentiments, that he considered CHRIST GOD? Reader! do not overlook these precious things, for they are at all times precious, and never more so, than in the present CHRIST-despising generation! You see how *Saul* confounded the Jews which were at *Damascus*, in proving the GODHEAD of CHRIST. And all faithful ministers of the present hour, confound the various heresies of the present day, in proving CHRIST the same way.

We are told, that all that heard him were amazed. Yes! all the unbelieving Jews were amazed, as unbelievers now are astonished and remain silent, overawed by the demonstration of the SPIRIT and power, whensoever CHRIST is fully preached and glorified. But, true believers in CHRIST then, as true believers in CHRIST now, from the

same grace in their own hearts, could not but be sensible by what sovereign power the whole is induced, and learn to glorify God in his mercy. Gal. i. 24.

32 ¶ And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all *quarters*, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda.

33 And there he found a certain man named Eneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy.

34 And Peter said unto him, Eneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.

35 And all that dwelt in Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.

What a most interesting record is here! It is impossible to read it but with delight. To behold the sovereignty of the very name of JESUS! This poor bed-ridden man, had been palsied eight years. And yet, as one might be led to hope from the familiarity with which *Peter* accosted him, in calling him by his name, that he knew the LORD. (See Acts xiv. 9.) And how many of the LORD's hidden ones are palsied, crippled, diseased, or under some bodily infirmity or other, for years together. The bed of sickness is blessed, upon which Jesus puts his people. They are sure of the frequent visits of their Almighty Physician. I hope the Reader will not fail to observe, by what name and power, *Peter* bid *Eneas* arise. See chap. iii. 6, 16. iv. 8—12. And I hope the Reader will not fail to recollect also, how fully these acts of the Apostles, confirmed their LORD's promise to them before his departure; that even greater works than He himself had done, should be done by them, when He was returned to his FATHER. See John xiv. 12. Mark xvi. 17, 18. And yet more particularly than all, I hope the Reader will not forget to connect with those views of the Apostles' miracles, in the name, and by the authority of CHRIST, on the bodies of his people, the still greater works which God the HOLY GHOST, by their instrumentality, wrought on their souls. Here were works indeed, and miracles of grace, when the palsied in soul, yea, the dead in trespasses and sins, were raised *from death to life*, and converted *from the power of Satan to the living God*.

36 ¶ Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and alms-deeds which she did.

37 And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died; whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber.

38 And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring *him* that he would not delay to come to them.

39 Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.

40 But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning *him* to the body, said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

41 And he gave her *his* hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive.

42 And it was known throughout all Joppa: and many believed in the Lord.

43 And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa, with one Simon, a tanner.

The HOLY GHOST hath closed this most sweet and interesting chapter, with the relation of a miracle wrought by *Peter*, in his LORD's name, on a godly woman, in raising her from the dead. This *Joppa* was a little sea-port in the tribe of *Dan*, made memorable in scripture by the history of *Jonah*. *Jonah* i. 3. Her name was *Tabitha* in the Hebrew, but the Greeks called her *Dorcas*. But the most delightful part of her character is, that she was a disciple of the LORD JESUS CHRIST. And it is an honorable testimony given of her at the same time, that she adorned that doctrine she professed, in being *full of good works, and alms-deeds which she did*. It is truly blessed to see a child of God *alive* in the discharge of all the duties of a believer, while at the same time *dead* to every idea of merit in the performance of them. To consider those things as blessed *effects* from grace in the heart, but not contributing an atom in adding to the *cause* of salvation. Nothing can be more lovely where this is the case. But such instances are rare to be found. For such is the corruption of our fallen nature, that these things more frequently minister to spiritual pride and pharisaical righteousness, than to the divine glory. And that soul must be highly taught of God indeed, who is in earnest, and zealous in laying himself out for usefulness in God's Church, and among God's people; and yet in proportion as the Lord blesseth him in such deeds, he layeth lower and lower in the dust before God. Who so far from taking to himself the most distant idea of merit, from a life like this, considers himself only as a greater debtor to the Lord for

having called him to the service, and given him both grace and ability to discharge it. One so taught of the LORD, will feel more humbled at every step he takes as the LORD's Almoner, and will be astonished at the grace which employs him, when he considers, that the same LORD hath angels at his command, for all his errands of mercy!

I admire the diligence of *Peter*, in being here, and there, and every where, at the call of the LORD's people, and in the LORD's service: The Apostle felt, what every faithful minister of Jesus ought to feel; that when embarked in the LORD's service, his time and talents, yea, his very life is not his own. And that service where he can be most useful, is the very spot where he should be always found. Hence from the bed of *Eneas* to the chamber of *Tabitha*, and from *Lydda* to *Joppa*, *Peter* hastens for employment.

I admire also the strong faith, both of *Peter*, and of the disciples at those places. It should seem, that the *one* expected miracles, and that the *other* depended in the LORD's name for strength to perform them. And what cannot that faith accomplish, which the LORD creates in the heart, which is wholly founded on the LORD's strength, and wholly designed for the LORD's glory? Reader! let you and I seek grace from the LORD, in the same way, and for the same ends, even CHRIST's praise, and depend upon it, our day, and our strength in the LORD will be alike. I can do nothing, (said one of old, highly taught of God,) of myself, but *I can do all things through CHRIST strengthening me.*

REFLECTIONS.

PAUSE, my soul, over the several miracles recorded in this chapter, and behold the wonders connected with the event of CHRIST tabernacled in the flesh! All, and every circumstance, which hath occurred, or hereafter to be accomplished, in the present life, of the time-state of the Church; all spring out of that one mystery, *God manifest in the flesh!* Precious LORD JESUS! what a world of mysteries is thy Church in? What a world of mysteries is the one view of thy love to thy Church? While I read the conversion of *Paul*, the healing of *Eneas*, the bringing back to life *Tabitha*; and ponder the cause of these, and all the numberless miracles recorded in the word of thy grace: while I contemplate the continuation of the same, daily going on through the earth; and all arising from the love of my LORD to his Church; oh! who shall speak of the love of CHRIST, which passeth knowledge!

And is this the manner of JESUS, in testifying his love? Doth JESUS indeed delight to raise a persecuting *Saul* from the brink of hell, to employ him in the service of heaven? Will the LORD indeed take pleasure, from having his name proclaimed from those very lips which have been uttering continued blasphemy? Shall he, who consented to the murder of *Stephen*, and persecuted unto death, men and women, of the LORD's people, be the very One JESUS hath chosen to be his honored instrument in the conversion of thousands? LORD! how mysterious thy ways; and how full of grace thy judgments? But, my soul! amidst all these wonders with which thou art surrounded do not lose sight of what the HOLY GHOST taught *Saul*

after his conversion to tell the Church; that *it was for this cause he obtained mercy, that in him the LORD JESUS CHRIST might shew forth all long suffering for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting!*

Reader! let us bless the LORD for the sweet records in this chapter; and for the grace manifested to the Church in the rest which she is here said to have enjoyed after the sharp persecutions. Oh! that those latter ages may find revivals from the LORD among the people; and that *walking in the fear of the LORD, and in the comfort of the HOLY GHOST, they may be multiplied.*

CHAP. X.

CONTENTS.

Cornelius, taught by an Angel, sendeth for Peter. *The Apostle is at the same time, taught by a Vision to obey the Call. He preacheth before Cornelius and his Household, and GOD the HOLY GHOST blesseth his Ministry.*

THERE was a certain man in Cesarea, called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band,

2 A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.

3 He saw in a vision, evidently about the ninth hour of the day, an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius,

4 And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.

5 And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter:

6 He lodgeth with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.

7 And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually;

8 And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.

9 ¶ On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour :

10 And he became very hungry, and would have eaten : but while they made ready, he fell into a trance,

11 And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth :

12 Wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.

14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.

15 And the voice *spake* unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, *that* call not thou common.

16 This was done thrice : and the vessel was received up again into heaven.

For the better apprehension of the subject contained in this chapter, it will be proper to consider the scriptural account of the Church of CHRIST, in relation to all the members of CHRIST's mystical body ; and no less to notice, the very different views which the Jewish Church had conceived of it.

Nothing can be more evident, from the whole tenor of revelation, than that the Church of CHRIST from everlasting is one. So CHRIST himself sweetly sings, and so, blessed be God, we know. *My dove, my undefiled, (saith JESUS,) is but one ; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her.* Song vi. 9. Hence, both Jew and Gentile are included in this view, and both form but one and the same. And, although the LORD was pleased for wise and gracious purposes known to himself, to form Israel in the family of Abraham, with whom might be the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises, and of whom as concerning the flesh CHRIST came : Rom. ix. 4, 5. yet these were subsequent transactions to the original and eternal gift of the Church to CHRIST by JEHOVAH. GOD the FATHER in his covenant-office and character, is said to have *chosen the Church in CHRIST before the foundation of the world.* Ephes. i. 4. And all the members of

CHRIST's mystical body, were written in his book, when as yet there was none of them. Psm. cxxxix. 16. John xvii. 2. And agreeably to these things, the SON of GOD in our nature, speaking by the spirit of prophecy, ages before his incarnation, yea, from the womb of eternity, is introduced to the Church, as calling upon his Church to listen to him, both Jew and Gentile, as JEHOVAH's *salvation to the end of the earth*. I pray the Reader before he prosecutes the subject further, that he would turn to the prophet *Isaiah*, in proof of this most blessed and important truth: See *Isaiah* xlix. 1—6. Nothing can be more decisive in confirmation, that the Church of CHRIST everlastingly was, and is, and can be, but One. And however diversified in the after time-state of the Church, the distinct stock of Jew and Gentile might be formed; yet, under every state, both in time, and to all eternity, CHRIST hath but one Church, and both Jew and Gentile in their relationship to him, are but one fold. Indeed, as if to shew that oneness yet more decidedly, it is to be noted, that *Abraham*, the great father of the Jewish Church, when chosen of GOD for this purpose, was himself a Gentile, (that is, an heathen and idolater,) when called out of *Ur of the Chaldees*. Gen. xi. 31. Gen. xii. 1. So that in fact, *Abraham* was a Gentile before he became a Jew, and thereby it plainly proves, that the name of the *Elder* brother given to the Jew, and the *Younger* to the Gentile, is the reverse of what was the case. See the note on Luke xv. 32. And in exact conformity to this statement, it is still worthy of further notice, that when JESUS himself, in the days of his flesh, was speaking on the same subject, and calling himself the shepherd, and his Church his sheep, he told his disciples, which were all Jews, that *he had other sheep, which were not of this fold*. *Them also*, (said the LORD,) *I must bring, and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd*. See John x. 16. and Commentary upon it.

Having taken this scriptural view of the Church of CHRIST, and, (as I venture to believe,) having clearly shewn, that that Church, formed in the divine mind before all worlds, was wholly one, and but one; though, in the after days of the time-state of the Church, was branched out into those two distinct families of Jew and Gentile; we shall now be the better prepared to enter into a proper apprehension of the subject, in what is related in this chapter, concerning the conversion of *Cornelius*, a Gentile, to the faith in CHRIST.

It will be recollected then, that the whole Jewish nation, were, to a man, brought up in those high notions, that as the *Messiah*, when he came, was to spring from the stock of *Abraham*, he would only come for the deliverance of *Israel*, and all the nations of the earth were uninterested in his mission; hence, they expected him only in this character. And all the Apostles were as deeply tinctured with those opinions, as any of their countrymen. And, although, in the farewell commission which the LORD JESUS gave to his Apostles, he commanded them, that as soon as they were endued with power from on high, they should *go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature*: Mark xvi. 15. yet, so little did they apprehend our LORD's meaning, and so rivetted were they in the same Jewish principles, of the LORD's grace only to *Israel*, that when they attended JESUS on the Mount at his ascension, they put the question to CHRIST, *LORD! wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?* Acts i. 6. It should seem by the circumstances related in this Chapter, nothing

short of a vision from heaven to *Peter*, and accompanied at the same time, with the message of an angel, and a command of the HOLY GHOST, to him to obey, would have been competent to remove those narrow conceits from *Peter's* mind: and to teach him, and all the Jewish Church through him, that God *had granted to the Gentiles*, as well as to the Jews, *repentance unto life*. Chap. xi. 2.

In the history of *Cornelius*, as related in this Chapter, the LORD was pleased to set forth this precious doctrine. This man, we are told, was a *Centurion*; that is, a Roman officer, commanding an hundred men. His character also is given. He was a *devout man*, and *one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God continually*. That is, he was a Proselyte of the Gate so called. He followed the stated hours of prayer, observed by the Jews, and feared the God of *Israel*. And to the love of God, as far as his knowledge led him, he added the love of man; and was of good report in the neighbourhood where he lived, for his alms, deeds, and charity. So that it appears, he was what the world would call a good man. And very certain it is, that the world at large would be a far different world from what it is, if it was composed of such characters. Happy would it be, for the peace and welfare of mankind, if we could look round, and behold men like *Cornelius*, in every neighbourhood. But with all these amiable qualities, as they relate to the intercourse with men, they fall short of what is essential to a friendship with God. And it should seem, that the LORD designed, in making choice of this very man, by way of declaring the necessity of salvation, plainly and decidedly to shew, that these things do not stand in account before God; and that without CHRIST, he must have perished everlastingly.

To accomplish this purpose, and to bring this honest Centurion into the way of learning by outward means, the knowledge of CHRIST, he is favored with a vision; and directions are given to him where to send, and from whom he should learn *words, whereby he, and all his household should be saved*. Chap. xi. 14. I do not think it needful to dwell upon the particulars either of *Cornelius's* vision, or that of *Peter*. In the beautiful simplicity in which they are related in this Chapter, every circumstance is very plain and obvious. I rather wish to direct the Reader's attention, to some of the striking things which arise out of the whole subject.

If I detain the Reader with a single remark on the vision of *Cornelius*, it shall only be to observe, the particularity of the hour; namely, the ninth hour: that is, three of the clock in the afternoon. That memorable, blessed, precious hour, to which every evening sacrifice, under the law, had respect. The hour, on which the LORD JESUS died on the cross: and by that *one offering of himself once offered, perfected for ever them that are sanctified*. Heb. x. 14. See Exod. xii. 6. 1 Kings xviii. 36. Dan. ix. 21. Matt. xxvii. 45, 46. Heb. x. 10.

And if I venture to offer a single remark on visions in general, it shall be only to observe, from the fear with which it is here said that *Cornelius* looked on the angel; what a natural disposition there is in every man of flesh and blood, to shrink at the supposed sight of what is a spirit. We are so much occupied with earth, and earthly concerns, that a messenger from heaven, even though on an errand of mercy,

like this angel to *Cornelius*, makes the heart draw back. And yet every child of God is in the habit, more or less, of daily, yea, hourly conversing at the throne of grace, with the LORD JESUS: and is not this a spiritual communion and fellowship? 1 John i. 3. Wherefore then should the mind be appalled, in the apprehension of the beloved object becoming visible? Why should any, who know the LORD, and love the LORD, and by grace and faith, keep up an holy acquaintance with the LORD, at his mercy seat, feel a somewhat of reluctance in the idea of sight?—I humbly ask the question, but speak not confidently, when I say, would it not be well in the LORD's redeemed ones, and to whom JESUS is dear, to familiarize these thoughts? Do I not know, that ere long, I shall be called upon to embark at once into the world of spirits, when my spirit shall be disembodied? And would it not be right now, and before that hour comes, (which cannot be far off, and may be near indeed,) to be sometimes walking as on the confines of the eternal world, and by faith communing with those spiritual objects which at death we instantly meet. Yea, is it not certain, that we are now surrounded by them in their ministry and services; and are nearer to them, and they to us, than we are conscious? See 2 Kings vi. 16, 17. Psm. xxxiv. 7. Dan. vi. 22. Heb. i. 14.

17 Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from *Cornelius* had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate,

18 And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there.

19 While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.

20 Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them.

21 Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from *Cornelius*; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come?

22 And they said, *Cornelius* the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.

23 Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them,

and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

24 And the morrow after they entered into Cæsarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.

25 And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.

26 But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.

27 And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together.

28 And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

29 Therefore came I *unto you* without gain-saying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?

30 And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing,

31 And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.

32 Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of *one* Simon, a tanner, by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee.

33 Immediately therefore I sent to thee: and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.

If I detain the Reader at these verses, it is but to call upon him to remark with me, the gracious manifestation of God the HOLY GHOST, in speaking to *Peter*. I never can say enough to myself nor to the

Reader, in calling the attention of both to what we are so apt to overlook ; the unceasing office of God the SPIRIT, in his Almighty ministry in the Church. Most certain it is, that from the beginning, when the Church was formed, the HOLY GHOST presided over it. He that anointed the glorious Head, anointed all his members. John iii. 34. Ephes. iv. 7. Psm. xlv. 7. All the services of the Old Testament-dispensation, as types and shadows of CHRIST, were of his appointing. Heb. ix. 8. All the Prophets were sanctified and ordained by him. Isaiah vi. 8, 9. Jerem. i. 5. Ezek. ii. 2. 1 Pet. i. 10, 11. All the Apostles from him received the unction of their Apostleship. John vii. 39. Luke xxiv. 49. John xiv. 26. Acts i. 5. Acts ii. 1—4. And without the LORD the SPIRIT ordains ministers to his service, in all ages of the Church, vain are the laying on of the hands of men. Acts xix. 1—6. Acts xx. 28. It is very blessed to observe in this scripture, the LORD the SPIRIT speaking to *Peter*. See also Acts xiii. 2—4. Acts xvi. 6, 7. 1 Tim. iv. 1. And I hope the Reader, from such palpable evidences to this great and leading truth of the Scriptures, will not fail to grant it due attention. Let him remember, that *speaking*, and *sending*, are personal acts, such as define real personal Being. And let him remember also, that when the HOLY GHOST commanded *Peter* to go with the messengers of *Cornelius*, saying, *I have sent them* ; and when *Cornelius* said to *Peter* : *Thou hast done well that thou art come ; now therefore all we are here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God* : the service *Peter* was then called to, was God's service, and by God's command ; and consequently this Scripture proves, the Person, GODHEAD, and Ministry, of God the HOLY GHOST.

34 ¶ Then Peter opened *his* mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons :

35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

36 The word which *God* sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ : (he is Lord of all :)

37 That word, *I say*, ye know, which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached ;

38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost, and with power : who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil ; for God was with him.

39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem ; whom they slew and hanged on a tree.

40 Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly ;

41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, *even* to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.

42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God *to be* the Judge of quick and dead.

43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

I beg the Reader's attention in a very particular manner, to the opening of this Scriptural sermon of the Apostles, as well as to the whole subject contained in it. Never, I believe, hath there been any part of the word of God twisted to speak the very reverse of what the Apostle meant, more than in this verse ; and therefore it merits the closer attention.

The advocates for a general inoffensiveness of conduct, as, in their view, the first and only qualifications, for an appearance before God, both here and hereafter ; are continually endeavouring to lessen the infinite importance of redemption by CHRIST, with harping upon this string, that God *is no respecter of persons* ; and that it matters not, how men live, provided they live up to the light of nature, and the reason that is in them ; *for in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him*. Whereas, both *Peter's* sermon, and *Peter's* journey to *Cornelius*, testified the very reverse of this interpretation of *Peter's* words. In the instance of this Gentile, the LORD decidedly declared, that neither his devotion, nor his charity, were of any account, in a way of justification before God : and that without a change of heart, in *repentance toward God and faith in the LORD JESUS CHRIST*, he could not be saved. Else wherefore the expence of a vision to send men to *Peter*, to tell him *words, whereby he and his might be saved* ? Wherefore *Peter*, receiving also the ministry of a vision, and a special command from God the HOLY GHOST, to go to *Cornelius*, at such a distance, had *Cornelius* been in a salvable state before ?

Let it be supposed, for argument's sake, that this honest Gentile had entertained such sentiments as these despisers of the Person and work of CHRIST do entertain ; who, from being unacquainted with the plague of their own heart, think lightly of CHRIST, and his salvation : and when the angel had delivered his message of sending to call *Peter*, he had said, wherefore send for *Peter* ? I am serving God to the best of my power. I do no wrong. I injure no one. I give much alms ; and pray continually. I need no more. What can we reasonably conclude would have been the consequence ? Would not the LORD's displeasure have been most justly called forth against such

contumacy?—Mistake me not. I am not for a moment supposing, *Cornelius* as at all liable to fall into such a temptation of arrogance and presumption. He was better taught. The Lord, which gave him instruction to send for *Peter*, had at the same time inclined his heart to obey. But I am simply stating the case, in order to shew more pointedly the dangerous situation of those, who wrest the Scriptures of God, to speak the reverse of what those Scriptures mean; and act upon that perversion. Very awful must it be in all who reject the council of God against their own souls, who rest satisfied with a general inoffensiveness of conduct, and live, and die, uninterested in the great salvation of the LORD JESUS CHRIST.

And if *Peter* had not the most distant idea of such a perversion of words, when he thus delivered himself, and which his journey to *Cæsaria* most plainly proves; what did the Apostle mean, when he said: *Of a truth, I perceive, that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him?* Nothing can be more evident, than that *Peter* meant to say, that all his Jewish prejudices were done away. He now discovered, what he knew not before, that the Jew and the Gentile as such, were equally the objects of divine favor in CHRIST. And, under these impressions, he hesitated not to declare openly the convictions of his mind; that the great redemption by CHRIST, was not limited to the Jew; but his people, were equally to be found, among the other nations of the earth. Hence he exclaimed, *God is no respecter of persons.* An expression similar to that of *Paul*, Gal. i. 6. *God accepteth no man's person:* meaning the same in both; that there is nothing in the person of any man, whether Jew or Gentile, to find respect, or acceptance; for both are only in CHRIST. *He hath made us accepted in the beloved*, saith the Church. Ephes. i. 6.

And, to the same amount *Paul* speaks, when, under the influence of divine teaching, he crieth out: *Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes! of the Gentiles also. Seeing, it is One God which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.* Rom. iii. 29, 30. God is no respecter of persons in *Paul's* view, no more than in *Peter's*. The God of the Jew, is the God of the Gentile, not only in nature and providence, but in grace and glory. God was in Covenant in CHRIST for his Gentile Church as well as his Jewish Church, before the Covenant of the law given by *Moses* on *Mount Sinai*: before the Covenant of Circumcision given to *Abraham* after the flood: before the Covenant transaction with *Noah*, before the flood: before the Covenant of promise, made at the fall, *in the seed of the woman bruising the serpent's head*: yea, before the foundation of the earth was laid. This is proved to us in what hath been before remarked, in the beginning of the observations in this Chapter. And the sending *Peter* to *Cornelius*, and the call of all the Church of the Gentiles in all ages, proves the same. The whole Church, both Gentile and Jew, were from all eternity, chosen in CHRIST; and in the time-state of the Church, all are called in CHRIST, adopted in CHRIST, justified in CHRIST, sanctified in CHRIST, and will be glorified in CHRIST, when they are all brought home from their present time-state on earth, to their eternal state in heaven. And all these blessings are the sole result of free, sovereign, and unconditional grace: *Seeing it is One God*, existing in a threefold

character of Persons, *which shall justify*; and justify in the same way, and by the same cause: not from human merit, but divine mercy; not from man's deserving, but God's free grace; the whole Church of his love, *whether they be Jew or Gentile; whether they be bond or free*. And this justification hath nothing in it derived from the Church; for it is wholly of God. *The circumcision of the Jew, doth not in the least promote it; neither the uncircumcision of the Gentile, retard. All the sufficiency is of God*. And the enjoyment *by faith* in the Jew, or *through faith* of the Gentile, is the same. The glorious comprehensive source of all justification, is as the Apostle closed his sermon, with observing, *as all the Prophets witness that it is through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins*. See Commentary, Chap. xiii. 39.

44 ¶ While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,

47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

Think, Reader, what blessed seasons those were, when God the SPIRIT sent his word, and owned that word, and crowned the labors of his servants in that word, with the graces of his holy unction! What refreshment must it have been, both to the LORD's servants, and the LORD's people, when while the one was speaking, the HOLY GHOST was descending upon the other, and both enjoying the presence and grace of the LORD JESUS in the heart. Almighty LORD of thy Church! do thou in the present hour manifest, that both the work, and the glory is thine. And when thou art mercifully pleased to send thy word to thy people, or to bring thy people to thy word; grant that *the glorious Gospel of the ever blessed God, may indeed be preached with the HOLY GHOST sent down from heaven!* 1 Pet. i. 12.

REFLECTIONS.

READER! in the perusal of this blessed Chapter, let us pass by every lesser consideration, to attend to the one great and glorious

truth, taught in it, and by it, how GOD the SPIRIT watches over, and is carrying on all the vast designs of his Almighty ministry! How blessedly hath the LORD here taught, that the Jewish and Gentile Church is but one: both branches equally dear to all the Persons of the GODHEAD, and equally calling forth the joint love, grace, and mercy, of FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST, And Reader! let not you and I forget, how infinitely important in the sight of JEHOVAH, is the work of the LORD JESUS CHRIST, in his mediator-character; that all the devotion of this honest Centurion towards God, and his conscientious dealings with men, would not have procured him salvation. Oh! the preciousness of JESUS CHRIST.

Let all humble waiters upon the LORD, take courage from the grace manifested in this sweet history. *The LORD knoweth them that are his.* And JESUS will call his redeemed from all places of the earth, where they have been scattered *in the cloudy and dark day.* When *the LORD writeth up his people,* even *Cæsarea* will have her children, like *Cornelius*, to be numbered.

Blessed SPIRIT of all truth! in all ages thou hast manifested thy saving power. Do thou be pleased, O LORD, from the water of regeneration, until grace is consummated in glory, to carry on thy work with power in the heart of thy redeemed, until thou hast brought the nations of CHRIST's heritage to thy sceptre; and made every knee of the LORD's people to bend to CHRIST's name, and *every tongue to confess that JESUS is LORD to the glory of GOD the FATHER!* Amen.

CHAP. XI.

CONTENTS.

The tidings of Cornelius's Conversion are communicated to the Church at Jerusalem. Peter is at first reproved for going to Cornelius; but afterwards the Apostles glorify God for the Mercy. Some Account of Barnabas.

AND the apostles and brethren that were in Judea, heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.

2 And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him,

3 Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.

4 But Peter rehearsed *the matter* from the beginning, and expounded *it* by order unto them, saying,

5 I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as

it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me:

6 Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

7 And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat.

8 But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.

9 But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, *that* call not thou common.

10 And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven.

11 And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Cesarea unto me.

12 And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house:

13 And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter:

14 Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.

15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.

16 Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.

17 Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as *he did* unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I, that I could withstand God?

18 When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

It will not be necessary to detain the Reader long over these verses, seeing they are but a recapitulation of what passed on the occasion of *Cornelius's* conversion, and are contained in the preceding Chapter. What I would chiefly request might be noticed, is, the conduct of the Church, in reproving *Peter*; and the very gracious behavior of the Apostle, in his modest defence of himself, in answer. Both are very instructive. The Apostles and Brethren which were in *Judea*, seem to have manifested a different conduct, upon a former occasion, when tidings was brought to them, that *Samaria* had received the word of God: for they sent upon that account, *Peter* and *John* to them, by way of comfort and confirmation. See Acts viii. 14, 15. But here the reverse seems to have actuated them. It serves to teach us, how improper all hasty judgments are. The best of men, and the best of Churches, and in the best of times, are but *men of like passions with ourselves*. It is blessed to know it. And it is blessed to be humbled under a sense of it. Nothing more sweetly and powerfully preacheth CHRIST, than when taught our nothingness without him.

What a beautiful example *Peter* holds forth, both to ministers and people, in the quietness and meekness of mind, he manifested to the reproaches, with which he was first received by the Church, on his return. *Casarea* from *Jerusalem*, was little short of seventy-five miles. And it was a sad reception, which they gave him in their reproach when he went up from the house of *Cornelius* to *Jerusalem*, to inform the Church of what had happened. *Peter* knew who had sent him. And he was conscious of the LORD's blessing upon his labors. These things, no doubt, fortified his mind, and enabled him to bear all their reproaches. The LORD's faithful people may, and ought to learn from hence, that God's services, when they are employed in them by Him, and blessed in them by Him, will be sure to call forth the displeasure of men; yea, even the LORD's own people, (as was the case here,) shall sometimes be prompted by the enemy, to afflict their brethren, ignorant of what they do. Sometimes our false misconception of things, sometimes our judging by report too hastily; and sometimes, and perhaps not unfrequently, from the remains of indwelling corruption, jealousies creep in our hearts, and we feel somewhat which ought not to be, rising there. The Church complained of it, when she said; *my mother's children were angry with me*. Song i. 6. Reader! if you and I know with *Paul*, the plague of our own hearts; and that even in ourselves corruptions arise, which *war against the soul and are bringing us into captivity, into the law of sin which is in our members*; how can we wonder that others, who neither know our motives of conduct, nor the leadings of them, should sometimes reproach us?

And while such views of the common infirmity of nature, will, under grace, tend to soften the minds of the LORD's people, and suppress anger at any of their little unkind misconception of conduct,

when we are conscious we have not merited their displeasure; such will in an eminent degree under the LORD, preserve faithful ministers of JESUS, as *Peter*, in the instance before us, *in patience to possess their souls*, when the world, or still more the mistaken men in the Church, come forth to reprove them. To shew displeasure because we know ourselves to be right, is not the plan to correct them that are wrong. It is rather *turning that which is lame out of the way*. How much better, like the Apostle, in brotherly affection to submit as he did, the point to their cool decision: and how soon were their tempers changed, and the LORD glorified! This is what the Apostle Paul called, *in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves*. For, said he, *the servant of the LORD must not strive, but be gentle unto all men: and an example of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity*. 1 Timothy iv. 12.

19 ¶ Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen, travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

20 And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.

21 And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

22 Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

23 Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

24 For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.

I beg the Reader to notice, how the LORD overruled the persecution which arose at *Jerusalem*, in the death of *Stephen*, and other faithful servants to the LORD; to minister to his glory, in scattering his people far and near, to spread the Gospel. How little are the enemies of the cross aware, how greatly their malice sometimes turns out, to the fur-

therance of the truth, as it is in JESUS! How often they become thereby, the unwilling instruments, in promoting the very reverse of what they intend. So it was here: so is it now: and so the LORD will for ever make it, as long as the present time-state of the Church shall remain. And I hope the Reader will not pass away from that precious verse, which speaks of the hand of the LORD being with them, until that he hath first observed the blessedness of the thing itself, and the blessings which are said to have followed.

I admire the character given of *Barnabas*. It is but short, though sweet. *A good man, and full of the HOLY GHOST!* What could be said more? And observe what holy joy it opened in his soul, when he had seen the LORD's work, in the hearts of the LORD's people. For, in the great number which are said to have believed, *Barnabas* beheld some of the same blessed effects discovering themselves in the people, which he felt in his own experience. For where God the SPIRIT dwells, all the properties of regenerating, renewing, illuminating, converting, and confirming grace, cannot but abound.

And there is a very great sweetness in this exhortation of the Apostle, which he gave them, that *with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the LORD*. He used the exhortation, but he was directing their minds to look unto the LORD for the accomplishment. *Hold thou me up,* (said one of old,) *and I shall be safe. Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee!* Reader! it is blessed, when at any time we receive the LORD's commands, to be looking to the LORD for grace to follow them. *I shall run* (said the same holy saint I just now quoted,) *the way of thy commandments; when thou hast set my heart at liberty.* Here is the strength for performance. And when we are enabled to accept the LORD's biddings, as enablings! oh! how sweet and precious are all the LORD's ways to his people. Psm. cxix. 32. Reader! do not dismiss this view of *Barnabas*, and his exhortation, before that you have first enquired at the heart, whether you have followed it. No man can cleave unto the LORD, until he knows the LORD. And if we truly know the LORD, we shall know ourselves also: and in that knowledge, both of our nothingness, and CHRIST's all sufficiency, the tendency of the soul will be, to cleave unto him. *They that know thy name will put their trust in thee.* No man can trust, or cleave to, an unknown God. John iv. 10. Psm. ix. 10.

And it will be among the easiest of all things, to discover whether we cleave to the LORD by the conscious strength and help we derive from the LORD. The tenderest plants in nature are not more feeble, when they throw their branches round some statelier tree for support, as the ivy to the oak, than a child of God, which cleaves to CHRIST, and lays hold of JESUS, as his whole security. And how sweet in confirmation, is that Scripture. *The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.* Deut. xxxiii. 27. Reader! it will be well for you and me, if while we admire, as we cannot but admire, this interesting account of *Barnabas*, we can trace somewhat of the same spirit which marked his life, in our own. *Moses*, the man of God, enjoined the same motive to *Israel* for cleaving to the LORD, because (said he,) *he is your life.* Deut. xxx. 20.

25 Then departed *Barnabas* to Tarsus for to seek Saul:

26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

As the HOLY GHOST hath been pleased to have it recorded, where the honored spot was, from whence the LORD's family first derived the high privilege of being called *Christians*, I think it well merits our attention. It should seem, that before, and about this period, the faithful in CHRIST JESUS, were variously distinguished in names. They who spake of them in derision, called them *Nazarenes*, *Galileans*, men who trouble our city, and teach customs which are not lawful: Acts xvi. 20, 21. who have turned the world upside down: Acts xvii. 21. and, as they called Paul, a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: Acts xxiv. 5. so no doubt the whole community were considered the same. And, whether the name of *Christians* was first given to them by their enemies, or by friends, is not said, though I confess to me it appears, as though it evidently came from the LORD. But one thing is certain, the scoffer used it in reproach. And for many generations after, as well as then in *Antioch*, the foes to the cross considered nothing more opprobrious, than when they called a man, Christian. Paul said for himself and companions, that they were esteemed *the filth and off-scouring of all things*. 1 Cor. iv. 13.

I have already said, that to me, I confess, it appears to have come immediately from the LORD. And my reasons are these. It was the LORD's promise, that when the *Gentiles should see CHRIST's righteousness, and all kings his glory*, that then the Church should be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD should name. Isa. lxii. 2. lxxv. 15. And the name itself doth not simply mean a follower of CHRIST, or one professing CHRIST, (though the enemies of CHRIST, perhaps mean no other, when they call the LORD's people *Christians*,) but the name means *anointed ones*. Thus in that beautiful passage of the prophet, where CHRIST is represented as going forth for the salvation of his people, it is added, *even for salvation with thine anointed*. Habak. iii. 13. That this passage refers to CHRIST, is beyond all dispute, for this *going forth* can mean no other, and so Micah describes CHRIST, whose *goings forth have been from of old from everlasting*. Micah v. 2. Matt. ii. 6. And the Church, is specially, and properly, CHRIST's people. In proof, see Psm. cx. 3. Matt. i. 21. John xvii. 6. And, when it is said by *Habakkuk*, that the LORD went forth for salvation with his *anointed*; though the word is in the singular, yet it is put as meaning the whole body. In a similar passage in *Zechariah*, the word to the same purport is plural. These are the *two anointed ones that stand by the LORD of the whole earth*. Zech. iv. 14. And if, as may be supposed, (though I presume not to speak decidedly,) those *two* mean the LORD's witnesses, Jew and Gentile, these correspond to the anointing of CHRIST's Church, which is but one and the same. Song vi. 9. John x. 16. Rev. xi. 3, 4. Some

indeed render the words of the Prophet, when he saith, thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed, even for salvation for thy CHRIST's, that is the same word *anointed*, for CHRIST means anointed. So much for the name.

I must not dismiss the subject of the Church being first called Christians at *Antioch*, without remarking further, that supposing, (as I have ventured to state, the hand of the LORD was in the appointment, what a singular mercy it was, that from such a place, and at such a time, the LORD should mark his family. *Antioch* was the chief city of *Syria*. It was the capital of *Antiochus*, and probably called after his name. He had been among the most bitter foes of God's Church. Here then in this man's empire, and in his chief city, the LORD will first call his people by his own most holy name. Reader! remember what JESUS said to *Peter* in relation to the building of his Church *upon this rock*, meaning himself, *will I build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*. Matt. xvi. 18. And is it not so now? yea, hath it not been the same in all ages? Psm. ii. throughout. Reader! depend upon it, the truths of our God were never more opposed than in the present hour. I mean the pure, distinguishing truths, which peculiarly belong to the Gospel. Men may be called *Christians*, yea, indeed, they are called so, because they are born under the meridian of christianity. And, for the same reason, the same men had they been born in *Turkey*, would have been called *Mahometans*. But a man must be *new-born* to be really and truly a Christian, as those at *Antioch* were, when branded by the carnal at that place, with the name of Christian. And if you, my brother, are truly a Christian, an anointed one in CHRIST by regeneration, and know, as you cannot then but know by that blessed work of the HOLY GHOST wrought in you, your union with CHRIST, and communion in all that belongs to CHRIST's being justified wholly by Him, sanctified in Him, and professing before all the world, that your everlasting All depends upon Him; an open profession of these glorious truths, and a corresponding conduct in life and conversation, answering to the same, will bring upon you reproach as much as true believers in CHRIST did the saints of old at this famous city, when *the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch*. The offence of the cross hath never ceased. And unless men temporize, and give in to the conformity of the times, now, as much as then, *they who will live godly in CHRIST JESUS, must suffer persecution*. 2 Tim. iii. 12. There is a fashionable gospel in the present day, which all the world may follow, and yet escape reproach. But none who love the LORD JESUS CHRIST in sincerity and truth, will go free. Reader! it will be your province of duty, now I have performed mine on this subject, to enquire after the real cause for which you are called Christian. And I shall leave the subject with you, only first requesting you to consult those two striking Scriptures of the LORD JESUS on the point, as both addressed to Pharisees. Luke xvi. 14, 15. and John iii. 3.

27 And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.

28 And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there

should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cesar.

29 Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea :

30 Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

The Prophets here spoken of, according to the original word made use of to call them by, were men *divinely warned*. Probably they were certain eminent disciples, who though not called to the Apostolic office, yet acted under them in the ministry of the word. We read of different orders in the Church. 1 Cor. xii. 28. And in relation to the purport of their prophecy, in the expectation of dearth; this seems to have been in great grace and mercy, given them from the LORD. Many such things have taken place from the watchful care of the LORD, in various ages, even down to modern times of the Church. And it is a truth which ought to be always kept in view: the LORD is as much a GOD of providence, as He is the GOD of grace, to his people. That sweet promise, concerning the SPIRIT of truth, shewing his Church things to come; may be, and ought to be, applied to all cases of his redeemed, in all their warfare. John xvi. 13. This famine gave occasion for the exercise of the love, and alms-giving of the Church. Thus the LORD overrules circumstances of seeming evil to real good; and in the diversities of character, and station, affords opportunity for calling into exercise, the various graces of the HOLY SPIRIT.

REFLECTIONS.

I would ponder well the several weighty things contained in this Chapter, and chiefly with an eye to behold the gracious tendencies of GOD the SPIRIT, watching over his Church and people. It is really wonderful when we trace how the LORD carried on the ministry of his sacred word, amidst all the oppositions, not only against the wickedness of the enemy, but the mistaken weakness of friends. Who could have thought, that after CHRIST's own direction to his Apostles, to go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature; those very Apostles should have been so prejudiced in Jewish notions, as to feel displeasure, when that Gospel was preached by *Peter*, and owned of GOD. But, Reader! what is human nature, in its highest attainments!

My soul! ponder that worthy name by which thou art called; and see amidst the undistinguished mass of the Christian world, falsely so called, what distinguishing part is in it, known by thee, and by which thou canst prove thy real title. For as he is not a Jew, that is one outwardly: so neither can he be a Christian, that is not one inwardly. Regeneration it is, which gives the just claim. And this is in the heart. The name *first* began at *Antioch*. Antioch is now no more. And where will be the *last* place where this holy name will

be truly known? It is a solemn question. But what a tremendous scripture is that of CHRIST's, and which must be assuredly fulfilled: *Many will say to me in that day: LORD, LORD, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils; and in thy name done many wonderful works. And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me ye that work iniquity.*

CHAP. XII.

CONTENTS.

Herod persecutes the Church. James is killed by him, and Peter put into Prison. An Angel of the LORD opens the Prison Doors, and delivers him. Herod's awful Death.

NOW about that time Herod the king stretched forth *his* hands to vex certain of the church.

2 And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

3 And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)

If the Reader at the opening of this Chapter, will consult the *Poor Man's Commentary*, on Matt. ii. 19; he will there observe, that this *Herod* was the *fourth* of that name, whose awful histories are shortly mentioned in the word of God. Not with a view to record their names, but their infamy. And, but for the carrying on the history of the Church, would not have been known even by name, in the present hour, but to a very few, if any. *Their memorial is perished with them.* Psm. ix. 6. He was deputy king, under *Claudius Cæsar*, Emperor of *Rome*. This *James*, whom *Herod* killed, was one of the sons of *Zebedee*, concerning whom the LORD JESUS foretold, of his being baptized with his baptism. Matt. xx. 22. The LORD hath given in a single line the infamy of Herod's character. He had killed *James*; and because *he saw it pleased the Jews*, he would have killed *Peter* also. So that this thirsting for blood, was not even pretended to be on the least ground of justice, but to please blood-thirsty men, like himself. How very pointed are the words of the HOLY GHOST, concerning the sure destruction of such characters. *Whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not!* 2 Pet. ii. 3.

4 And when he had apprehended him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.

5 Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer

was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

The days of unleavened bread mean the feast of the Passover; and as a great number of Jews were of course come up at *Jerusalem* on this occasion, *Herod* thought this a fine opportunity to gratify that people with the spectacle of the murder of *Peter*; and therefore he intended, as soon as their religious ceremonies were over, the Apostle should be brought forth. And thus this time-serving king was filling up the measure of his iniquity. Gen. xv. 16.

I pray the Reader to be very particular in observing, what is said of the unceasing prayer of the Church, for the preservation of *Peter*. The words in the margin of the Bible are: *instant and earnest prayer* was made without ceasing. An holy importunity with the LORD, such as would take no denial. Such as *Jacob* himself, the father of all the praying seed of *Israel* used, when it is said, that *he wept and made supplication unto him*. Hos. xii. 4. Weeping, and then praying; and then at it again: wrestling again, with tears and prayers; and as one that was determined never to give over, until he obtained as at length he did obtain the object he desired. See the whole history. Gen. xxxii. 24. &c. And it is worthy remark, the light in which the LORD regards such holy pleaders. He calls them *Recorders*; for so the word *Mazkir* means: Isaiah lxii. 6, 7. I beg the Reader to turn to the passage. He will find in the margin of his Bible, that to the LORD's *watchmen*, whom he hath commanded never to hold their peace, day nor night, the LORD saith; Ye that are the LORD's *remembrancers*, keep not silence; and give *him no silence*, until he hath established, and made *Jerusalem* a praise in the earth. And then follows the LORD's Oath.—I entreat the Reader to ponder this sweet Scripture well. And I entreat him to seek instruction from the LORD the SPIRIT, to a right apprehension of it. And when he hath thus done, I would ask him the question, (I do not decide,) whether there is not in the whole GOD the FATHER's oath and promise: Heb. vi. 17, 18. GOD the SON's finished salvation and intercession: (for both are implied in all real prayer): 1 John ii. 1, 2. and GOD the SPIRIT's grace and supplication, as a spirit of both, poured out to lead the praying seed of *Jacob* to prayer, and help them in it; all included in this sweet portion. Zech. xii. 10. Rom. viii. 26.

We that live in the present cold, prayerless generation, (and as it is to be feared, too often satisfy ourselves with heartless forms,) by reason of such prison frames as we pray in, can hardly figure to ourselves an idea of the holy importunity of those holy men of old. But were the LORD to bring on the Church, as in those days, an awful persecution like this of *Herod*, the faithful in CHRIST, would soon learn, in what soul-feeling prayer consisted.

6 And when *Herod* would have brought him forth, the same night *Peter* was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains; and the keepers before the door kept the prison.

7 And, behold, the angel of the LORD came

upon *him*, and a light shined in the prison : and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from *his* hands.

8 And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.

9 And he went out, and followed him ; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel ; but thought he saw a vision.

10 When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city ; which opened to them of his own accord : and they went out, and passed on through one street : and forthwith the angel departed from him.

I need not attempt a comment where every word is so very plain. And sure I am, the simplicity of the history as here related, would lose its beauty, if I were to alter it by a needless explanation. But, I would observe, that the situation of *Peter* in this prison, hath been, and perhaps not unaptly considered, (besides its real history,) as a lively representation of the child of God before his conversion, when in the prison of sin and Satan. Like *Peter* he may be truly said to be *sleeping between two soldiers* ; both law and justice bound with the two chains of sin and death ; and the keepers, Satan and his hellish crew, before the door guarding their lawful prisoner. Lawful, it may be truly called ; for he hath made our whole nature his lawful captive, by reason of our original and actual transgressions. *For of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.* 2 Pet. ii. 19. And hence that blessed question of the LORD. Isaiah xlix. 24, 25, 26.

The Angel of the LORD delivering *Peter* from the prison is like the LORD the SPIRIT by regeneration, rousing a sinner from the slumber of death in sin : for before this glorious act is wrought, every child of God is sleeping in sin ; yea, *dead in trespasses and sins.* Ephes. ii. 1. But when the LORD the SPIRIT gives life to the soul, and he that was dead in sin, is made life in CHRIST ; all chains fall from the poor sinner : for the SON of GOD *having made him free, he shall be free indeed.* He is at once delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of GOD's dear SON. John viii. 36. Coloss. i. 13. And such is the mighty change wrought in his heart by grace, that, like *Peter*, the whole appears too good to be true, and for a while seems to be but a vision. He will indeed, being so enabled by the LORD, gird himself with strength in the LORD ; bind on the garments of salvation, and his feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of

peace: he will follow the LORD in the regeneration, through both the wards of providence, and grace; until he cometh to the iron gate of death, which leadeth to *the city, and which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God*. But here the subject varieth. For forthwith the angel departed from *Peter*. But JESUS never departs from his redeemed; for all his delivered captives enter with him into the holy city, and abide with him for ever.

11 And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and *from* all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

12 And when he had considered *the thing*, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together, praying.

13 And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda.

14 And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate.

15 And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel.

16 But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened *the door*, and saw him, they were astonished.

17 But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go, shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.

This interview must have been particularly interesting. The LORD which brought *Peter* from the prison, no doubt directed his steps to the house of *Mary* the mother of *Mark*. See Col. iv. 10. Here he found many of the Church, at prayer for him (see verse 5). The knocking at such an hour, and at such a time, as the night before the intended execution of *Peter*, must have excited wonderful apprehensions. Who shall describe what the different party felt? It seems they were all panic struck; for none ventured to go to the gate. At length a

damsel went, perhaps chosen for this purpose, that whoever it was knocking, the voice of a mere child, might not convey an idea, that there was any fear within. Ye people of God! judge ye, for I cannot explain, how these things, and similar ones, sometimes operate in life. Oh! what a world of wonders will be explained at the great day of account! The name of *Rhoda*, which signifies *Rose*, would not have been memorable but from this circumstance. The situation of *Peter*, however, compelled him to be importunate. And when at length they opened the door, (for it should seem that the whole party went to do it,) what surprize it must have occasioned!

But, Reader! the grand point remains to be considered. Do not overlook, the blessed answers to prayer in *Peter's* deliverance. So gracious, so abundantly gracious was the LORD in this event, that they who were so earnest in prayers, did not believe the thing was done, when answers came to their prayers: so that the LORD far exceeded all their expectations. And oh! how often, both before and since, hath the LORD done so by all his people! See a beautiful proof of it in the Church of old. Psm. cxxvi. throughout.

18 Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of *Peter*.

19 And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that *they* should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Cesarea, and *there* abode.

20 ¶ And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's *country*.

It is a question, more of curiosity than usefulness, where *Peter* went after he left the house of *Mary*, and where he secreted himself. It is enough for the Church to discover the LORD's gracious hand in delivering him at that time from *Herod*, and the expectation of the Jews. The LORD had other work for his servant to accomplish. But when that was over, *Peter*, like other men, proved to be vulnerable. 2 Pet. i. 14.

21 And upon a set day, Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them.

22 And the people gave a shout, *saying*, *It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.*

23 And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.

Hère we arrive at the close of *Herod's* pomp, in which we behold the sure end of iniquity. We see that in the very moment of all his pomp, and earthly grandeur, an Angel of God smiting the monster to the earth. And to distinguish him yet more, as one execrated both by God and man, he was eaten of worms, even before his death. It is the common sentence on human nature, by reason of sin, to return to the dust, out of which man was taken. But this hater of God, and persecutor of his people, shall have an end yet more despicable, and loathsome. He shall be eaten of worms while alive; a prelude to the everlasting devouring by that worm which dieth not, and in *that fire which shall not be quenched*. And if we may credit profane history, it is remarkable how many tyrants have died this death!

24 ¶ But the word of God grew and multiplied.

25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled *their* ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.

What a sweet relief to the mind from the perusal of the foregoing account, in the awful death of the Reprobate, is the relation here made, of the progress, and blessedness of the Church. Yes! thou dearest JESUS! thy Church must stand: and *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!*

REFLECTIONS.

READER! let not you and I, overlook the wonderful success of prayer, in the case of *Peter*, as related in this Chapter. Oh! what cannot prayer accomplish, when awakened by the SPIRIT of the LORD? And let us not fail to remark, how very near sometimes the LORD permits the enemy to approach, and the apprehensions of his people to be exercised, before the LORD vouchsafeth his answer to prayer. The night was advanced, and the morning hastening on, which was to end the life of *Peter*, before that the prayers for the Apostle's deliverance were answered. So is it frequently with the Church. But *there is a time to favor Zion*. And that time, shall not fully run out, before the LORD's hour is come. Oh! the wonders of the LORD's timing; and the LORD's giving deliverance. And, oh! the exercises of the LORD's people, thereby to their good. In every one the LORD speaks; *I the LORD teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go!*

What a lesson is here read, to the great and the mighty of the earth, of such as are enemies to GOD, and his CHRIST. Oh! how sad-

denly do they consume, perish, and come to a fearful end! Behold in Herod, the sad representation. It is the shout of a god, said the mistaken multitude. And before the shout was hardly ended, he shrieked, though unheard by them, the first shriek of his in hell. What a striking, but just account, the word of God gives, of such awful characters, Like Sheep, (said the Psalmist,) they are laid in the grave: death shall feed on them, and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning: and their beauty shall consume in the grave from their dwelling. He shall go to the generation of his fathers: they shall never see light. And where is that? Nay, where is it not? Peter saith; to the spirits which are in prison. And if they never see light, where can that be but hell? A land of darkness, as Job saith; as darkness itself, and of the shadow of death, without any order; and where the light is as darkness. Oh! for grace to know distinguishing grace, and to say with the same Psalmist: But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for he shall receive me.

CHAP. XIII.

CONTENTS.

The HOLY GHOST specially ordains Barnabas, and Saul to his Service. They are sent forth. Elymas the Sorcerer, is struck blind. Saul, (who also is called Paul,) preacheth in the Synagogue. The Jews blaspheme. The Gentiles believe.

NOW there were in the church that was at Antioch, certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon, that was called Niger, and Lucius, of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid *their* hands on them, they sent *them* away.

4 So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Selucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

We enter here upon one of the most interesting records which we have in the word of God, as it relates to the ordination by the HOLY GHOST, to the ministry. And, after referring the Reader to what hath been already offered, on the Person and character of the SPIRIT, by way of Commentary, in this work, (see the xivth, and two fol-

lowing Chapters in the Gospel according to *John*,) I very humbly beg his permission, to enlarge a little more particularly, on this gracious office of God the HOLY GHOST, as it is here set forth, in calling to the work of the ministry, *Barnabas and Saul*.

It should seem, that in this Church of CHRIST at *Antioch*, (from whence *Barnabas* and *Saul*, as related Chapter xi. 29, 30. had been sent to *Judæa*, with their alms for the poor saints, and were now returned;) there were some, who were called Prophets and Teachers. By which are meant, I presume, those who ministered in holy things. It was at one of their public meetings, that God the HOLY GHOST spake as is here said. And, as at the day of *Pentecost*, he had made an open, and visible manifestation of himself; so here, he was pleased to renew the token of his divine presence, by a voice, declaring his sovereignty, and power. I beg the Reader not to lose the recollection, that God the FATHER did the same, when, by a voice from heaven, he declared CHRIST his beloved SON, in whom he was well pleased. Matt. iii. 17. This revelation of God the HOLY GHOST, contains in it *Three* distinct, and special acts, in confirmation of his Person, GODHEAD, and Ministry; all which merit the Reader's close attention.

First. His Person, is as clearly proved by the action of *speaking, calling, and sending*, as the actions of any Being whatever, can prove, personality and identity. The pronouns, *me*, and *I*, are wholly personal; and are not capable of being made use of any other way. And as much as we infer, the person of a man, by the actions of a man; so the Person of God the HOLY GHOST is as fairly and fully inferred, by the actions here ascribed to Him.

Secondly. His GODHEAD must also be admitted, if the authority he here exercised, of *calling and ordaining* to the sanctuary service, be (as indeed it must be,) wholly the province of God. *No man taketh this honor unto himself but he that is called of God.* Heb. v. 5. The HOLY GHOST called *Barnabas* and *Saul* to this honor; and consequently proved thereby, his eternal power, and GODHEAD.

And thirdly. The service, to which the LORD the SPIRIT separated, and called, and sent forth *Barnabas* and *Saul*, is strongly marked as his service; for he said: Separate *me*, or for *me*, *Barnabas* and *Saul*. So again, the LORD adds, *to the work* whereunto *I* have called them. They are not said to be separated to the LORD, or to the service of the Church; but the HOLY GHOST saith, separate *me*, that is, to my service. As if to shew, that his is the Almighty ministry in the Church; and all that act in it, act under him, and in his service, as well as by his appointment. John xiv. 26.

And were it not for swelling the pages of this *Poor Man's Commentary*, I should find it no difficult matter to prove, that as the HOLY GHOST anointed CHRIST, the Great Head of his Church, in his priestly office, when the SPIRIT was given to him without measure: John iii. 34. So all his members, and especially his ministers, from Him derive all the unction, necessary for their high calling, according to the measure of the gift of CHRIST. Ephes. iv. 7. But, I must abridge myself of this pleasure, and shall only beg to make a short observation, (taking occasion, from this ordination of *Barnabas* and *Saul*, as here stated,) on this work of God the SPIRIT, and on the characters of those men ordained.

I venture to conclude, that so palpable the truth appears, in this history, of the necessity of the LORD the SPIRIT'S ordaining, all that are called to any holy function, no one will question it. And, from the character of those men the LORD here ordained, it will be equally plain, that God the HOLY GHOST calls none to the ministry, but what he hath before called by his grace. Should any one of my brethren condescend to read these poor labors of mine, I hope that he will not be offended with the observation. Let the characters of *Barnabas* and *Saul* be well considered, and the point will; I conceive, be abundantly plain. Of the *former* we are told, in a preceding Chapter, that he was a *good man, and full of the HOLY GHOST*. Chap. xi. 24. And, concerning the *latter*, we know of his wonderful conversion by the LORD JESUS himself. So that *both*, were savingly called, and regenerated, and made rich partakers of grace, before that the LORD the HOLY GHOST sent them forth, to preach grace to the people.

And, indeed, had this not been the case, how should they have suited for the ministry of JESUS? A man can never speak of the malignity of sin, who hath never in himself felt the evil of sin, neither been made acquainted with *the plague of his own heart*. 1 Kings viii. 38. A man cannot describe the love, the grace, the mercy, the favor of JESUS, who hath never felt, or known, those precious things from JESUS, in his own soul. But he who hath felt, and known both; and in his own heart, hath experienced both; will best minister to others, when *from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*. This was what made the Apostles so animated, in the service of the LORD. They themselves were awakened, and their chief bent was as instruments in the LORD'S hand, to awaken others. They held forth that bread of life, which they themselves had eaten of, and by which their souls lived. They called the people to the water of life, in JESUS, which they had drunk of, and found, as CHRIST had said, that *it was in them a well of water springing up to everlasting life*. 1 John i. 1—3. John iv. 14. Oh! that all who minister in holy things, were thus first made partakers of the manifold gifts of God; and proved their ordination, like *Barnabas* and *Saul*, from God the HOLY GHOST; in that the word of CHRIST dwelt *in* them, by coming with power *from* them, and the LORD giving testimony to his truths, and to the word of his grace, *by* them. Almighty LORD the SPIRIT! vouchsafe in this our day, as in those days of the Apostles, gracious manifestations of thy divine ordination of thy servants to the ministry! Oh! for that voice to be again heard in spirit, and felt in power, as it was then sounded: *Separate me* (multitudes of the true) *Barnabas's and Sauls, for the work whereunto I have called them!*

5 And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to *their* minister.

6 And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus:

7 Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.

8 But Elymas the sorcerer, (for so is his name by interpretation,) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.

9 Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him,

10 And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, *thou* child of the devil, *thou* enemy of all righteousness, wilt not thou cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?

11 And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist, and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.

12 Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

I pass by all the observations which might be made of the extent of their labors, in those different places, to call the Reader's attention to what is here said, of the opposition made to the preaching of *Barnabas* and *Saul*, by *Elymas* the Sorcerer. The account is but short, but it is awful. His name, *Elymas*, is probably descriptive of his employment, a *magician*. But the HOLY GHOST hath more strongly marked his real character. The Apostle, under his Almighty influence, called him, *child of the devil*. And, his opposition to a child of God, as the deputy governor *Sergius Paulus* proved to be, is at once a decisive proof of the different kingdoms to which they belonged. The father of this *Elymas*, even the devil, knew, both of the conversion, and ordination of those servants of the Lord. And when *Sergius Paulus* called for *Barnabas* and *Saul*, desiring to hear the word of God; all hell was up in arms, to withstand their preaching. *Elymas*, one of the serpent's brood, is stirred up to oppose. And the event is here recorded. But the Reader will not have drawn all the improvements from this scripture history, which it is designed to bring, if he doth not learn under the HOLY GHOST's teaching, that the same is going on every day throughout the world, and must go on to the end, in the holy war, between the seed of CHRIST, and the seed of the serpent. Nay, the enmity must be eternal. We have many an *Elymas* in our day, to oppose the truth; and who oppose it from the same cause. And if the same awful judgment of

bodily blindness doth not always follow; a still more awful condemnation always takes place on the soul. The HOLY GHOST, by his servant *Jude*, hath said; that *to them is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever*. And the same Scripture explains the cause. See *Jude* 4, 6—19. See also the *Poor Man's Commentary* on Matt. xij. 30—35.

As at this place we now drop the name of *Saul*, with which indeed we are not so much accustomed, and from henceforth call this zealous servant of the LORD, *Paul*: I would just detain the Reader to remark, it is very probable that he used *both* names. For it is here said, *Saul*, who is *also* called *Paul*. The name of *Saul*, which is a *Jewish* name, was no doubt given him by his parents. And this of *Paul*, is the name he was chiefly known by among the *Gentiles*, which is a *Roman* name, and given him because he was a citizen of *Rome*. Acts xxii. 28. But, as this name is first spoken of in this place, and at the conversion of *Sergius Paulus*, the Roman Deputy; is it not probable, (I ask the question, but not decide,) that it was now particularly chosen on account of this man?

13 Now, when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga, in Pamphylia; and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.

14 But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch, in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath-day, and sat down.

15 And after the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, *Ye men and brethren*, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.

16 Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with *his* hand, said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.

17 The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it.

18 And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness.

19 And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, he divided their land to them by lot.

20 And after that he gave unto them judges,

about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet.

21 And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul, the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years.

22 And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king: to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David, the *son* of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.

23 Of this man's seed hath God, according to *his* promise, raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus:

24 When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.

25 And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not *he*. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of *his* feet I am not worthy to loose.

The Reader is perhaps aware, that it was the custom in the Synagogue, after the reading of the law, and the Prophets; for holy men to expound to the people, as they felt their minds disposed, the word of God. And as *Barnabas* and *Paul* had the reputation of being sacred characters, the chief ruler of the Synagogue invited them to speak, if they had any thing particularly to say. No doubt the Lord overruled the occasion. And we of this hour, find cause to bless the Lord for it, in the delightful discourse here recorded. But, I do not think it necessary to comment upon it. The whole is short, and so fully explained by Scripture, that it can require no further illustration.

26 Men *and* brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.

27 For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath-day, they have fulfilled *them* in condemning *him*.

28 And though they found no cause of death *in*

him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain.

29 And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took *him* down from the tree, and laid *him* in a sepulchre.

30 But God raised him from the dead :

31 And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people.

32 And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers,

33 God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again ; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

34 And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, *now* no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.

35 Wherefore he saith also in another *Psalms*, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

36 For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption :

37 But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.

38 Be it known unto you, therefore, men *and* brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins :

39 And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

40 Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets ;

41 Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and

perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.

I request the Reader to remark with me, *some* of the many blessed things contained in this sermon of *Paul's*. Here he is indeed preaching CHRIST, fully, sweetly, and powerfully. Let the Reader first observe, how he opens his discourse. *Men and Brethren*, for so they were, as he himself was by birth a Jew. And *children of the stock of Abraham*; and this, no doubt, was peculiarly grateful to them, as they prided themselves on their descent from that honored Hebrew. But, that the *Gentiles* might consider themselves as included also in his address, (as no doubt many of the proselytes to the Jewish religion were present,) he added; and *whosoever among you feareth God*. So that he included the whole. And thus the LORD commanded *the Gospel to be preached to every creature*. Mark xvi. 15. But, let not the Reader fail to observe at the same time, that while it was the province of *Paul* thus to preach, and all the truly ordained ministers of the word, like *Paul*, to do the same; (for neither he, nor they, can do more;) unless the word of this salvation is *sent*, that is, directed by the power, and grace of God the SPIRIT; neither *Paul's* preaching, nor any other man's watering, will prove profitable, 1 Cor. iii. 5, 6, 7.

Before we proceed further, I would beg the Reader to pause, and make this view of the subject somewhat a little more practical.

The substance of *Paul's* preaching, he himself sums up, in what he calleth *the word of salvation*. And the Gospel of CHRIST, in every point of view, corresponds to this character. For it is *the power of God for salvation to every one that believeth*. Rom. i. 16. And, whoever is made the happy partaker of it, hath a blessed apprehension in his own heart, of the blissful consequences. He finds it to be a salvation, *from death to life, from sin to righteousness, from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to the living God*.

And, I pray the Reader to ponder well the distinguishing nature of this blessing of salvation; in that, it is said to be *sent*. It comes, by divine *appointment*. And it is sent, by divine *direction*. Like *the rain, or the dew of heaven, it waiteth not for man, neither tarrieth for the sons of men*. *The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people*. Micah v. 7. And what endears it yet more, is the distinguishing nature of it, in that, as it waits not for man's deserving; so neither for man's preparing to receive it. The grace of God, which bringeth salvation, doth not suppose men to be in a state of grace, but void of it: for, if the LORD was to wait till a man had prepared himself to receive, this would be to expect life in the dead; and corrupt nature to do that for itself, which salvation comes to give. Very blessedly, therefore, is it said to be *sent*; and to be sent to *the dead in trespasses and sins*. *I am come*, (said JESUS,) *that they might have life*. *He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live*. John x. 10. John xi. 25.

There are numberless beauties in this sermon of *Paul's*, which, I hope, the LORD the SPIRIT will graciously unfold, and give efficacy to in the heart of the Reader. But I dare not enlarge. I must not

however pass by noticing, the very comprehensive expression of the Apostle's, when he saith, that *by Him*, (that is, the LORD JESUS CHRIST,) *all that believe are justified from all things*; from which no justification could be found, *by the law of Moses*. I have often thought, how very gracious it was in GOD the HOLY GHOST, in directing his servant *Paul* thus to teach the Church. The LORD well knew, how many of his people of little faith are at times sharply exercised, by reason of the slenderness of this principle; so as sometimes from the temptations of the enemy, and their own mis-giving hearts, to call in question whether they have the least measure of faith. And, what a relief to the souls of all such ought it to be, and no doubt hath frequently proved, when they are here told, and from an authority which cannot err, that *all that believe*; whether strong believers, or weak believers; whether babes in CHRIST, or fathers in GOD: all are alike *justified from all things*, by CHRIST. And, the reason is given. It is by Him. Yes! CHRIST's Person, and CHRIST's blood and righteousness, are the sole causes of justification; and perfectly distinct from, and unconnected with, any other circumstance whatever. It is indeed a very blessed thing, and calls for great thankfulness in the hearts of those, whom grace gives the power to enjoy it; when a child of GOD is *strong in the faith which is in CHRIST JESUS*. But it never should be forgotten, at the same time, that it is not our faith, but CHRIST's salvation, which is the whole security of the LORD's people. And the weakest believer, as well as the strongest, are alike safe in CHRIST JESUS. *In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.* Isaiah xlv. 25.

And, let me offer a short observation more. As faith is the entire gift of GOD, which, like our stature, we can neither add to, nor take from; a soul in grace, however conscious of the weakness of this blessed principle, should always take comfort in the assurance, that it is a gift of GOD which can never die; *for the gifts and calling of GOD, are without repentance.* Rom. ii. 29. A child of GOD, by virtue of that grace-union in CHRIST, which was given him in CHRIST JESUS, before the world began; Ephes. i. 4. is, during this time-state of the Church, quickened into spiritual life, in CHRIST JESUS. Now, this quickening can never die. *This incorruptible seed liveth and abideth for ever.* 1 Pet. i. 23. Death itself cannot destroy it. Hence, the Apostle blessedly saith: *He that hath the Son hath life.* 1 John v. 12. And JESUS declares it to be *life eternal.* John xvii. 2, 3. So that neither in life, nor death, can there be any alteration here. And the reason is evident, because it is in CHRIST; yea, it is CHRIST himself. John xi. 25. How truly blessed is it then, to behold our safety wholly in CHRIST. There are no procuring causes. Neither great faith nor little faith, have the least hand in the great work of salvation. And though, as was remarked before, it is a matter which calls for much love and praise, to the Almighty Author and Finisher of our faith, when we can cheerfully pass through a tribulated path of darkness, *rejoicing in hope of the glory of GOD*; yet even in that path, though lightened by faith, this must be the believer's song, when his heart is rightly tuned, and which is as much the portion of the weak believer, as the strong: *In the LORD have I righteousness and strength; even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed.* Isaiah xlv. 24.

If I may be indulged one moment longer, it shall be to observe, how solemnly the Apostle finished his sermon, in the concluding sentence of it. He had said, all that could be said, by way of encouragement to poor distressed, broken-hearted sinners which were present, in proclaiming the fulness, greatness, and freeness, of this salvation: and now he makes an appeal to any stout-hearted persons which were there, who would still neglect so great salvation. *Behold ! ye despisers, and wonder and perish !*

There is somewhat tremendously awful in calling to their recollection their own scriptures, in confirmation of what he had said, and by quoting this passage from the Prophet, of those who not barely slighted, but despised the counsel of God, against their own souls, boldly to shew them the dangerous state to which they were exposed. See Habak. i. 5. I do not upon this, or any other occasion, desire to speak decidedly, but I beg the Reader to ask himself, whether the Apostle doth not, by the manner of speaking here made use of, very plainly intimate the total impossibility of those men he alluded to, of receiving the truth of God. They despised, and yet they wondered, they looked with astonishment at what they heard, but yet determined to resist all conviction. They tasted, but rejected the word of life. See Heb. vi. 4, 5, 6. and Commentary. And, Reader ! have you not seen similar things in the present generation ? I have. Oh ! what numbers are there in the earth, who, like *Agrippa*, are almost persuaded to be Christians ; but, like him, prefer time to eternity ; and for the moment's gratification, rush into infinite woe. Acts xxvi. 28. Would the Reader learn the cause ? The word of God explains. See Isaiah vi. 9. 2 Pet. ii. 12—17. Jude 4.

42 ¶ And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath.

43 Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas : who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

44 And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God.

45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

46 Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you : but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

47 For so hath the Lord commanded us, *saying*, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

49 And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.

50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts.

51 But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium.

52 And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.

It appears very plainly from what is here said, as the immediate consequence of *Paul's* eloquent discourse, that as it is for the most part now, so was it then; *some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not*. The Gospel hath always been, and always must be, in proof of its divine truth, *the savor of life unto life, and of death unto death*. 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16. And while the Reader remarks upon what is here said, of the whole city being moved with the relation of the Apostle's preaching, I think it will strike him, that similar effects are not unusual now. What a day of hearing is the present! And how is almost the whole city up in arms to attend preaching! But, alas! what consequences follow? Perhaps there never was a period since the reformation of less vital godliness!

But here is the relief to every child of God, which this history teacheth, and which every age of the Church affords the same. We are told, that in the mixed multitude of Jew and Gentile, the LORD's testimony was given. For, *as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed*. Reader! this is the grand and essential standard. This forms the blessed decision, amidst all doubts and questions of men. All that were ordained to eternal life, in the FATHER's gift, CHRIST's purchase, and the HOLY GHOST's regenerating grace, believed. Provision was made for these blessed effects from everlasting. *Thy people* (said JEHOVAH to CHRIST,) *shall be willing in the day of thy power*. Psm. cx. 3. *All that the FATHER giveth me* (said CHRIST) *shall come to me*. John vi. 37. *According to his mercy* (said Paul) *he saved us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the HOLY GHOST*. Titus iii. 5. Precious LORD JESUS! while thy redeemed are daily praying for an increase of faith, give us grace to praise thee for the least portion, which so fully proves our interest and everlasting safety in thee. *As many as were ordained to eternal life believed!*

REFLECTIONS.

ALMIGHTY GOD the SPIRIT, blessed be thy holy name, for the open and signal display which thou wert pleased to make of thyself, and thy sovereignty, in the ordination of *Barnabas* and *Saul* to the ministry of thy word. Do thou, gracious God, in mercy preside over all the assemblies of thy people, and especially in the setting apart to the sacred office the ministers of thy Church and people. Hast thou not said, with an eye to this unspeakable mercy, *I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.* In mercy, LORD, be it according to thy word, in an eminent manner, in the present day and generation!

LORD, grant that the fearful judgment of *Elymas*, may deter the sworn foes of our God, and of his CHRIST, from daring to oppose thy faithful sent servants. And for the word of salvation which our God hath sent, very sure we are that it will *never return unto thee void*; but as thou hast promised, give thy people grace to wait the accomplishment of it, for it must fulfil thy pleasure, and *prosper in the thing whereunto the LORD shall send it!*

Oh! precious LORD JESUS! cause thy people to rejoice in thy full and finished salvation. *By thee, all that believe, are justified from all things.* Here then, LORD, give thy people grace to rest. Let there be nothing wavering, nothing unsettled, in our faith; while every thing in the covenant of grace is *ordered, and sure in all things.* Oh! for faith, in lively exercise, to believe the record God hath given of his dear SON. *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.* Let all thy faithful therefore of the present hour, as were the disciples of old, be strong in the grace which is in CHRIST JESUS, and, like them, *be filled with joy, and with the HOLY GHOST.*

C H A P. XIV.

CONTENTS.

Paul, and Barnabas, preaching in the Synagogue, are opposed by the unbelieving Jews. Paul healeth a Cripple. The Multitude are astonished, and are for offering to the Apostles divine Honors. Certain Jews from Antioch persuade the People, and Paul is stoned. He recovers, and, with Barnabas, departs from Antioch.

AND it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews, and also of the Greeks, believed.

2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.

3 Long time therefore abode they speaking

boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

4 But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.

5 And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews, with their rulers, to use *them* despitefully, and to stone them,

6 They were ware of *it*, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about:

7 And there they preached the gospel.

Iconium was the chief city of *Lycaonia*, a province in the lesser *Asia*. Here the Apostles, *Barnabas* and *Paul* had fled, as *CHRIST* directed them, from the persecutions raised against them. *Matt. x. 24*. But here the same conflicts they had to encounter. How full of rage is Satan! He knoweth that he hath but a short time. *Rev. xii. 12*. But, Reader! do not fail to remark, that though men, or devils, oppose the cause of *CHRIST*, that cause cannot fail. The *LORD* always hath, and always will, as is here said, give testimony to the word of his grace, and fail not to bring home his redeemed to his everlasting kingdom. There is nothing doubtful in the final issue of the Church of *CHRIST*. No peradventures, or uncertainties. *All that the FATHER hath given to me* (said *JESUS*) *shall come to me.* *John vi. 37.* *JESUS* is pledged for their eternal safety. So that not one of them can be found wanting, when *he maketh up his jewels.* *Mal. iii. 17.* *John xvii. 2.*

8 ¶ And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked:

9 The same heard *Paul* speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed,

10 Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.

We have here a most interesting account of a miracle wrought by *Paul*, in confirmation of the doctrines of grace. So *CHRIST* had promised, and here we behold the accomplishment. See *Mark xvi. 17* to the end. It is worthy remark, that *Peter* and *John* opened their commission in the *Jewish* Church, with healing a cripple at the gate of the temple. *Acts iii. 2, &c.* And here *Paul* and *Barnabas* commenced their public ministry to the *Gentile* Church, with healing

a cripple also in the streets of *Lystra*. And both these cases were similar, being cripples from the womb, and never had walked. Striking emblems of the crippled state of the souls of God's people, by reason of sin; lame from the womb of nature, and such as not only never had walked, but as never could have walked, unless restored by JESUS CHRIST.

I beg the Reader to observe, what is said, concerning this man, hearing *Paul* speak. There is certainly somewhat more intended from the expression, than merely that hearing which is promiscuous, and what is general. And I confess, that I am the more inclined to this opinion, from what is said of the Apostle in remarking it. For it is added, that he, *stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed; said with a loud voice, stand upright on thy feet.* We know that the Apostles possessed the faculty of discerning spirits: for this was among the spiritual gifts given to them. See 1 Cor. xii. 10, 11. And hence, by virtue of it, the Apostle perceived the faith this man had. Is it not probable, (I ask the question, but do not decide upon it,) that the LORD, who placed this Cripple in the Apostle's way, did by him as he did by *Lydia*; opened his heart, to attend to the things which were spoken by *Paul*. Acts xvi. 14. Now, we are told, that *faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* Rom. x. 17. And therefore, is it not as probable in the one instance, as in the other; that the LORD wrought a miracle of grace in the soul of this poor cripple, by regeneration, before that *Paul*, as the LORD's servant, wrought a work of mercy on the *body*, by healing him of his disease: and both, becoming blessed confirmations of the truth of the Gospel? However, be it as it may, one thing is certain: The poor cripple, at the Apostle's command, arose and stood on his feet, and leaped, and walked. And, Reader! do not overlook, that these were the promised effects which were to take place in the earth in the days of the Gospel, when the *lame man should leap as an hart; and the tongue of the dumb sing.* Isaiah xxxv. 6.

And, if the Reader will allow me to detain him a moment longer, over this sweet miracle of sovereign grace, shewn, as we have reason to hope, both to body and soul, I would desire him to remark with me, the properties of grace, so beautifully illustrated as they are, in the example of this cripple. Here was no provision, no preparation, made on the part of the happy receiver. Yea, it is probable, that at the time, and perhaps after, he had no immediate consciousness, how much greater mercy he had been shewn to his soul, than to his body. Such, depend upon it, is the case, in the numberless instances that are going on continually in life. What *David* said, all God's children more or less find, and may with equal truth, say the same: *The God of my mercy shall prevent me.* Psm. lix. 10. The LORD prevents, that is, goes before his people, in all their mercies. He is *found of them that seek him not.* Isaiah lxv. 1. Our whole *Adam*-nature, the Church, as well as the world, are all alike born crippled in all our faculties; yea, not merely crippled, but *dead in trespasses and sins.* There is no apprehension of this ruined state, in any one of the *Adam* race, of our misery, much less a cry for deliverance from it. Therefore, when at any time the LORD healeth our souls, it is his preventing grace, not our application. The poor sinner is healed

he knoweth not how; and faith is wrought in his heart in a way he hath no consciousness of. So wonderful, and powerful, are the works of grace. And oh! how infinitely more wonderful must He be in himself, and in the tendencies of his love towards his people, by whom the whole is wrought; and who is blessedly called, *the God of all grace!*

11 And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.

12 And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.

13 Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people,

14 *Which*, when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard *of*, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out,

15 And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein :

16 Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.

17 Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

18 And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.

Reader! do not fail to observe, the awful darkness in which those men must have been covered, who, while looking with astonishment at the Apostles, in the contemplation of the miracle which they had wrought; had sense enough to know, that such an act could not be performed by man: yet were totally ignorant of the nature, and being of God. And, let me ask, is it not equally so with respect to a real

knowledge of God, notwithstanding the light of the Gospel, in the present day, when such gross misconceptions take place, concerning the real character of JEHOVAH, in his threefold distinction of Person? How few are there, who though they profess this truth, that live in the heartfelt knowledge and enjoyment of it. The creed of multitudes, concerning this glorious, and fundamental article of our holy faith, is found only in their prayer-books. They know the Person of the FATHER, of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST, only by name. They constantly have heard of these truths. They have been *taught* to rehearse them. (Read that Scripture, Isaiah xxix. 13.) And they repeat in *words*, what they are taught to believe in *form*; but know not *the power of godliness*. And here they rest. But, in respect to the relation of the Persons of the GODHEAD to each other, and of their love and grace to the Church: who of this description could give a reason, if they were asked, *of the hope that is in them, with meekness and fear?* 1 Pet. iii. 15.

Reader! do not dismiss the consideration of this subject, (for it is a solemn one,) before that you have given it a more special regard; as it concerns yourself, in making it personal. Depend upon it, that it is not the simple acknowledgement of God, as God, which constitutes a real faith in him. Neither is it all that is needful to be called true faith, which subscribes to the doctrine, that *there are three which bear record in heaven; the FATHER, the WORD, and the HOLY GHOST; and these three are ONE*. 1 John v. 7. For, although it be in fact, no acknowledgment of the true God, which doth not acknowledge him in the true scriptural revelation of Him, as existing in a threefold character of Person; yet men may acknowledge JEHOVAH in this sense by mouth, while having no saving apprehension of him as such, in the heart. *It is with the heart, man believeth unto righteousness: and then from the heart, with the mouth confession is made unto salvation*. Rom. x. 10. Other belief is in fact no saving belief. For we are told, that there is a sense, in which *devils believe and tremble*. James ii. 19. The true faith of the Gospel, on this, and every other momentous article of faith, is taught of God. And this becomes a life-giving, a soul-quickenings, and refreshing faith, bringing the believer into a personal acquaintance with each glorious Person of the GODHEAD, as they have been pleased to reveal themselves to the Church in CHRIST, in their Covenant offices, and characters: when you and I know, and have tasted, the love of God the FATHER, the grace of God the SON, and the communion of God the HOLY GHOST. 2 Cor. xiii. 14. And it was, as the LORD JESUS himself saith, for the communication of this knowledge, that as God-Man Mediator, he had *power given him over all flesh; that he should give eternal life to as many as the FATHER had given him*. And, CHRIST defined this eternal life, to consist in this knowledge; *to know Him the only true God, (FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST,) and JESUS CHRIST God-Man Mediator, whom JEHOVAH hath sent*. John xvii. 2, 3. Reader! what hath the LORD taught you, of these precious things? The belief, the mere profession of belief, in an unknown God, is no belief at all. *They that know thy name, (is the language of scripture,) will put their trust in thee*. Psm. ix. 10.

I hardly think it necessary to pause and remark, what is so very plain, the stupidity of those people at *Lystra*, in their proposed sacri-

fices. We may indeed make an improvement under grace from it, in observing on the one hand, to what a desperate state of ruin our whole nature is reduced, by the fall; and on the other, what grace the LORD JESUS hath manifested to his Church, in her recovery. What line shall fathom the vast depths of misery, in the one; and what stretch of thought, calculate the infinite dimensions of mercy, in both depths, heights, breadths, and lengths, in the other? Ephes. iii. 17, 18, 19.

But I pass over for the present, the consideration of these things, in order to call the Reader's attention to that part of the Apostle's sermon, before these men of *Lystra*, wherein he speaks of the LORD's *suffering, in times past, all nations to walk in their own ways*. Which is a similar expression to what he said some time after, in his discourse before the men at *Athens*. *The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent*. Acts xvii. 30.

It cannot be supposed that in either case, *Paul* meant, that the God of the whole earth was indifferent to the conduct of his creatures. Much less, that the infinite Creator, *whose eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good*; can possibly be an inattentive observer, to any of the works of his Almighty hands. But, the sense seems to be this. The Apostle is drawing a line of distinction, between the Church and the world. And he intended to shew them, from what he said of himself and his companion, that as they were *men of like passions with themselves*; the Church of God, no more than the world, had in themselves any difference of nature. It is as if *Paul* had said; though to the coming of CHRIST, the LORD *suffered all nations to walk in their own ways*, all the purposes of revelation being wholly with an eye to his Church; yet even then, from the fall of man, the LORD had been gathering out his children, wheresoever they were scattered, from the Adam-nature of corruption. But now, by the SON of God having finished redemption-work, and being returned to glory; the HOLY GHOST is come down, to send abroad the remedy of God's own providing for sin; and commanding all men every where to repent. This appears to be the mean drift of the Apostle's words. God's people, consisting both of Jew and Gentile, are scattered over the face of the earth. And, therefore, still with an eye to the Church, so scattered, the LORD is sending his message to them. And the consequence will be, that *all* in every nation, *whom the FATHER hath given to his SON, shall come to him*; for he that calls them to repent, will give them grace to repent; for *they shall come that are ready to perish*. John vi. 37. Isaiah xxvii. 13. Acts v. 31.

And, in the further confirmation of these truths, the Apostle adds: *Nevertheless, the LORD left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness*. Meaning, no doubt, that notwithstanding in spiritual things, the LORD had all along respect only to his Church; yet he left not himself without witness to the whole earth, in temporal things. The Covenant which he made after the flood with all flesh, had stood firm, and would stand firm, never to be broken. The LORD had said, and several thousand years had now run out since the LORD said it, to confirm the purpose of his unchangeable decree. *While the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest, and cold*

and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, should not cease. Gen. viii. 22,

I beg the Reader to remark this. And, while he doth remark it, in testimony to the faithfulness of a Covenant God with all flesh, and to which every day's experience gives a further testimony; let him not forget, that while the LORD continueth his fruitful seasons, and fills the heart with food and gladness, carnal men have not the true relish which spiritual men enjoy. Here, as in the other instance, there is still a line of distinction drawn. It is not the mere possession of *the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, nor the precious things put forth by the moon; unless the good will of Him that dwelt in the bush, sweeten, and sanctify all.* Deut. xxxiii. 14—16. It is the want of this, for which so many aching hearts are in fine houses: and on the contrary, the possession of this, which gladdens the sorrowful situations of many that are very poor. Reader! turn over the subject for yourself, and judge accordingly. See Commentary on Chap. xvii. 22, &c.

19 ¶ And there came thither *certain* Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew *him* out of the city, supposing he had been dead.

20 Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city; and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

21 ¶ And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch.

22 Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

23 And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

24 And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia.

25 And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia:

26 And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.

27 And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.

28 And there they abode long time with the disciples.

It is worthy observation, how fluctuating and inconstant the minds of men are, in respect to religious things, where the heart is not established in grace. Here are those very persons, of whom we read in a few preceding verses, which would have offered, in the extravagance of their zeal, divine honors to *Paul* and *Barnabas*, would now stone them. And was it not so with the LORD JESUS? The multitude, which hailed him with *Hosannas*, within a few days after, cried out, *Crucify him, Crucify him*. So it hath been, and so will it be, in all ages of the Church, during the present time-state of her pilgrimage. See note on Luke iv. 32. See also Matt. x. 21—25. John xy. 18—21. *Paul* seems to have referred to this treatment. 2 Corinthians xi. 25. 2 Timothy iii. 10, 11.

I pray the Reader not to overlook the faith and boldness of *Paul*, who, although he had been stoned at *Lystra*; yet shunned not to go there, for a second benefit to the Church. And *Iconium*, however undeserving, shall not lose the blessings of his labors, where the LORD had before owned his ministry, though there were many adversaries. 1 Cor. xvi. 9. If the Reader would see *Paul's* comment upon this part of his history, he may read it: 1 Cor. iv. 9—13. Oh! that all ministers of CHRIST, had the grace to be like him, faithful!

I detain the Reader in the close of this Chapter, to notice what is said about *confirming the souls of the disciples*. By which we are authorized to conclude, that those were partakers of grace. For otherwise, they could not be confirmed, in what they were not. And, indeed, we are told as much, in the opening of this Chapter. *A great multitude*, (it is said) *both of Jews and Greeks, believed* (verse 1). So that they were real regenerated followers of the LORD. It was highly proper, that they should be confirmed in the faith, which is in CHRIST JESUS. Whether there was any particular service used upon this occasion, is not said. Some of the old writers have said much, in contending that there was. Others have said not. But, on the supposition that there was, it should seem to have been more than probable, agreeable to primitive times, the ordinance was accompanied with the breaking of bread, and of prayer. See Chap. ii. 46, 47. and Chap. xx. 36. And, if such was the service of Confirmation, it must have been a blessed service; where both the persons confirming, and the persons confirmed, were all in grace. Chap. xi. 24. Gal. i. 15, 16. All the beholders of such an assembly must have felt, what *Paul* himself describes, of one coming into a similar congregation of spiritual worshippers; and, being smitten with a deep sense of what he had heard and felt, would fall upon his face, and worship God; and report that God was in them of a truth! 1 Cor. xiv. 25.

We have a short, but it is an interesting account, of an Ordination, held by the Apostles. And truly, it must have been altogether Apostolic.

tolical. It appears to have been observed in prayer and fasting: and then the Apostles commended the Elders to the LORD *in whom they believed*. And these things, for the most part, are all that comes within the province of man in ordination to perform. For the ordination itself, must be of the LORD. CHRIST, as the Head of his body the Church, appoints his under Shepherds, in his fold. And God the HOLY GHOST consecrates, and ordains them. And, oh! how truly called, separated, and sent forth to the service of the sanctuary, who are thus anointed by the sovereign unction of God the HOLY GHOST? What may not be expected, from such a ministry? What blessings are too great to look for in that Church, where the ministers of CHRIST, and stewards of the mysteries of God, come forth in the authority of JESUS, ordained by God the HOLY GHOST; and through grace, are enabled to give themselves first to the LORD, and then to his people? See Acts xiii. 2. and Commentary. HOLY, Blessed, and Eternal SPIRIT! in love and compassion to thy Church, send forth Pastors after thine own heart, to feed thy people with knowledge and understanding. Jeremiah ii. 15.

REFLECTIONS.

GRACIOUS LORD! we behold, in what is here said in this Chapter, the true representation of thy Church, in all ages. The faithful sent servants must endure persecution. The pure Gospel of JESUS, will never be relished by the corrupt minds of the unawakened; neither will it be cordially received by those, who desire to add law to Gospel. But, what grace LORD must it be in thee, to overrule the malice of the enemy, when opposing thy truths, in making the flight of thy servants from persecution to minister to thy glory, in dispersing thy word every where. Oh! may such views sweetly teach my soul, to cry out with the Psalmist, *Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath wilt thou restrain!* I see, LORD, by this wonderful work of thine, that so much of the wrath of man as thou wilt convert into good, shall be employed to praise thee; all the further malice intended, shall be driven, like water running to waste, into another channel.

Will it please my honored LORD, to teach my soul to profit, from the changeable opinion of men, as here set forth; first in honoring his servants too much, and afterwards in treating them so cruelly; to leave all confidence in the creature, and live wholly upon my God the Infinite Creator. Precious JESUS! doth not every day's experience with a loud voice proclaim the solemn truth: *Cease ye from man whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of?* Oh! the blessedness of knowing thee, living to thee, walking with thee, and rejoicing in thee, as the LORD my righteousness. Here let my soul be daily confirmed, and then it matters not, what tribulation I pass through, to enter into thy kingdom! And grant, LORD, to all thy sent servants, the continual manifestations of thy favor, to bear them up, and bear them on, and bear them through, all opposition. Shortly the LORD will come, to take all his redeemed home, both ministers and people, to himself, for ever: and then the whole of persecution will end, in an everlasting day of the full knowledge, and enjoyment of my God for ever!

CHAP. XV.

CONTENTS.

Disputes arise in the Church, on the Subject of Circumcision. The Apostles and Elders are consulted on it. Their Determination is sent to the Churches. Paul and Barnabas differ, and separate.

AND certain men which came down from Judea, taught the brethren, *and said*, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

3 And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles : and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

4 And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.

5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses.

I beseech the Reader not to overlook, how early dissention arose in the Church, notwithstanding the Apostles had been so openly ordained by the HOLY GHOST to the ministry. One might have thought, that nothing would have sprung up to disturb the peace of the Church, at such a golden age, when men so highly taught, were alive to prevent it. Every case of dispute arising from the remains of in-dwelling corruption, might have been brought before them, and their decision unerring and final. But, we learn from hence, how universal and unceasing the deadly fruits of our fallen state are ! It is blessed, however, to observe, how sweetly the LORD overrules evil for good ; and makes that which is sinful in itself, by his grace, to minister to his glory. *There must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.* 1 Cor. xi. 19.

I beg the Reader, however, to observe, (and the same will serve to guide him upon all similar occasions,) that those men which came

from *Judæa*, came not from the Apostles' authority. (See verse 24). All schism, springs from the corruptions of men; they derive no sanction from God. And, it should be further observed, that this rite of circumcision, which they contended for, was joined with the necessity of keeping the law of *Moses* (see verse 5). And thus they were shackling the free grace of God, with the will-worship, and will-working, of man. And, the ultimate object was, to render CHRIST and his finished salvation, a matter of uncertainty, whether it should prove beneficial or not, to the Church of God. Reader! pause over the subject. Will-worship is the same, in every age of the Church, under whatever covering it hides itself. Ordinances, even the purest, and the best of Ordinances, are no SAVIORS. When men lay more stress upon them, than they do upon the everlasting love of God the FATHER; the union of CHRIST with his Church, before all worlds; and his finished redemption in the glories of his Person, blood, and righteousness, when saving her from all the sin and evils of this time-state of her warfare; and the regenerating grace of God the HOLY GHOST; they abuse them, in converting them into a purpose for which they were never intended. In such seasons of the Church, it is blessed to live above all party spirit of men, by living upon CHRIST; and suffering not God's grace to be made subservient to man's will. If the Reader will consult what *Paul* said to the *Galutians* on this subject, he will find, how warmly the Apostle reproved all such errors. See Gal. v. throughout, particularly 1—6.

It appears, that *Paul* and *Barnabas*, who were preachers of free grace, in opposition to the doctrine of circumcision, had warm disputes with those free-will men and work-mongers, before the subject was proposed to be brought before the Apostles and Elders at *Jerusalem*. And probably, those men, as we find *Paul* himself took notice of upon several occasions, were disposed to call in question *Paul's* authority, and to run down his Apostleship as much as possible: as if his judgment was not to be considered, in point of value, with the first and original Apostles. See Gal. ii. 1—10. Reader! think it not strange, at what is going on now in the Christian world, in the opposition made to the plainest and purest doctrines of the Gospel; when we find such men as *Paul* and *Barnabas* so lightly esteemed. The great enemy of souls, wageth war chiefly with those grand truths, in which the present and everlasting welfare of the Church depends. Such, I mean, as the eternal love, purpose, and grace, of God the FATHER, to the Church, before all worlds. The GODHEAD, Person, work, blood-shedding, and righteousness, of our LORD JESUS CHRIST. The Person, GODHEAD, love, and grace, of God the HOLY GHOST, in his regenerating, convincing, converting, and sanctifying influence, upon the persons of the Lord's people. While these grand, and infinitely momentous doctrines are insisted upon, as the sole life of the soul; the enemy will raise up all the various methods his subtilty can devise, to counteract them, and keep as much as possible in the back ground their importance. He stirreth up enemies *from without*, among the ungodly and carnal, to say, that good order among men is in danger, and nothing but licentiousness will follow, if such doctrines are allowed to be preached. And, he stirreth up the corruptions of friends *within*, to lay more stress upon things of less moment, in order to keep out of view those most essential truths. *Paul* saw this, and

felt it in his day, and before his departure from the Church at *Ephesus* foretold it, as an evil that would follow. *I know*, (said he,) *that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them.* Acts xx. 29, 30. But, Reader! let you and I learn to make a proper distinction, between things which are essential, and others which are of no moment. If we are called upon to contend, let it be a holy contention for what is worth contending for; namely, *the faith which was once delivered to the saints.* Jude 3. And, let us see that we are living ourselves upon what we contend for with others, or would recommend to them to live upon also. All our springs of grace here, and glory hereafter, are in CHRIST. His GODHEAD, and our compleat justification in him, are the life of our soul. To give up these, were to give up life. For, *if righteousness come by the law, then CHRIST is dead in vain.* Gal. ii. 21.

6 ¶ And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men *and* brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as *he did* unto us:

9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

12 Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.

13 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men *and* brethren, hearken unto me:

14 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written,

16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up:

17 That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.

18 Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them which from among the Gentiles are turned to God;

20 But that we write unto them that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and *from* fornication, and *from* things strangled, and *from* blood.

21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

There is somewhat very interesting in what is here related, of this holy meeting. The three Apostles, *Peter*, *James*, and *John*, were at *Jerusalem* at this time: (Gal. ii. 9.) and, no doubt, though no notice is taken of *John's* speaking on the subject, as *Peter* and *James* did, he was present also. And, as it is said, (verse 4.) that *Paul* and *Barnabas* were received of the Church at *Jerusalem*, and a goodly company of the Church from *Antioch* accompanied them thither; we may well suppose this meeting must have been very numerous. Five, at least, Apostles, with the Elders of *Jerusalem*, and the whole Church of that city; (verse 22.) and many of the Church from *Antioch*! And, above all! How eminently must have been the presence of the Lord in the midst? Reader! Is it not a subject of great animation, to contemplate, if but in idea, an assembly so formed under the LORD?

I consider it a subject, which calls for great thankfulness to God the HOLY GHOST, in causing those words of the Apostles upon a point of such consequence as was here determined in this assembly, to be recorded. Who but must behold God speaking in them, and by

them, to this important purpose! And, while we find the matter so fully decided, as if to put an end to every thing of a like nature, which might arise in the future ages of the Church, to disturb the peace of it; how truly blessed is it to find included also in this decision, the oneness of the Church of CHRIST, in both Jew and Gentile. This was a grand point to be made fully known to the Church. And, in what *James* was taught to deliver, it is, according to my view of what he said, most blessedly expressed, and confirmed. For, having quoted a well-known prophecy of *Amos*, (Chap. ix. 11, 12.) in reference to the Church of our spiritual *David*, whose tabernacle, in the *Adam*-nature of sin, was fallen down, and by Him was to be rebuilt; he adds, that *all upon whom his Name was called might seek the LORD*. And these things were not the result of any after act, in the divine mind, but the eternal purpose of JEHOVAH; FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST, in Covenant purposes and engagements, from everlasting. There is somewhat so truly blessed in this, short as the Apostle's statement is, as can never be sufficiently admired; neither GOD the HOLY GHOST sufficiently thanked for, in causing it to be recorded. Truly we may say, with the Apostle: *known unto God are all his works from the beginning!* I must not trespass by quotations. But I beg the Reader, in confirmation of this precious truth, (for indeed it is most precious,) that he will look at a few scriptures before he quits the subject. Ephes. i. 3, 4, 5, 6. Ephes. iii. 1—11. John x. 16. Isaiah xlix. 1—6.

22 ¶ Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; *namely*, Judas, surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:

23 And they wrote *letters* by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren *send* greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:

24 Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, *Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law*: to whom we gave no *such* commandment:

25 It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

26 Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

27 We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell *you* the same things by mouth.

28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;

29 That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

30 So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle:

31 *Which* when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.

32 And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed *them*.

33 And after they had tarried *there* a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.

34 Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still.

35 Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

Though the purport of this Apostolic Epistle is as plain as words can be rendered; yet I think it necessary to detain the Reader with a short observation, to avoid any misapprehension. This letter from the holy College, it should be remembered, was sent, to settle the main point in question, respecting *Circumcision*. By the full decision of the Apostles and Elders, and the whole Church, assembled for that purpose, under God the HOLY GHOST; (verse 28.) this *Jewish* rite was now for ever done away. But, lest the Gentile Church should abuse this Christian liberty; or the Jewish Church should be tempted to conceive, a total freedom from all restrictions whatever, was included; the Apostles declared, that while that Jewish rite of circumcision was removed, the abstinence from those idolatrous customs to which the Gentiles, before their conversion to God were accustomed, must be fully observed. And, I would beg to make another observation, respecting the several things, which are *four* in number, here brought together. The eating meats offered to idols, and blood, and things strangled, are classed with fornication; but this

doth not imply as though these things were equally sinful. The former ceased when idolatry ceased, which at conversion, when the work was of God, and the sinner truly regenerated, took place. But the latter, namely, *fornication*, is, and will be, of everlasting obligation to abstain from, as long as the world remains; and the holy estate of God's ordinance in marriage, (which is a type of CHRIST's marriage with his Church,) shall continue.

Reader! how blessedly the Gospel enforceth every thing that is lovely, in an holiness of life and conversation, and brings with it to every renewed soul, grace and strength from God the SPIRIT, to perform it; while teaching at the same time, that it is *by grace we are saved through faith*, and not by the deeds of the law. Blessedly indeed is it said, that through the SPIRIT alone it is, that *we can mortify the deeds of the flesh, and live*. Rom. viii. 13. Oh! thou SPIRIT of holiness! create in thy people new hearts, and new minds, by thy continual renewings, Put forth the efficacy of CHRIST's blood, upon all whom thou hast called with an holy calling, to purge the conscience, and daily, hourly, to wash away every thing that is unholy, and unclean, in our lives and conversation. Oh! for the renewings of the HOLY GHOST, to be shed upon the whole redeemed family abundantly, through JESUS CHRIST our LORD. Titus iii. 5, 6.

36 ¶ And some days after, Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, *and see* how they do.

37 And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.

38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.

39 And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus;

40 And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.

41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

I would pause over this contention of these faithful servants of the LORD, to make all suitable reflections upon it. As God the HOLY GHOST hath been pleased to have it recorded in his Church, it may well be supposed, that it will be to our profit, to attend to it. Here then, we see two eminent fellow laborers in the service of their

LORD, who had gone for several years, as it should seem together, and with their lives in their hands, and moreover sent forth by the HOLY GHOST, to his work; (Acts xiii. 4.) now separating asunder, upon a point of apparently no great importance. And, this separation was made at a time, when the peace of the Church had been but just established, from the saw of contention having passed over the Church, about the introduction of the law with the Gospel: verses 1, 2. Yea, *Paul* and *Barnabas* were sent by the Church to *Antioch*, jointly to deliver the decrees ordained by the Apostles and Elders at *Jerusalem*, on this question of Circumcision, verses 22, 23. And, a very blessed time it should seem, they had together at *Antioch*, on that occasion. But yet, all these things, were not sufficient to suppress the risings of contention between them; but part they would, and part they did. And thus the Church is taught, that the best of men are but men; and, as *Paul* himself had but a little space before told the people of *Lystra*, so here was shewn; that they were *men of like passions with ourselves*. Acts xiv. 15. Reader! let this be our improvement from it. Look to JESUS. He, and he alone, is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens. Heb. vii. 26. Oh! how sweet is the relief, when amidst every thing unsatisfying in ourselves, and all creature comforts, we can look to JESUS; and cease from man whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of. Isaiah ii. 22.

Let it be observed, however, in the instance of this quarrel, how graciously the LORD overruled it, to his glory, and the promotion of his Church's welfare. For, by this separation, the word of God was further extended, when *Barnabas*, by going unto *Cyprus*, and *Paul* through *Syria* and *Cilicia*, carried the glad tidings of salvation to those places. But, though the LORD's providences in extracting good from evil, calls upon the Church to adore his Almighty hand, in the grace manifested; yet we should learn also, that while this ministers to his glory, the evil of sin in our fallen nature remains the same. It is still our infirmity, which produceth such sad consequences. The LORD's is the sole praise, which, even from the unworthiness of his people, will bring sweet from the bitter, and manifest divine strength to bear up against creature weakness.

We should not, I think, dismiss the subject of this contention of those holy men, without taking into our view of it, what afterwards followed. It is very plain, from the history of the Church, that though *Paul*, rather than take *Mark* with him at that time, separated from *Barnabas*, yet he still loved them both, and afterwards, upon more than one occasion, spoke of them with all the love of a brother. Yea, this very *Mark* was with *Paul* just before his martyrdom; and the aged Apostle, then with full prospect of death in view, tells *Timothy*, that he must bring *Mark* with him, for, said he, *he is profitable to me for the ministry*. See 1 Tim. iv. 11. See also 1 Cor. ix. 6. Coloss. iv. 10. Grace in the heart will revive as the Corn, though the remaining weeds of indwelling corruption will too often choke it. Hosea xiv. 7. But how, and from whence is this revival? Read the last six words of the following verse. *From me* (saith the LORD,) *is thy fruit found*. Oh! precious JESUS! how sweet in all things is thy Person, grace, and power?

REFLECTIONS.

How can I begin, or end, the perusal of this blessed Chapter, without having my whole soul led to the LORD JESUS, in contemplating the infinite preciousness of his Almighty Person, and the infinite preciousness of his Almighty work. Truly, LORD, thou hast shewn thy Church and people, that *in CHRIST JESUS neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.* No obedience to the law, nor all the imperfect and unmeriting services of thy servants under the Gospel, can recommend to GOD. All justification is alone in thee. And oh! how very blessed to the souls of thy redeemed ones, is that precious Scripture, *CHRIST is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.* Be it my portion, O LORD, under the sweet influences of the HOLY GHOST, to enter into an heartfelt enjoyment of these things, that I may be included in that glorious assurance of my GOD, by his servant the Prophet, *In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.*

Praises to GOD the HOLY GHOST for thus causing the frailties of his faithful servants to be recorded, for the edification and encouragement of more frail and exercised servants of our GOD, in the service and ministry of his word. Oh! that the LORD the SPIRIT may render the review of it at all times profitable to his Church. Earthen vessels at the best, even the Apostles of CHRIST were, and how less than nothing, but as the sufficiency is in CHRIST, must be all that labor in the word and doctrine. Oh! then vouchsafe thy sovereign grace, O LORD the SPIRIT, to all thy sent servants. Make them one in CHRIST, and then will they with one mouth and one heart glorify GOD, and be at peace among themselves.

CHAP. XVI.

CONTENTS.

We are here first brought acquainted with Timothy. Paul hath a Vision to call him to Philippi. The LORD opens the Heart of Lydia. Paul and Silas are imprisoned. The Jailor is converted. Paul and Silas depart from Philippi.

THEN came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father *was a Greek*:

2 Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.

3 Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek.

4 And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.

5 And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.

It is astonishing, after what is related in the preceding Chapter, and after what we read of *Paul's* sentiments concerning circumcision, Gal. v. 2. that the Apostle should have so temporized in relation to *Timothy*. But how sweetly do all the infirmities of men, yea, and great men too, when the LORD the SPIRIT is our teacher, preach the glories and perfections of CHRIST, and our compleat need of him.

6 Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia, and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia,

7 After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia; but the Spirit suffered them not.

8 And they passing by Mysia, came down to Troas.

9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

10 And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.

11 Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next *day* to Neapolis.

12 And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, *and* a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.

13 And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted *thither*.

I do entreat the Reader to remark what is here said of the HOLY GHOST. What can be an higher proof of His Almighty Ministry in the Church? He forbids to preach in one place. He sends to another. Can any thing more strongly define distinguishing grace? So the Prophet speaks, in the name of the LORD, *I caused it* (said the LORD,) *to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city.* Amos iv. 7. And I entreat the Reader to observe with me, that when the *persons* of his people are concerned, then it is no longer the *place* which is objected to. This *Bithynia*, when the LORD's people are there, the LORD will send to. Hence *Peter*, directed so to do by the HOLY GHOST, sends his Epistle to *Bithynia*. See 1 Pet. i. 1. See Jerem. iii. 14.

14 ¶ And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard *us*: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought *us*, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide *there*. And she constrained us.

Every circumstance in the history of this woman is striking, and merits our attention.

First, We find a special call of *Paul* to *Macedon*; and the first reason for it, is given in the history of this woman being called to God, through the instrumentality of *Paul's* preaching. The LORD hath said, he will seek out his sheep, and deliver them out of all places whither they have been scattered. Ezek. xxxiv. 12.

It is further remarkable in the case of this woman's conversion, that though she was in this city of *Philippi*, when *Paul* was sent here, she was not an inhabitant of this place, but of *Thyatira*, a country far removed from it; for *Philippi* was in *Europe*, and *Thyatira* on the borders of *Asia*. So that the LORD must have brought her to *Philippi*, and then called *Paul* thither, to bring about the purposes of his grace. Doth the Reader ask, whether the conversion of this woman might not have been accomplished without those means, had she remained in *Thyatira*? I answer, Yes, without doubt, the LORD might so have wrought. But the LORD is pleased not unfrequently, to appoint otherwise; and what the LORD appoints must be right. And it is very precious when we see how the LORD, who fixeth the bounds of his people's habitations, arrangeth every thing for his glory, and his people's happiness.

There is another sweet circumstance in this woman's history. Though in the eyes of the world she was a person of no great rank or character, a seller of purple only, not one dressed, as the rich man in the parable is described, in purple and fine linen, but one that moved about from place to place to get her daily bread, yet so precious in the eyes of JESUS, as one of his jewels, that a special messenger shall

be sent to her to tell her words whereby she must be saved. Reader! learn from hence how valuable in the eyes of Jesus are all his redeemed ones. Luke xvi. 19.

I pray the Reader to consider another feature respecting this woman. GOD the HOLY GHOST hath caused her name to be handed down in the Church with honorable testimony. Had she not been precious to the LORD, neither her history, nor name would have been given. But now her name is known by thousands, and her history also, while millions of the human race, and multitudes which have made a figure also in their day and generation among the carnal and ungodly, and thought themselves persons of no small consequence, are now buried in everlasting oblivion, and are known no more. Oh the blessedness of being in CHRIST! Oh, the blessedness of being recorded in his book, and having our names written in heaven. Philip. iv. 3. Luke x. 20. Rev. xiii. 8. Psm. cxxxix. 16.

But the principal feature to be noticed in *Lydia's* history, is, that the LORD opened her heart to attend to the things which were spoken by *Paul*. Yes. For if the LORD had not opened her heart, *Paul* never could. Reader! this is one of the most important points in the Gospel to be regarded. Oh! that it was well and duly considered, because in every instance it must be the same. For it is not man's preaching, but the LORD's ordering, and the opening of the heart is the LORD's work, and not man's. Did men but consider what a work is wrought when conversion-work is wrought, how different would be their views concerning the importance of salvation from what they now have of it. In every instance, all the persons of the GODHEAD must, and do concur. No man can come to CHRIST, without the drawings of the FATHER. And these drawings are a proof of his everlasting love. John vi. 44. Jerem. xxxi. 3. None can open the heart but He who hath the key of David. Rev. iii. 7. None but that GOD who moved over the face of the waters at the old creation, can cause light to spring out of darkness in the new. 2 Cor. iv. 6. So that the whole persons of JEHOVAH put their Almighty hand to the work in the conversion of *Lydia*; and the same is essential in the instance of every sinner, whom the LORD makes willing in the day of his power. Psm. cx. 3. Reader! what saith your experience to this scriptural testimony? If He who opened *Lydia's* heart hath mercifully opened your's, you can best explain the greatness of the work, the difficulties of it, the state of your mind before it was wrought, in the dominion of sin and Satan, and the state of your heart since GOD was so gracious, as will render unnecessary any observations of mine upon the subject, to explain. All those blessed effects which marked *Lydia's* conduct, will more or less manifest themselves in your life and conversation. All the LORD's faithful servants, his ordinances, his word, his sabbaths, his people, will be dear to the heart. Nothing will be judged equally valuable as CHRIST and his.

16 ¶ And it came to pass, as he went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying:

17 The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.

18 And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.

There is somewhat very singular in what is here related. This damsel was evidently under an evil possession, as the craft she was engaged in proves. But what she said was strictly true, for the Apostles were the Lord's servants, and shewed the way of salvation in preaching CHRIST. John xiv. 6. But whether the Lord overruled the enemy which deluded her, to give an unwilling testimony to the truth, as it is in JESUS, as he did in the days of his flesh concerning CHRIST himself, Mark i. 24. or whether the Lord did by her, as he did by the poor man possessed of an evil spirit among the tombs, suffer this evil possession to be for a time, for the greater manifestation of the Lord's glory, I cannot presume to say. See Mark v. 1—20. and Commentary upon it. But it is worthy remark, that when in the name of the Lord JESUS, Paul commanded the evil spirit to come out, the infamous gain of her masters was at an end, and affords a reasonable hope, that, as in the case of the poor man among the tombs, this damsel might have been delivered, as he was, from the power of Satan to the living God. It is true that the scripture is silent, and hath not added this part to her history. We have therefore no authority to make the conclusion as certain. But it is equally true, that she was delivered from the delusion under which she had been, and therefore we are in some measure authorized to hope it. But here we leave the subject.

19 ¶ And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains were gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew *them* into the market place unto the rulers,

20 And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city,

21 And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.

22 And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat *them*.

23 And when they had laid many stripes upon

them, they cast *them* into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely :

24 Who having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.

Reader! while attending to what is here said, in the conflicts and sufferings of God's faithful servants, do not forget what the LORD JESUS said, *In the world ye shall have tribulation. In me ye shall have peace.* John xvi. 33. *Paul* refers to this unjust and cruel treatment in his Epistle to the *Thessalonians*; and makes use of it to shew that the LORD's promise had its accomplishment. *For yourselves (said he) brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain; but even after we had suffered before, and were shamefully treated as ye know at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the Gospel of God with much contention.* 1 Thess. ii. 1, 2. And it is very blessed to behold, how stripes occasioned strength; and the malice of enemies endeared the LORD to the hearts of his suffering servants. Look at these holy men under every conflict. Wherever they were, how shamefully soever, as *Paul* saith, they were handled, the bitterness of persecution only rendered them more impregnable to suffering. *None of these move me, (said Paul,) neither count I my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the LORD JESUS, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God.* Acts xx. 24. What a blessed frame of mind! Oh! what a gracious God to give it!

25 ¶ And at midnight *Paul* and *Silas* prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.

26 And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.

27 And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison-doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.

28 But *Paul* cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.

29 Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before *Paul* and *Silas*,

30 And brought them out, and said, *Sirs*, what must I do to be saved?

31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

32 And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.

33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed *their* stripes: and was baptized, he, and all his, straightway.

34 And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

Here are several very interesting subjects opened to our meditation within the limits of these few verses, of a different nature, but all sweetly corresponding to one great point, namely, to set forth the glory and prayer of the LORD JESUS. The situation of *Paul*, and his companion, when thrust into this loathsome place, and with many stripes on their backs, and their feet made fast in the stocks, was truly exercising; but as no prison can shut out CHRIST, so no prison can shut in the soul. JESUS giveth songs in the night, and the midnight hour is a day-light hour, when GOD the HOLY GHOST calls up his people to prayer and praise!

This was not the first time the LORD had answered the prayers of his saints by an earthquake. See Acts iv. 31. and Commentary upon it. How sweetly that promise was here fulfilled. Isaiah lxy. 24. And was it not (I ask the question,) as if to teach them of His abiding presence, who came down in an open display of glory at *Pentecost*? Chap. ii. 1. And what a courage it must have imparted to the Apostles, when such decided testimonies were given them, both of the LORD's presence, and the LORD's power? Reader! do not overlook the rich assurance such things bring with them to the present hour, of the same presence and power, though such open manifestations may not be now made, because they are not needed. Read, in confirmation of it, only these *two* promises, and if the LORD applies them to the heart, they will be fully conclusive. Matt. xxviii. 20. Isaiah xxvii. 2, 3.

The effect wrought upon the jailor, prompts the mind to ask, whether the LORD in rich mercy had not suffered his sen's servants to be imprisoned, purposely to bring about the wonderful event of this man's conversion. But be this as it may, surely no faithful servant of the LORD would shrink from stripes, and a prison, if by such means the LORD should be pleased to minister to the salvation of a sinner. And if we call to mind that this visit of *Paul* to *Philippi*, had been induced by the effect of a vision, there will be no great violence to suppose, that the LORD's providence in thrusting *Paul* and *Silas* into this prison, was intimately connected with the LORD's leading them into *Macedon*. We may indeed enquire, speaking after the manner of men, how this rugged jailor, whom we may suppose by virtue of his office, rarely, if ever left the prison, should have heard *Paul* preach, except as by a means like this, *Paul* came into the prison to preach there?

But, Reader! do not in the earthquake of the prison, given in answer to the prayers and hymns of *Paul* and *Silas*, overlook the still greater earthquake the LORD made in the *jailor's* soul. No convulsion without, unaccompanied with trembling within, would have put such a cry as this awakened sinner uttered, when he sprang in and fell down before his prisoners. There was a divine light from the LORD shining inward upon his soul, before that he called for the common light of the house to lighten the wards of the prison. Convinced by this illumination of his own lost estate, and of those prisoners being the servants of the LORD, the language of his very soul earnestly desired to know what must be done for salvation.

The answer of *Paul* and *Silas* to the question is short, but sweet, and fully comprehensive to what the Gospel of salvation hath stated. Thus our dear LORD, during the days of his flesh, dwelt much upon it. See Matt. viii. 10. Mark ix. 23. Luke xvii. 6. And his servants following their LORD's steps. Acts viii. 37. Chap. xiv. 9. But it should be remembered, that in all these instances, and numberless others, it is not meant a mere acknowledgment of the truths of the Gospel. In this sense, devils believe and tremble. But true faith is the conviction, not of the head, but the heart. And this is God's giving, not man's creating. *Unto you*, saith the Apostle, *it is given in the behalf of CHRIST, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.* Philip. i. 29.

And let it be further observed, in the instance of this man, that his faith was manifested to be genuine by the effects which followed. For we are told, that *he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes, and was baptized, he, and all his, straightway.* Here were decided tokens of a work of sovereign grace wrought in his soul! He took them from the prison to his house. The stripes which he himself had so unmercifully laid on them, he now softened with the oil of love. Their breadless prison was now changed into a bountiful supply of food. And the deadness and darkness of his mind, in a state of nature, was now done away for life and light in the soul. For it is said that *he rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.* Reader! behold what grace can accomplish! See here, what hath God wrought! Oh! who shall limit the sovereignty of the LORD, when the word of the LORD abounds with such wonderful instances of the power of grace.

35 And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go.

36 And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace.

37 But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast *us* into prison: and now do they thrust us out privily? nay, verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out.

38 And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates, and they feared when they heard that they were Romans.

39 And they came and besought them, and brought *them* out, and desired *them* to depart out of the city.

40 And they went out of the prison, and entered into *the house of Lydia*: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.

It is more than probable that the report of the earthquake had reached the ears of the magistrates. Indeed, it is hardly to be supposed possible that it should not. But neither earthquake, nor the relation made of the change wrought on the *jailor*, could effect any change upon the magistrates. Oh! how plainly, clearly, and fully, doth every circumstance in life preach the doctrine of distinguishing grace. Reader! it is very blessed to trace the LORD's hand in all the LORD's appointment; and, like *Paul* and *Silas*, watch the LORD's leadings, both for removals or abidings, where-soever his providence appoints.

REFLECTIONS.

AMIDST many gracious improvements to be made of this Chapter, I would desire to remark the LORD's merciful manifestations, in the instances here recorded of sovereign grace, in opening the heart of *Lydia* by the sweet constraining cords of love; and in alarming into conviction the heart of the *Jailor*, by the trembling convulsions of horror, and anguish of soul. Oh! how various, how wonderful, and how full of mercy in all, are the multiform ways of our wonder-working God! *He will beautify the meek with salvation.* He will pull down the strong-holds of sin in his people; and make the stubborn knee of the soul to bend to his power.

Reader! have you observed, carefully observed, what is said in this Chapter of GOD the SPIRIT? How truly awful to read of his forbidding the word to be preached in *Asia*! How strikingly solemn, that when the servants of the LORD assayed to go into *Bithynia*, the SPIRIT suffered them not. Reader! have you noticed these things? And can you notice such things without pausing to remark, yea, and to remark with astonishment, wonder, love, and praise also, that the LORD hath not long, long since forbidden it in our guilty land? Oh! the forbearance of our God to the present CHRIST-despising generation! LORD! let it never be said of our British *Judah*, *I will command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it!* But, oh! in mercy grant, that *the goodness and long suffering of our God may lead to repentance.*

C H A P. XVII.

CONTENTS.

Paul and Silas prosecute their Circuit of preaching the Word through Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens. We have an awful Account of the latter.

NOW when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews:

2 And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,

3 Opening and alledging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.

4 And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.

5 But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

6 And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;

7 Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Cesar, saying, That there is another king, *one* Jesus.

8 And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.

9 And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.

It doth not appear that *Paul*, or any of his company, preached in the two first places noticed in this Chapter. Neither have we any

mention made of them any more than here, in all scripture. And what a striking consideration is it, that both those places are now, and for many a generation have been, in the hands of the Turks! I leave the Reader to his own reflections upon the subject.

Thessalonica was the chief city of *Macedonia*, larger than *Philippi*. The Jews, it should seem, were very numerous here, and had a Synagogue. And the Apostle, with *Silas*, and *Timotheus*, his companions, (see verse 15.) during their abode among the *Thessalonians*, attended the worship in the Synagogues, and most ably preached to them *JESUS*. I say most ably, for we have full proof of it in both Epistles to the *Thessalonians*, which *Paul* afterwards sent to the Church there. I need not make quotations from those blessed writings, for it would swell my *Poor Man's Commentary* to too large a size. Neither is it necessary, as the Reader can refer to both Epistles in proof. Indeed he would do well to read those Epistles, and this history together. But, of the Apostle's success, the first Chapter of the First Epistle to the *Thessalonians*, fully proves. And of his labors among them night and day, the second Chapter of the same Epistle very sweetly testifies.

But while we notice with delight and thankfulness the work of the *LORD* prospering under the hand of his servants, in the call of the Redeemer's people in *Thessalonica*, I pray the Reader no less to notice with myself the rejection made by the unbelieving Jews. Yes! The word of God so points out the solemn truth: and the earth in every age bears testimony in confirmation. As *Paul* said, so daily experience, both then and now, proves. *We are, (said he,) where we make manifest the savor of his knowledge in every place, a sweet savor of CHRIST in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one, we are the savor of death unto death: and to the other, the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?* 2 Cor. ii. 14, 15, 16. Oh! the wonders of distinguishing grace!

10 ¶ And the brethren immediately sent away *Paul* and *Silas* by night unto *Berea*: who coming thither, went into the synagogue of the Jews.

11 These were more noble than those in *Thessalonica*, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

12 Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.

13 But when the Jews of *Thessalonica* had knowledge that the word of God was preached of *Paul* at *Berea*, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.

14 And then immediately the brethren sent

away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.

15 And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.

I admire the scripture sense of nobility, in the account here given of the people of *Berea*. The word of God defines what it is to be truly noble, in both receiving with all readiness of mind the scriptures, and searching them daily. Reader! behold an honorable testimony the HOLY GHOST hath himself given to those who do receive, and daily search his sacred word. He saith elsewhere, *them that honor me, I will honor: and they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed.* I Sam. ii. 30. Oh! how will the word of God arise in judgment at the last day, to silence in everlasting confusion thousands, in whose houses the Bible indeed may be found, but so little used by them, that their condemnation may be written in letters upon the dust which covers it? Yea, strange to say, but by a contradiction in terms peculiarly known in the present hour, numbers profess great earnestness to send the Bible abroad to others, while thrown aside and never studied by themselves! Oh! ye noble Bereans! I bless God the HOLY GHOST for the high honor the LORD of hosts himself hath here conferred upon you, in thus recording your true nobility in the word of his grace, and transmitting it to endless generations of the Church to be noticed by his people!

It may be proper for the Reader to observe, that when the Apostle speaks of the *Bereans*, as more noble than the people of *Thessalonica*, is meant the Jews of that place. And the commendation given the one, to the reproach of the other, is wholly in that; while the one searched the scriptures daily, and examined concerning what *Paul* and his companions said, whether those things were so; the other made no enquiry in the word of God, but condemned their doctrine without seeking any proof. But that this comparison did not refer to the Gentiles in *Thessalonica* is very certain, for before *Paul* and *Silas* left the *Thessalonians* to go to *Berea*, we are told, that among the devout Greeks which were believers, there was *a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few*, verse 4. Indeed the Church planted in *Thessalonica* before *Paul* left it, and the two blessed Epistles afterwards sent to it by him, very plainly shew how God the HOLY GHOST had opened a door among them for their ministry, and given testimony to their labors by the word of his grace.

16 ¶ Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

17 Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.

18 Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him, and some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.

19 And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine whereof thou speakest is?

20 For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.

21 (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there, spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.)

We shall be better able to form our conclusions of the Apostle's ministry among the *Athenians*, if we previously take a short view of this people; and, under divine teaching, from what is here said of them, behold the wretched blindness, in respect to the true knowledge of God, in which this famous city was then covered.

Athens, at the time *Paul* was there, stood high in repute for learning and philosophy, and all human sciences then in esteem in the schools. It prided itself also upon religion. And from the intercourse with the Jews at Jerusalem in trade, they had acquired some knowledge of the scriptures of God. And as a free toleration was granted to every one to exercise whatever profession he thought proper of religion, the Jews had a Synagogue for worship in *Athens*. But the leading part of the people were divided, (as appears from this Chapter,) into those two great sects, the *Epicureans*, and the *Stoicks*. The former sprung from a certain philosopher (falsely so called) of the name of *Epicurus*, who lived about three hundred and forty years before the coming of our LORD JESUS CHRIST. His doctrine was, that there was no first cause; no God; but that the world came by chance. And that a man's own pleasure was the only object of pursuit. The *Stoicks* were the followers of a philosopher called *Zeno*. They took the name of *Stoic* from the Greek word *Stoa*, which signifies a Porch. And as it is said that under a Porch *Zeno* used to walk, and teach his pupils his notion of things, they were called *Stoic* philosophers on that account. The tenets of this class of people differed from that of the *Epicureans*, in acknowledging a first cause. But they held that so much natural goodness was in every man, he had a power over his own passions; and he might, if he pleased, undergo the greatest pain with indifference. Such were the different characters of the Gentile philosophers with whom *Paul* had to contend; beside the blindness and prejudice of the ignorant Jews. No wonder so deeply distressed in soul the Apostle must have been,

when he beheld the whole city sunk in idolatry, that his spirit could not refrain! Jerem. xx. 9. Reader! pause, if but for a moment, and contemplate, the awful effects of the fall! Oh! what an universal ruin was induced thereby, to our whole nature! The Church of God, as well as the whole mass of men, all involved in one common calamity: *darkness covering the earth, and gross darkness the people.* Isaiah lxii. 2.

22 Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.

23 For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD**: whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

24 God that made the world, and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life and breath, and all things;

26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed; and the bounds of their habitation;

27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:

28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being: as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

29 Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

31 Because he hath appointed a day in the

which he will judge the world in righteousness, by *that* man whom he hath ordained; *whereof* he hath given assurance unto all *men*, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this *matter*.

33 So Paul departed from among them.

34 ¶ Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which *was* Dionysius, the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

It appears, from what is here said, that this meeting was by appointment. The dispute which *Paul* had occasionally entered into, with those different sects of Philosophers, as he met them in the market place; as well as with the Jews on the holy days in their Synagogue; had excited great curiosity among a set of people of whom we are told, that they spent their time in nothing else but an enquiry after novelty. They therefore took *Paul* to their public Court, called *Areopagus*; and then desired that he would deliver his opinion more fully, upon what he had before occasionally spoken of, *Jesus* and the Resurrection.

I do not think it necessary to go over the several parts of the Apostle's discourse, by way of illustration. Indeed this service is rendered needless, from the plain language *Paul* adopted. Every one must perceive, that in condemning the idolatry and superstition of this people, he hath fully shewn, the importance and necessity of the Gospel of *CHRIST*. But, for Readers of that class of persons for whom this *Poor Man's Commentary* is designed, I shall be doing a more acceptable service, if from the whole of the Apostle's sermon, I endeavour to raise such improvement, as under the *LORD's* blessing, may be rendered profitable. And, in doing this, I venture to believe, we shall be acting in correspondence to the gracious design of God the *HOLY GHOST*, when the *LORD* caused this account of *Paul's* preaching at *Athens* to be recorded.

And here, at the very entrance on the subject of *Paul's* sermon, those two great points are discoverable, as though marked with a sun-beam. *The Apostle's spirit was stirred within him, when he saw the whole city given to idolatry.* But, in the close of the preaching, we discover the cause. *Certain men clave unto him, and believed.* Hence we learn here, as in the former instance at *Berea*, the *LORD* had a people at *Athens*, for whom *Paul's* spirit was stirred to speak. And here also, as there, mockers were found, to whom *Paul's* sermon became the ministry of condemnation. See *Luke* x. 5—16.

I know full well, by long experience, that the mind of every man by nature, is apt to revolt at this: neither, till grace hath entered the heart, can such truths be received. But, the approval or rejec-

tion of God's sovereignty, leaves the subject just where it found it. The LORD hath said, and who shall gainsay it: *My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.* Isaiah xlv. 10. So that, *while the potsherd may, and will, strive with the potsherds of the earth;* and if the blows be violent against each other, like earthen vessels, both may break: *Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!* Isaiah xlv. 9.

That the LORD hath a Church in the world, whose recovery from the Adam-nature fall, all the ordinances and means of grace under the LORD, are directed to accomplish, is a truth, too fully, and too plainly revealed in the word of God, to require any further arguments to prove. And, that there are others of mankind, not included in this dispensation, the prayer of JESUS in his Mediator-office, as decidedly shews. *I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me. The world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.* Yea, the LORD, when speaking of God's decrees, in relation to discriminating grace, in separating *the precious from the vile*, makes use of the name *righteous*, as if (and which must be the case,) the very act resulted, from this divine perfection. *O righteous FATHER! the world hath not known thee!* John xvii. 9. xiv. 25. And, after the review of this part of CHRIST's prayer, who will venture to arraign God's justice? Who will assume the confidence of being more merciful than CHRIST? Who will impeach the divine sovereignty, when despisers of GOD, like those *Athenian* philosophers, are left to their scorn: and the *cause* in this instance, as in ten thousand others, is permitted to bring forth its natural effect? But, I pursue the subject no further. To the LORD I bring it. And with the LORD I leave it. Sweet and satisfying is that delightful scripture, though the destruction of *Sodom and Gomorrah* followed it: *Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right.* Gen. xviii. 25.

I beg the Reader not to overlook, how blessedly the Chapter is closed. While some mocked, and others proposed to themselves another hearing, before the Apostle departed from them, *certain men clave unto him and believed.* And, the HOLY GHOST hath handed down the names of two of them with honorable testimony, to the latest generations. *Dionysius the Areopagite*, by which it is probable is meant the judge of the Court: and *Damaris* it is also likely, was a woman of some distinction. And the account adds, *and others with them.* How many, or how few, is not said. But we may safely conclude all within that promise. Acts ii. 39. See also John vi. 37.

REFLECTIONS.

READER! do not fail to observe, how highly *Paul* was taught, so as to adapt his discourse to the different hearers among whom he exercised his ministry. To the Jews he preached CHRIST crucified, in all his fulness, suitableness, and all-sufficiency. To the *Bereans*, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free, still JESUS CHRIST became the one text, sum, and substance, of the Apostle's sermons, in declaring to every hearer, CHRIST *the power of God, and the wisdom of God, for salvation to every one that believeth.* To Philosophers, falsely so called, (for, professing themselves to be wise, they

became fools,) who erected an altar to an Unknown God, *Paul* preached *JESUS*, and the Resurrection. He, and He alone, as the New Testament Altar, the High Priest, and the Sacrifice. In short, so highly taught was *Paul*, and so divinely commissioned by God the SPIRIT, that *he became all things to all men, that by all means he might save some*. And, what a sweet testimony the LORD gave to the word of his grace, when, even in *Athens*, the LORD called out his own, and manifested the SAVOR of his name in every place!

Reader! let you and I learn, rightly to value our mercies. Oh! the blessedness of having the glorious Gospel of the blessed God made known, and proclaimed in his Churches. LORD! grant thy people grace to know the truth, and the truth to make them free. *Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound; they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance!*

CHAP. XVIII.

CONTENTS.

We have the great Apostle Paul here represented as working with his Hands for his daily Bread. He preacheth at Corinth. He is opposed by the Jews. He is encouraged by a Vision. He departs to Ephesus. Some Account of Apollos, Aquila, and Priscilla.

AFTER these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth;

2 And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla, (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them,

3 And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them and wrought: for by their occupation they were tent makers.

4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.

It is truly delightful to observe, with what zeal the great Apostle to the Gentiles flew on the wings of love and faith, to spread the adorable name of his Almighty LORD. Lately we found him at *Athens*. Now at *Corinth*, where he labored personally in the word, and doctrine, for nearly two whole years. And, from the blessed events which followed his ministry, we find cause to praise the LORD for sending him there. Yea, the whole Church of CHRIST, through all the intermediate ages, to the present hour, have cause so to do, and will to the remotest period of time; since we owe those two divine Epistles written by *Paul*, under the HOLY GHOST's dictating, to this source.

Corinth was a large populous city, situated on an isthmus of the

sea, and the chief town of *Achaia*. It was remarkable for trade and commerce, which its vicinity to the sea highly favored. And, as it abounded with wealth and opulence, every species of luxury was known in it. Indeed, it was so remarkable for sin and uncleanness, that a Corinthian woman became proverbial, and meant the same thing, as a woman on the town. Here the LORD directed his servant *Paul*. And who shall calculate the extensiveness of his usefulness, in gathering sinners to CHRIST?

I beg the Reader not to overlook the beautiful portrait here drawn, of *Paul* the Apostle, in *Paul* the Tent-maker. He gives a faithful account of this in his tender and affectionate farewell, when he took leave of the Church at *Ephesus*. *Ye know, (said he,) from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the LORD with all humility of mind, and with many tears. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.* Acts xx. 18, 19, 33, 34. The imagination can hardly picture to itself any thing more lovely, than to behold the Apostle filling up the intervals of his public ministry, with private labors. No love of gain, no work of constraint, not for filthy lucre, did this great Apostle labor, in the word, and doctrine. As he told the Church of the *Thessalonians*, so every Church of CHRIST was equally dear to him. *Being affectionately (said he,) desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted to you, not the Gospel of GOD only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travel, for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the Gospel of GOD.* 1 Thess. ii. 8, 9, 10, 11. Blessed servant of the LORD! How highly suited to so humble a Master?

Who those persons, *Aquila* and *Priscilla*, were, hath been the subject of much conjecture. But, it is not an object of moment further to know, than that they were believers in the LORD, well spoken of by *Paul*, in his Epistle to the Romans. Chap. xvi. 3, 4. Their names written in the book of life. And now, and for ages past in spirit, among the *spirits of just men made perfect*. Reader! how illustrious are those tent-makers, when beheld with an eye to CHRIST? How will they all look, when at the last day they shall appear, encircling Him, who in the days of his flesh was contemptuously, though falsely called, *the Carpenter's Son*? Matt. xiii. 55.

5 And when *Silas* and *Timotheus* were come from *Macedonia*, *Paul* was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews *that Jesus was Christ*.

6 And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook *his* raiment, and said unto them, *Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.*

7 And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named *Justus*, one that wor-

shipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.

8 And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord, with all his house: and many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized.

9 ¶ Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace:

10 For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.

11 And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

If the Reader wishes to enter into a more particular account of *Paul's* preaching at *Corinth* than what is here stated, he will be able very easily to gather the chief sum and substance of what he discoursed upon, by referring to his Epistles to this Church. Indeed, it would be always profitable, when reading at any time in this part of the scripture history, the life and ministry of the Apostle; to consult and read with it, his both Epistles, which he afterwards sent to the Church at *Corinth*, when his personal labors among them were ended. One point in particular, we know *Paul* mostly dwelt upon, for he hath said as much; namely, CHRIST, and his cross. For, (said he,) *I determined not to know any thing among you save JESUS CHRIST, and him crucified.* 1 Cor. ii. 2. There were a thousand subjects of holy joy and delight, the Apostle discovered in his adorable master. His Person, his GODHEAD, his Manhood, his union of both: His Offices, Characters, Relations; all, and every one of these topics, *Paul* could have dwelt upon for ever. But, when speaking to poor, ruined, lost, and perishing sinners, like those *Corinthians* he knew CHRIST crucified was the one persuasive remedy of God's own providing, and the only one suited to their then-state and circumstances of ignorance and darkness: and therefore, here *Paul* fixed his eye, and here he found ample subject for his heart to enlarge upon, and recommend: and having in his own example found the blessedness of it, he labored to enforce and recommend it to all others. And how sweetly, and persuasively he did it, those beautiful Epistles still shew?

It should seem, by what is here said, of the blasphemy of those Jews who opposed *Paul's* preaching, and the manner of shaking his raiment upon the occasion; that the Apostle was hardly put to it, and felt the bitterness of their persecution. And it should seem, that for the moment, he paused over the matter, as if more than half disposed in his own mind to leave *Corinth*. And yet he had enough to encourage him to abide there, in the conversion of *Crispus*, the chief ruler of

the Synagogue, with all his house; and many *Corinthians* also. But, I pray the Reader not to lose sight of the grace and loving kindness of JESUS, in this night vision shewn *Paul*. For, that it was the LORD JESUS himself which so spake to the Apostle, is beyond all question. And, oh! how sweetly, powerfully, and persuasively, the LORD spake to him. How must it have refreshed and animated the Apostle? What new courage must it have inspired?

Reader! fail not to take to yourself, the consolation, such a view of the LORD's watching over his people brings, for every emergency! Oh! could the faithful but behold things visibly as they are, how often, like the Prophet's servant, should we see ourselves surrounded with *horses of fire, and chariots of fire*; when to our poor, timid, and apprehensive minds, like him, through fear of man, we have been crying out: *Alas! how shall we do.* 2 Kings vi. 14—17. Precious JESUS! do I not hear thee say, and do I not know, and at times feel the sweet power of thy words, while my LORD is saying it: *Sing ye to her a vineyard of red wine. I the LORD do keep it. I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.* Isaiah xxvii. 2, 3. I entreat the Reader to turn to those sweet scriptures also. Isaiah li. 7—13. Psm. xxxvii. throughout.

And chiefly, ye faithful servants of my God, who minister in his sacred Name! (If peradventure one of that sacred order should glance at these my writings.) Oh! let this most interesting view, of the LORD JESUS comforting and encouraging his servant *Paul*, in this vision of the night, strengthen your hands and hearts with the same assurance. JESUS speaks as much now, as he did then. *Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace; for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee.* See Jerem. i. 17—19. And, no doubt, but in this our day, and in the midst of the present CHRIST-despising generation, the LORD hath much people to gather from the midst of this our sinful land. Oh! that the consciousness of these things may stir up the hearts of his sent servants, to do as *Paul* did, under the LORD's blessing; and remain as he did, if need be a whole year and six months, teaching the word of God among the people. And surely the LORD will defend, all that labor in his name, and are sent by him to the service, amidst all the conflicts they may sustain. *Persecuted they may be, but not forsaken: cast down, but not destroyed.* 2 Cor. iv. 9.

I hope the Reader will allow me to dwell a moment longer on a subject so truly interesting, as it concerns the LORD's people, as well as the LORD's ministers. If JESUS told *Paul* that in a city like *Corinth* he had much people there; may we not hope, though sinful as a nation we are, yet many of God's hidden ones are among us. And, by the *much people*, let it not be supposed that JESUS meant his people by right of creation. For, although indeed the earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof and all are his, as well by creation as redemption; yet there would have needed no vision of the night to have informed *Paul* of this, had that been all, for he knew it before. But very evidently, by the *much people* JESUS told *Paul* he had in *Corinth*; he meant his Church, his Chosen, according to Covenant-settlements. That people whom the HOLY GHOST spake of, as a *people near unto him.* Psm. cxlviii. 14. Whom the LORD said, he had *formed for himself, and they should shew forth his praise.* Isaiah xliiii.

21. A people by gift, John xvii. 6. by purchase, Isaiah xlii. 1. by conquest, Psm. cx. 3. And *JESUS knew them all by name*, John x. 3. and they must *all be gathered out*. Ezek. xxxiv. 13. and *all pass again under the hand of him that telleth them*. Jerem. xxxiii. 13.

Reader! let us indulge the thought, for it is most pleasing. *Paul* knew them not. But *JESUS* did. *Elijah* was as unconscious in his day, what numbers the *LORD* had, when he thought himself single and alone. 1 Kings xix. 10, 18. But, *the LORD knoweth them that are his*. 2 Tim. ii. 19. And what makes the subject so very interesting and precious is, that while they are in the unregeneracy of their Adam-nature, and to all human observation alike undiscernable, as the ungodly among whom they dwell; yet *JESUS* hath his eye upon them for good, he keeps them from the unpardonable sin amidst all their sinning, he keeps them from going down to the pit, preserves them from death and the grave, watches over them for good in all their ungodliness, until the day of their effectual calling, when he brings them out by his *HOLY SPIRIT*; so that not one of them is lost for whom he died, and whom he hath received from his *FATHER*; but all are brought at length savingly home, when he comes to *make up his Jewels*. Malachi iii. 17. Precious *LORD JESUS*! I bless thee for this gracious vision to thy servant, the Apostle! And hast thou not, dearest *LORD*, much people in the present day, in the city of this world? *LORD*! gather them out, and make them willing in the day of thy power! Take comfort my soul! He that conquered thy stubborn nature, can subdue others. No heart of stone, but *CHRIST* can take away, since he hath taken away thine!

12 ¶ And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgement seat,

13 Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law.

14 And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you:

15 But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it: for I will be no judge of such matters.

16 And he drave them from the judgement-seat.

17 Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgement-seat, and Gallio cared for none of those things.

18 And Paul *after this*, tarried *there* yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla, and Aquila; having shorn *his* head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.

19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.

20 When they desired *him* to tarry longer time with them, he consented not;

21 But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus.

22 And when he had landed at Cesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch.

23 And after he had spent some time *there*, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.

It should seem, that the vision which the Lord favored his servant the Apostle with, was but a little space (perhaps only the preceding night) before this insurrection made by the Jews. Surely the Lord times his visits. And, we might observe, if our inattentive minds were but more awakened to these things, that Jesus is not more sweet than seasonable, in the manifestations he condescends to make to his people. No doubt, *Paul* felt the blessedness of what had passed between his Lord and himself in the night, when called to the exercises of the day. And, Reader! let me hope, that you and I are not unconscious of Him and his grace, who giveth *songs in the night*. Surely it is impossible to be so, while we have his promises in view. See a cluster of them, John xiv. 16—27.

I am at a loss how to explain, or even to account for, this vow of *Paul*. And I confess, that I should be inclined to think, that it was *Aquila* which made this vow, (as some have thought by putting the stop after *Priscilla*, and not *Aquila*,) and not *Paul*, did we not meet with a similar instance of the Apostle's, Chap. xxi. 23, &c. When we call to mind, that *Paul* had been now in a state of conversion somewhat more than *fifteen years*; and that it was some time before this took place at *Cenchrea*, that he had written his Epistle to the Church at *Galatia*, in which he so strongly reproves the mingling Jewish customs, with Gospel grace: when we recollect these things, how strange, and even contradictory doth it appear, that so great an

Apostle should be found complying with such weaknesses. Gal. ii. 1. But, Reader! our LORD JESUS can, and I trust will, make such a view of the Apostle profitable to us both. For, when we behold the infirmity of the man, yea, so great a man and minister too, falling into such a weakness; surely it teaches us to cease from man, and look more to the LORD. What poor creatures the best of men are, and how strongly the heart is prompted therefrom while contemplating human weakness, to lay hold on divine strength. Precious JESUS! whatever tends to endear my LORD to the hearts and affections of his people, must be blessed. *Paul* himself rejoiced to be a fool, yea, any thing, or nothing, so that CHRIST became exalted! 2 Cor. xi. 21. and xii. 5—11. See the Commentary, Chap. xxi. 26.

If I detain the Reader a moment longer at this paragraph, it shall be only to remark, what extensive ground the Apostle traversed, in his zeal for the LORD's glory, and the welfare of the LORD's Church. Happy servant of an Almighty Master! While knowing that JESUS had much people in *Corinth*, how could he leave it before that he saw the Church formed there, and Elders ordained to supply his place. Acts xiv. 23. But, when this was done, and his mind directed to go elsewhere, like his LORD, he would of consequence say, *I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, for therefore am I sent.* Luke iv. 43.

24 And a certain Jew, named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, *and* mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus.

25 This man was instructed in the way of the LORD: and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the LORD, knowing only the baptism of John.

26 And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto *them*, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

27 And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace;

28 For he mightily convinced the Jews, *and that* publickly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.

There is somewhat very interesting in the account here given of *Apollos*. His being instructed in the way of the LORD, means no more, I should apprehend, than that he had been taught, or cate-

chized, (as the word is,) concerning the truths of the Gospel. Perhaps had learnt under the ministry of *John*, or his disciples. But, we may take occasion from hence to remark, how sweetly the LORD prepares the minds of his people for the reception of his divine truth. What a teachable disposition the LORD had given him, that while blessed with the gift of eloquence, and with an earnest desire to speak for the LORD; he submitted to be taught by those poor tent-makers, *Aquila* and *Priscilla*. He appears to have been so great a man, that many of the *Corinthians* preferred his preaching to *Paul's*. No doubt, this was from their ignorance. But it serves to shew the greatness of the man. 1 Cor. i. 12. And, it may be observed, that it is the character of none but little minds, to refuse instruction, however weak or humble the channels through which it comes. *Apollos* found, that *Aquila* and *Priscilla* were better taught in divine things than himself. And, no doubt, while those humble persons ministered to his furtherance in knowledge; he strengthened their hands in his acquaintance with the Scriptures: and the LORD's blessing upon them all, they became helpful to one another. And so is it now. While the LORD's ministers are going forth, in their public labors for the people, the saints of God are holding up their hands by their private prayers for them, (as *Aaron* and *Hur* did the hands of *Moses* in the Mount: Exod. xvii. 12.) in their ministry. And thus, as *Paul* said to the *Romans*, while the one imparted some spiritual gift, he received others in return: *that I may be comforted* (said *Paul*,) *together with you, by the mutual faith both of you and me.* Rom. i. 12.

REFLECTIONS.

It must have been a blessed time in the Church, when ministers, ordained of God the HOLY GHOST, found their minds disposed in the intervals of public service, to labor in private for their daily bread, that they might not make the Gospel of God chargeable to any. And we find, that so far was this employment in honest industry, for their own maintenance, from damping the ardor of their zeal for God, that while *Paul* wrought in tent-making for his daily bread; his soul burned with an holy flame, to preach CHRIST to the people. Oh! that all the faithful ministers of the sanctuary now, were under the same blessed influence as *Paul* was then, when he was pressed, as it is said, *in spirit, and testified to the Jews that JESUS is the CHRIST.*

Reader! let you and I bless GOD our SAVIOR, that in such a city as *Corinth*, the LORD had a Church: yea, much people. Let us love the LORD JESUS, for granting so sweet and timely a vision, to tell *Paul* this, as is here recorded. And, let us ponder well the record, as it concerns the Church of God, in all ages. Depend upon it, the same is now, and so will be, to the very end of time. JESUS hath much people in every city where he sends his Gospel, his word, his servants. In this our city, our sinful land, which like *Corinth* is full of uncleanness, luxury, pride, and every evil. His people are in the midst of many people, as the remnant of *Jacob*. They are like sparks, among the stubble; as pure seed, among the tares. Yea, how many of them, all of them indeed, originally and by their Adam-nature living during the days of their unregeneracy, in the same sin, and under the in-

fluence of the same corruptions. But JESUS will search and seek them out. They are his, and he must gather them. The FATHER gave them to him in charge, and they must *all pass again under the hand of him that telleth them*. They are the purchase also of his blood, and too dearly bought to lose one of them; too dearly loved to be indifferent about them. And, GOD the SPIRIT hath marked them to the day of redemption. Precious LORD JESUS! cause all thy faithful ministers to keep these things in remembrance, and like Paul when oppositions from men or devils arise, to call to mind this sweet vision of their LORD, as though they still heard JESUS say: *Be not afraid, but speak and hold not thy peace, for I have much people in this city!*

CHAP. XIX.

CONTENTS.

Paul *passeth through* Ephesus. The HOLY GHOST *blesseth his Ministry*. A Tumult is excited in consequence of Paul's preaching. The Town-clerk *appeaseth the People*.

AND it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul, having passed through the upper coasts, came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,

2 He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? and they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.

3 And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? and they said, Unto John's baptism.

4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, That they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.

5 When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

6 And when Paul had laid *his* hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.

7 And all the men were about twelve.

This is a very interesting record of the Church. I beg the Reader's close attention to it. There is no little difficulty in discovering, what class of disciples those were. It is said, that they had been

baptized into *John's* baptism; and yet had never heard, whether there were any HOLY GHOST. It is very strange this, because *John the Baptist* himself, is said to have been *filled with the HOLY GHOST, even from his mother's womb*. Luke i. 15. And, it is most certain, that *John* entered on his office of preaching repentance, and commanding the people to believe on him that should come after him, by the immediate influence and direction of the SPIRIT. Yea, *John* declared, that his knowledge of the Person of CHRIST his LORD, was wholly derived from the SPIRIT's teaching. *He that sent me to baptize with water, (said John,) the same said unto me; upon whom thou shalt see the SPIRIT descending and remaining on him, the same is He which baptizeth with the HOLY GHOST. And I saw, (said John,) and bare record that this is the SON of GOD.* John i. 25—34. So that *John* preached of the HOLY GHOST, as well as of CHRIST, to all the people. And *John* taught those he baptized, to observe the vast difference between CHRIST's Person and Ministry, and his, by this very circumstance, that *Jesus* baptized his people with the HOLY GHOST. *I indeed, (said John,) baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the HOLY GHOST and with fire.* Mat. iii. 11. All these things very fully prove, that as *John* preached of the HOLY GHOST, all his disciples must have heard of Him; and therefore the expression here used, that they had not so much as heard whether there were any HOLY GHOST, could not possibly mean, that they were altogether ignorant of His Being, and GODHEAD.

I am inclined to think, that those disciples were such as had never known, or experienced the gifts and graces of the HOLY GHOST, upon their own hearts and consciences: and therefore might, in the strictest sense of the words, be truly said to have never heard, in respect to any saving knowledge, whether there were any HOLY GHOST. And, Reader! pause over the thought, (for it is a very solemn one,) and say, how many in this our day, who like those men are called *disciples*, and like them are supposed to *believe also*, who, if called upon, could give no better account of themselves than these persons. They are Christians, because born under the meridian of Christianity. They are believers, as far as creeds and prayer-books can make them so, and no further. They assent to the truths of the Gospel because they have never troubled themselves to enquire about them; and therefore take them up on trust. And, thus thousands live, and it is to be feared, thousands die; as ignorant whether there be any HOLY GHOST, as to any real conversion of the heart towards God, by His sovereign and Almighty Power, as those unenlightened nations of the earth, to whom the LORD hath not sent the Gospel. Reader! hath the LORD made you to differ from such? Have you received the HOLY GHOST since you learnt of him only by the hearing of the ear; or formed your belief from the creed or the prayer-book?

If my views of the persons here spoken of in this Chapter, whom *Paul* found at *Ephesus*, be correct; what a beautiful account is given of the real conversion of the heart towards God? Surely here was a renewal of the day of *Pentecost*. It was not equal in number, neither was the descent of God the HOLY GHOST accompanied with equal splendor and glory; but the sovereignty of his power, and the blessed effects of his grace, were the same.

Some have thought, that those persons were truly converted, when the Apostle met them; and that what is said here of their ignorance of the HOLY GHOST, is not intended to say, that they had never heard of the HOLY GHOST in his divine office of *convincing of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment*; but as ordaining to the ministry. And that now meeting with *Paul*, and receiving the extraordinary gifts of God the SPIRIT, they entered on the ministry. And this opinion is formed from what is said, that when the HOLY GHOST came on them, they were blessed with the same gifts as the Apostles; *for they spake with tongues and prophesied.* Acts ii. 4.

I am far from setting up any opinion of mine, in opposition to this. And, it is possible, that this might be the case. But, there is another difficulty which then ariseth; in that they were re-baptized. It doth not appear, that any of the Eleven Apostles had any other water-baptism than *John's*, if they had that; for even of that we are not certain. The LORD commanded them to baptize others, when they should have been baptized with the HOLY GHOST; but we never read of any water-baptism enjoined them by the LORD for themselves. Compare Matt. xxviii. 19. with Acts i. 5. Nay, CHRIST himself had no other water-baptism than *John's*. Matt. iii. 13. to the end. And there was no water-baptism made use of at the day of *Pentecost*, in the three thousand the HOLY GHOST came down upon, in that glorious display of his power. So that, on the supposition, that these persons were converted before *Paul* met them, and were now ordained to the ministry by the HOLY GHOST; the re-baptism is totally different from what was observed by CHRIST and his Apostles. The Apostles were all acquainted with the regenerating influence of the HOLY GHOST, before their ordination to the ministry on the day of *Pentecost*. See, in proof, John xiv. 17. And their qualification for the ministry, Jesus bid them wait for at Jerusalem. See Luke xxiv. 49. But having stated both opinions, I leave the Reader, under divine teaching, to form his own judgment, only first praying that the LORD Jesus may bring the souls of all his redeemed, under the continual and unceasing baptisms of God the HOLY GHOST!

8 And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing, and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.

9 But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.

10 And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

11 And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul :

12 So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them,

13 Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits, the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.

14 And there were seven sons of *one* Sceva, a Jew, *and* chief of the priests, which did so.

15 And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know ; but who are ye ?

16 And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

17 And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus ; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.

18 And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds.

19 Many of them also which used curious arts, brought their books together, and burned them before all *men* : and they counted the price of them, and found *it* fifty thousand *pieces* of silver.

20 So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed.

I beg the Reader to remark with me, how uniformly, through the whole history of the Church, may we trace the different effects which the LORD the HOLY GHOST hath declared should follow the ministration of his word. Let the Bible be opened at any part whatever, this line appears as luminous and shining as though drawn with a sun beam. To one class of hearers, it becomes *the savor of death unto death*. To the other, *of life unto life*. 2 Cor. ii. 16. And the same is equally visible in every congregation in the present hour, where-soever *the truth*, as it is in JESUS, is faithfully dispensed. We may behold *some* melting under the word, awakened, interested, and not

unfrequently alarmingly concerned, in enquiries *for the one thing needful*. While *others*, under the same word, as insensible, and, as it is here said, *hardened, and believing not*; yea, *speaking evil of this way before the multitude*. Can the word of God's grace make a more decided appeal than when scripture truths so uniformly concur, from age to age, with common experience?

I do not think it necessary in a work of this kind, to enter into the minutia of the several things in the historical part of the subject. The opposition *Paul* met with from those Jews, and the Lord's success upon his labors to confirm the word, are beautifully blended, to shew how unavailing the contest was, when the Lord is gathering out his people. The seven wretched sons of this *Sceva*, stand forth an awful monument in the history of the Church, what awful delusions the human mind is capable of falling under. But the Lord hath shewn in all such instances, that *no weapon formed against CHRIST and his Church, can prosper. Every tongue that shall rise in judgment against the LORD and his people, must be condemned.* Isaiah liv. 17.

21 After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.

22 So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; *but* he himself stayed in Asia for a season.

23 And the same time there arose no small stir about that way.

24 For a certain *man*, named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen;

25 Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth.

26 Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands:

27 So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her

magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.

28 And when they heard *these sayings*, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians.

29 And the whole city was filled with confusion : and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre.

30 And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not.

31 And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring *him* that he would not adventure himself into the theatre.

32 Some therefore cried one thing, and some another : for the assembly was confused ; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.

33 And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people.

34 But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours, cried out, Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians.

35 And when the town clerk had appeased the people, he said, *Ye* men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not now that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the *image* which fell down from Jupiter ?

36 Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly.

37 For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess.

38 Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another.

39 But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly.

40 For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse.

41 And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.

Without going over a large tract of ground, on the subject of idolatry, which the history of those verses would lead into, I shall only detain the Reader with one general observation upon the whole, which, under divine teaching, may enable both the Writer and Reader of this *Poor Man's Commentary*, to gather sufficient improvement to bless God in being delivered from such awful delusions as are here shewn.

When we see, as in the melancholy instance before us, to what a desperate degree of ignorance and idolatry the mind of man is capable of being driven; and when we behold at the same time, as in the case of *Paul*, the vast difference when a soul is brought from darkness to light, and as the Apostle himself expresseth it, *is turned from idols to serve the living and true God*; (1 Thess. i. 9.) it becomes a subject of infinite moment to ask the cause? No two beings under the sun can differ more than what is here represented. Here is a nation so sunk in the grossest idolatry, that even an image becomes the object of all the world's worshipping as they thought, and here is an Apostle of CHRIST going forth with his life in his hand, to preach JESUS to the people.

It becomes a subject of infinite importance, in tracing effects to their cause, to explain such a mystery. For when we see the human mind so immediately opposed in one to another, it is very obvious there must be some source predisposing to this end. And happy it is for us the Gospel of CHRIST very fully and satisfactorily explains it.

There we learn, that in the one common nature of our fallen estate in Adam, by his apostacy, the whole race became equally involved in ruin. All equally *dead in trespasses and sins*; and all equally incompetent, while remaining unquickened by the SPIRIT, to any one act of spiritual life. The Church of GOD, being given by the FATHER to the SON before all worlds, and consequently before *sin entered into the world, and death by sin*, and the SON of GOD having undertaken to recover his Church from the Adam-state of ruin in which she was involved at the fall in the common mass of nature, *in the fulness of time*, as it is called in scripture language, the SON of GOD comes in grace and truth, *to do away sin by the sacrifice of himself*, and by his

HOLY SPIRIT he quickens the souls of his redeemed, and brings them out of darkness, and the shadow of death, and breaks their bands asunder. I stay not to produce the whole proof of these things, for this would swell my pages indeed. But I refer the Reader, in confirmation, to some few of the more plain and conclusive. See Rom. iii. 10—19. Ephes. i. 4. Rom. v. 12. Gal. iv. 4. Heb. ix. 26. Ephes. ii. 1—5. Psm. cvii. 14.

Without amplifying the subject, this statement (and which by the way let it be considered is wholly scriptural,) is enough in testimony to shew wherefore it is that the souls of some, such as *Paul* and his companions, in this history became quickened, regenerated, and made new creatures in CHRIST JESUS. Hence they hear and *know the joyful sound, and walk in the light of God's countenance. In the name of JESUS they rejoice all the day, and in his righteousness they are exalted.* Psm. lxxxix. 15, 16. Every thing in CHRIST becomes lovely, and is endeared to their view. His person, His work, His glory, His offices, His character, His relations; all that He is in himself; all that He is to his people; what He hath done for them, and what He is still doing for them, and will do for them to all eternity; these glorious subjects, when they are themselves quickened to a new and spiritual life, are opened to their minds, and cause them *to rejoice with joy, unspeakable and full of glory!* On the other hand, the souls of others remaining in the *Adam-nature* of a fallen, sinful, and lifeless state, unawakened, unrenewed, uncalled, the whole of their apostacy remains, and, as *the carnal mind is enmity against God*, they not only are insensible to their own corruptions by nature, and the want of grace to bring them out of it, but *they hate to be reformed, and cast God's words behind them.* I stay not here again to produce all the evidences of these solemn truths which might be brought forward, but refer only to a few. Romans viii. 5—8. 1 Cor. ii. 14. Romans i. 22—25. Psm. li. 17.

If it be said, (as indeed it hath been said by presumptuous minds,) how is this to be explained on principles of equity? The answer is at hand, and indeed hath been already given. *The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.* Psm. cxlv. 14. It must be a righteous act in recovering the LORD's people from the *Adam-nature* of a fallen state, because the Son of God, in that nature, hath bought their persons out of the hands of law and justice, and God makes good his covenant-promises to his dear Son. And it must be a righteous act in leaving those to their sins who delight in them, seeing it is in this instance, as in every other, only permitting every *cause* to produce its own natural *effect*. And in relation to those before whom the word of grace is dispensed, and where, instead of softening their hearts, it only acts as heat upon certain substances, to harden them the more, and raiseth their greater bitterness of spirit against the truths of God, it tends but to confirm the truth of scripture, in shewing to what a desperate condition man is sunk by the fall, and what wonders of grace must it be in every instance, when a poor sinner is brought out of it.

Reader! ponder well the subject. And if so be the LORD, in rich, free, sovereign mercy, hath brought you from the *Adam-nature* in which you was born, in which you lived, and, but for the gracious provision made in CHRIST, in which you would have died; calculate if

you can the vast amount of the immense mercy! Well may every child of God take to himself that sweet scripture, and make it his daily song during the whole time-state of his pilgrimage. *Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.* Psm. ii. 11.

REFLECTIONS.

SEE, my soul, in the history of those disciples *Paul* met at *Ephesus*, how easy it is to have a name to live, and yet be virtually dead before God. Oh! how sweet the baptisms of the SPIRIT. LORD, let my soul seek thy daily baptisms, thy sweet anointings, without which all outward ordinances, how good soever in themselves, will profit nothing!

Oh! for a portion of the same SPIRIT as *Paul* had, when speaking boldly for the space of three months in the Synagogue, and contending for *the faith once delivered to the saints*. Oh! how cold and languid are our warmest arguments, compared to the burning zeal of this Apostle. Ye ministers of my God! beg of Him who touched the Prophet's mouth, to touch your's, that the words of God's grace may not freeze as they drop, but from being warm yourselves, your souls may kindle others, and from *the abundance of the heart the mouth may speak*.

Blessed LORD JESUS! we would praise thee, that even in the darkest days, as here, so now, thy miracles of grace upon the heart are plainly distinguished from all counterfeits, like those vagabond Jews. Thy work, Almighty LORD, in conversion, manifests the people of thy love from all idol worshippers. Great is the cry of the world in their various schemes of creature perfection. But, oh! thou dear LORD! do thou hold up thy faithful servants, as thou didst *Paul*, by giving testimony to the word of thy grace, and granting signs and wonders in the conversion of the heart to God, to follow a faithfully preached Gospel.

CHAP. XX.

CONTENTS.

Paul goeth to Macedonia. He preacheth at Troas, and celebrates the LORD's Supper. A Youth falls from a Window while Paul was long preaching, and is taken up as dead. Paul restores him to Life. He gives a Charge to the Elders at Miletus, and enters into a Ship.

AND after the uproar was ceased, *Paul* called unto *him* the disciples, and embraced *them*, and departed for to go into Macedonia.

2 And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece,

3 And *there* abode three months. And when

the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia.

4 And there accompanied him into Asia, Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus, and Trophimus.

5 These going before tarried for us at Troas.

6 ¶ And we sailed away from Philippi, after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days.

It appears from the preceding Chapter, that *Paul* had determined upon a visit to *Macedon*. (Verses 21, 22.) Probably however, this uproar prompted him the rather to hasten his departure. However he went not away before that he had called together the people to take an affectionate farewell of them. And it should seem that this was always the Apostle's custom. For wherever he went, it was as with his life in his hand. And when at any time he took leave of the brethren, he knew not whether he should ever see them again. It is very interesting the parting interview of a faithful minister and a beloved congregation. How truly lovely is that of *Moses*, which is called the blessing wherewith *Moses*, the man of God, *blessed the children of Israel before his death*. Deut. xxxiii. Such *Joshua* also. Joshua xxiii. and xxiv. And, in short, all the servants of Jesus. But, Reader! what a farewell was that of Jesus himself? John xiii. and xiv. &c.

The exercise of Paul's ministry through this circuit, we are told, was with much exhortation. And, if we may form a judgment from the specimen given in the close of this Chapter, when addressing the Elders at *Miletus*; what a lovely part of the Apostle's labors must this have been? They who have been curious to trace the journeys of the Apostle, have formed to view no small tract of land, the Apostle went over during this circuit. But, I can only refer the Reader to the Scriptural statement of it; together with the same account of his companions. See 2 Cor. viii. 1—6. and Chap. ix. 1—5. Rom. xvi. 21. 1 Cor. xvi. 3, 4.

7 And upon the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.

8 And there were many lights in the upper chamber where they were gathered together.

9 And there sat in a window a certain young

man, named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead.

10 And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing *him*, said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him.

11 When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed.

12 And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted.

I admire the expression, *the first day of the week*; meaning the day in which the LORD JESUS arose from the dead. For the whole body of believers, from that time, made it the great day of public meeting. And, from that period, they considered it for their sabbath. And before the beloved Apostle left the Church upon earth, to join the Church in glory, the name by which this first day was known, was the LORD's day. Hence *John* saith: *I was in the SPIRIT on the LORD's day.* Rev. i. 10. And, as in the first ages of the Church, the name by which the holy Supper CHRIST instituted was called, *breaking of bread and prayer*: Acts ii. 42. So, before *Paul's* ministry ended, the believers called this solemn service, *the LORD's Supper.* 1 Cor. xi. 20. And what can be more sweet and suited, in reference to both? Is it not the LORD's day, and the LORD's Supper? Is not JESUS LORD of both; yea, the sum, and substance of both? Reader! do you not love the LORD's day, and the LORD's Supper? And can any thing be more suited, than that all true believers, celebrate the Supper of the LORD on the LORD's day? Not indeed to the exclusion of other days, when the LORD invites his members to his table. All days, and all times, are blessed, when *the King sitteth at his table*, and when the sweet *Spikenard* of his people's graces, planted and brought into exercise by His SPIRIT, *send forth the smell thereof.* Song i. 12. 1 Cor. x. 16. But, there is a peculiar sweetness and sacredness, on the LORD's day, and is endeared to the LORD's people by every tie of affection. And, what blessedness have the saints of GOD in all ages, yea, the whole Church of GOD, during the whole time-state of her pilgrimage here below, found in it? The Jews say, that it was the first day when JEHOVAH, in his three-fold character of Persons, went forth, in the creation of the world. And, we know, that it was the first day when the SON of GOD, in our nature, triumphed by his resurrection, over death, hell, and the grave. And, is it not the first day as such of the everlasting world to all his redeemed? Hail! thou holy day of the LORD! Sweet pledge and emblem of the eternal, and unceasing Sabbatism of heaven!

The farewell sermon of *Paul*, was lengthened to the midnight hour. His heart was with the people, and he knew not how to leave off.

It is truly blessed, when the sent servants of the LORD, like the Apostle, are so affectionately desirous of the flock of CHRIST, as not to impart only the Gospel of GOD, but their own souls also, because they are dear to them. See a beautiful portrait of this in the Apostle himself: 1 Thess. ii. throughout. And it is a lovely sight, when a congregation, under the teachings and influences of GOD the SPIRIT, hang upon the Preacher's words, and forget the length of the discourse in the sweetness of it, from CHRIST being both text, sermon, and substance. Reader! think, what a Preacher must have been JESUS himself! Look at one instance of the LORD's preaching, when the people pressed upon him to hear his word? Luke v. 1.

I stay not to make any further observation on this certain young man's infirmity of sleeping under the word, than to remark, his sin, and the LORD's mercy. Had not the LORD's grace been greater than even his undeservings, what would have been the consequence? The Evangelists have been particular, in telling the Church how the disciples slept, when CHRIST was in his agony. But, the LORD himself hath taught us from what quarter the temptation came. It was *the hour of the power of darkness*. See Matt. xxvi. 36—45. Mark xiv. 32—42. Luke xxii. 39—53. And who shall say, even now in the present hour, how often the deadly foe attempts to drench the people of GOD in sleep, when sitting under the word, in the house of prayer, to render it unfruitful? Let the LORD's people seek grace from the LORD, to counteract Satan's devices. *Pray*, saith JESUS, *that ye enter not into temptation*. Luke xxii. 40. And, every sinner that reads this history of *Eutychus*, (though his life was restored to him by a miracle,) hath reason to tremble, if sleeping in the house of GOD, conscious that he thereby insults the majesty of the LORD, and exposes himself both to the divine wrath, and to the devil's devices. Mark iv. 15.

13 And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot.

14 And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene.

15 And we sailed thence, and came the next *day* over against Chios; and the next *day* we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium: and the next *day* we came to Miletus.

16 For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia, for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.

It is delightful, to behold the zeal of the Apostle and his companions, in going from place to place, to preach the Gospel of the ever-blessed GOD. He had not been at *Jerusalem* for several years before (perhaps *four*). His object, in getting there before the feast of *Pentecost*, was not, it should seem, to keep the feast after the manner of the

Jews; for these things he had done with: but his wish was, to avail himself of the great concourse of persons, which came from all parts at those festivals, to trade together: that he might preach to them *JESUS*. And, as that feast had been made so blessed, by the first open display of God the HOLY GHOST; no doubt, *Paul* had it in remembrance, and had his heart directed to the LORD with hopes of distinguishing mercy, at such a time. Reader! it is blessed to eye the LORD's hand, in all our movements. And sure I am, our souls are never more likely to enjoy the LORD's mercies, than when the LORD is preparing our souls to be looking for them. Indeed the LORD comes; (and well is it for his people that he doth,) when our forgetful and inattentive hearts are not looking for him. *Isaiah lxxv. 1.* But, those mercies are doubly sweet, which, by the LORD's prompting our hearts to seek, are first prayed for, then watched for, and then received at the LORD's hand, and sweetened and sanctified with the LORD's blessing. Oh! how ten-fold blessed are all mercies, where *JESUS* is seen in all, and Himself enjoyed in all! Reader! are you acquainted with those soul-enjoyments?

17 ¶ And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.

18 And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons,

19 Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befel me by the lying in wait of the Jews:

20 And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house.

21 Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord *JESUS CHRIST*.

22 And now, behold, I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there:

23 Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me:

24 But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord *JESUS*, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

25 And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.

26 Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all *men*.

27 For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

29 For I know this, that after my departing, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.

32 And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

33 I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel.

34 Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.

35 I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

36 ¶ And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all.

37 And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him,

38 Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.

It hath been thought by some, that *Miletus* was near *fifty* miles from *Ephesus*; though others make it no more than *thirty*. But, even thirty miles in those days, was a great distance for the Elders to attend the Apostles' visitation. Reader! you and I have cause to bless God the HOLY GHOST, both for this meeting of the Apostle with the Bishops and Deacons, and for having caused this precious sermon of the Apostle's to be recorded. What refreshment hath the Church in all the intermediate ages to the present hour, found from it? And what numbers yet unborn will arise to enjoy the blessing of it? *Ephes. i. 1. Philip. i. 1.*

I cannot propose to the Reader to offer any observations by way of Comment, on *Paul's* discourse. It is in itself so truly Apostolical, and carries with it in every verse, such evident marks of being the immediate work of inspiration; that it can need nothing more, than for the same Almighty LORD, which guided *Paul's* mouth, to accompany the reading of it to the heart of his people who peruse it, or hear it read, to make it a sweet savour of CHRIST in every place. Oh! that all the sent servants of JESUS were so taught, so helped to speak, and so enabled to appeal to the hearts and consciences of the people, among whom they minister, in proof of their honesty and faithfulness, as *Paul* here did. What a Church of CHRIST would it be, were servants so to labour? What a visitation would it form, were the meeting and the parting become so tender and affectionate? Happy period of the LORD's household! When shall the LORD's people behold the return of days so truly blessed?

Though I venture not to attempt any remarks on *Paul's* sermon, (perfectly aware, that the beautiful simplicity which runs through the whole of it, from beginning to end, would suffer from the least alteration made in it;) yet, I would beg to point to the Reader some of the more prominent parts of it, as they strike me, which serve to set the whole in a more interesting point of view; and which, under God's teaching, may render it more profitable, both to the Reader's apprehension, and my own.

And here I request him first to notice, that it was not only the parting farewell discourse of an Apostle to the Church at *Ephesus*, rendered dear to him, by a three years ministry, exercised among them; but it became infinitely more interesting, in that it appealed to their consciences, that he had preached none but CHRIST. This, Reader, appears to me, to be the grand and distinguishing feature, of this very blessed discourse. I am free to allow all that may be demanded, of affection, and tenderness, and love, which ought to distinguish a Church of Jesus, between a minister and the people. But, when this is heightened in the utmost extent the imagination can heighten it, the whole is nothing in my view, compared to what ought to mark the faithfulness of the servant of the LORD, in ministering in holy things. It is the LORD's work, and to the LORD, the servant is to be everlastingly looking. The tenderest sympathy and affection to the people, can admit no departure from steadfastness here. Nay,

without a constant eye to this first leading principle of duty, it is possible, that a mistaken tenderness to the people, might induce an inattention to the LORD. The Apostle hath in another place, stated this idea of service, when he saith: *not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God. And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as to the LORD, and not unto men: knowing that of the LORD ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance; for ye serve the LORD CHRIST.* Coloss. iii. 22—24, And hence, what a solemn appeal the Apostle makes in the midst of his discourse, on this ground; that *he was pure from the blood of all men, because he had kept back nothing that was profitable to them, but had declared the whole counsel of God.* Reader! ponder over the view. Think what a blessed frame of mind *Paul* was in, when he thus spake. It is not indeed the privilege of all the faithful ministers of the LORD JESUS CHRIST, so to take a farewell of the Church and people. But, amidst the consciousness of a thousand infirmities, as the believer finds them daily in his heart; it is, it must be, truly blessed, when he can, and doth appeal, in the first and highest of all concerns, in the humble hope, that his preaching hath been wholly JESUS.

Having looked at *Paul's* sermon in this first, best, and most important point, we may look at it in another; I mean, the unbounded affection expressed in it, to the Church. Reader! depend upon it, there is a relationship, between the members of CHRIST's mystical body, that infinitely surpasseth all the mere natural ties of common life. They are kindred souls. Their union with each other, begins in CHRIST the Head; and is kept alive in Him, and by Him. And, it is an union, which is indissoluble and everlasting. Death, which puts an end to all the affinities of this world, makes no alteration here. Nay, as it is with the glorious Head of the body, to which the Church is but betrothed in the time-state of her existence, and the compleat union begins but at death, when brought home to the marriage supper of the lamb in heaven: so, by the several members, their perfect union, freed from all the interruptions arising from a sinful, sorrowful body, can only be truly said to be pure and unbroken, *when that which is perfect is come, and that which is but in part is done away.* And, under this view, what very sweet and precious apprehensions of the mind, must the faithful servant of the LORD JESUS feel, towards the several members of CHRIST's body, among whom he ministers, and over whom, as *Paul* here beheld it, the LORD makes his ministering servants Overseers.

Whoever reads the several parts of this blessed discourse of the Apostle with an attention to this particular will discover, how much the heart of *Paul* was in all he said in his earnestness for their spiritual and eternal welfare; and that his very soul, was going forth, in the most unbounded affection towards them. He calls upon them to observe, that the whole drift of his preaching was to hold up CHRIST. He expressed his jealousy, lest any other subject at any time, from any quarter whatever, should be brought forward, to mingle with this one, this only one of salvation. He foresaw by the spirit of prophecy the LORD had given him, (John xvi. 13. 1 Cor. xii. 10.) that there would be grievous wolves entering in among them; yea, some *among themselves would arise*, from the corruptions of nature and the temptations of Satan, *which would speak perverse things.* *Paul* therefore

charges them to watch, and remember, how for the space of three whole years, he had been preaching CHRIST, and CHRIST only; and that even with all the tears of entreaty, in holding him up in his beauty, glory, suitableness, and all-sufficiency!

Reader! I beseech you, look over this sermon of *Paul's*; yea, look over the whole preachings and writings of *Paul*, with an eye to those things, and then judge, under the LORD's teachings, for yourself, whether CHRIST and him crucified, CHRIST and him glorified, is not the whole of all. 1 Cor. ii. 2. Gal. vi. 14. Coloss. iii. 11. All the sweet, and precious conclusions of the Apostle's Epistles, are spoken of by him, and recommended by him, as the *effects*, and not the party *cause*, of the real conversion of the heart towards God. *Paul* makes CHRIST to be, in all his Sermons, and in all his Epistles, what JEHOVAH, FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST, made Him, from all eternity; the One, and only one, great and compleat Ordinance of heaven, for salvation to every one that believeth. Indeed, as another great Apostle said, and the faithful gone to glory all along have proved, by experience; *salvation is in no other: neither is there any other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.* Acts iv. 12. And, if these things are so, as the word of God, in every part beareth witness, how sad, how wretchedly sad, must it be, to preach any other, which can only tend to mislead, and carry sinners from CHRIST, instead of leading them to CHRIST. Had *Paul* studied oratory, who more eloquent? Had he meant to gratify men's ears, instead of awakening under God the SPIRIT their souls; who better able? But, conscious that he was always addressing men, who by nature were all guilty, and polluted before God; he came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom; but simply preached CHRIST. And, who shall count the honor which God the HOLY GHOST put upon his labors, in the vast success of his ministry to souls?

I must not enlarge. But *Paul's* sermon leads to an almost endless subject, in marking the beauties of it. What an affecting account the Apostle gives of himself; his watchings, his humbleness, bonds, imprisonments! The earnestness of his labors, with tears, amidst temptations, persecutions, and conflicts: and how the HOLY GHOST witnessed to his trials in every city, which awaited him! And with what holy triumph he viewed the whole, now going bound as he was, to *Jerusalem*; declaring that none of these things moved him, not counting his life dear to himself, so that he might finish his course with joy, and the ministry which he had received from the LORD JESUS! Faithful servant of thy God! thou hast indeed long since finished thy course with joy, and hast entered into the joy of thy LORD! Oh! that the LORD would raise up many a *Paul*, in the present dark day of the Church, to testify *the Gospel of the grace of God*! 2 Tim. iv. 6, 7, 8.

Reader! let us not overlook the sweet prayer at parting, when the Apostle tore himself away, as it were, from the embraces of the people. The LORD, who gave the Apostle grace to preach, gave both him and them, the grace also to pray. Such a sermon, could come only from the LORD. And, though the prayer is not recorded, yet there can be no doubt, but it was a very blessed one, for it could only come from the LORD too. And what a place of weeping was it made! But the tears were holy tears, like *the spiced wine of the pomegranate*. JESUS, who wept himself at the grave of *Lazarus*, hath sweetly

sanctified all the sorrows of his people. And how have all those tears on this occasion since terminated in joy? How hath *Paul*, and the gracious party which were then with him, long sung together their hymns of everlasting glory, and praise, around the throne of God, and the LAMB; *where all tears are wiped away from all eyes, and sorrow and sighing are done away for ever.* Rev. vii. 9. to the end.

REFLECTIONS.

READER! let you and I behold with delight, what is here said, of the Apostle and his companions, celebrating the LORD's supper on the LORD's day. Let it encourage our hearts to delight in that sweet service, that we may be often found, in breaking of bread, and of prayer. And do thou, LORD JESUS, always preside over those assemblies of thy people. Oh! the blessedness, when by faith we receive the gracious emblems at thine own hand! Then will it always be a feast upon a sacrifice. CHRIST our New Testament Altar, our High Priest, and Passover sacrificed for us. A sweet commemorating, communicating, refreshing, strengthening Ordinance. Yea, we shall say: *the cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of CHRIST? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of CHRIST?*

Who that reads of the *Eutychus* in this Chapter, and beholds the *Eutychus* in the many instances of the present day, but must be ready to cry out; *what meanest thou, O sleeper: arise, call upon thy God that thou perish not?* What, if such sleepers in the house of God were to open their eyes no more, until awakening in eternity? Is the sanctuary of the LORD, and the place where his honor dwelleth, a fit place to sleep in? Can it be possible, for men to snuff at God's ordinances, and say: *Oh! what a weariness is it! When will the Sabbath be gone?*

Let my soul be relieved, from such a contemplation as the weary and the sleepy in the house of God, to look once more at *Paul*, and the Elders of *Miletus* at this most refreshing meeting, described in this Chapter. Ye servants of the LORD, who are sent by Him to minister in his Name; and ye faithful among the congregation, who are ministered unto: let this interesting service between *Paul* and his beloved people, which GOD the HOLY GHOST hath so graciously recorded the account of for his Church's edification, be your pattern, and the object of your imitation. Such, indeed, should be every assembly of the faithful. He that preacheth, should preach, as though it was his last. And they who hear, as though they should hear no more. Every separation, and the breaking up of assemblies, as if the final farewell. LORD JESUS! do thou be present at all, that in the close on earth, instantly thy redeemed may meet thee in heaven.

C H A P. XXI.

CONTENTS.

Paul is advised by the Brethren not to go up to Jerusalem. He persists. On his Arrival there, he visits James. Soon after he is seized by the Jews. He is rescued by the Chief Captain.

AND it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the *day* following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara :

2 And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth.

3 Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre : for there the ship was to unlade her burden.

The separation between the Apostle and the Church at *Ephesus*, must have been very painful. The word made use of to express it, is strong ; signifying being *torn* from each others' embraces. And what added to the sorrow, was the consciousness on both sides, that it was final. There is an affinity between faithful pastors and their people, which far exceeds the common relationships in natural life. And when death, or a separation like this, which was as death, being final, takes place, there is great cause for sorrow. The children of Israel wept thirty days at the death of Moses. Deut. xxxiv. 8. But, Reader ! what a relief to the soul is it, amidst all the separations of life, and the deaths, or departures of every one around ; JESUS departs not, but is with his people for ever ! Oh ! thou dear LORD ! let the thought of this comfort and support my soul, amidst all the dead, and dying circumstances, of a world passing away. JESUS lives, and loves, and is with his people for ever. Matt. xxviii. 20.

4 And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days : who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem.

5 And when we had accomplished those days, we departed, and went our way ; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till *we were* out of the city : and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed.

6 And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship : and they returned home again.

It is very blessed to observe, how the mind of the Apostle was borne up amidst these exercises, in the forebodings of his friends, concerning this journey to *Jerusalem*. The HOLY GHOST had witnessed to *Paul*, that in every city, *bonds and afflictions would meet him*. Chap. xx. 23. But, the vision at *Corinth*, Chap. xviii. 9. had made *Paul* more confident. And, as *Paul* told the Church in the preceding Chapter, his journey to *Jerusalem* was by the SPIRIT's direction. Chap. xx. 22. The intimation, therefore, of those disciples, *Paul* consider-

ed as only a further confirmation of what he had to expect. It is plain, that neither he nor they concluded, that it was meant by the LORD to keep him back; but only to prepare him for the encounter. How gracious is the LORD in all his watchings, over his people, in preparing them against the time, and trials, he is preparing *for* them! Reader! pause a moment, over what is said of the brethren, with their wives and children, bringing *Paul* and his company on the way, and before separating, committing each other to the LORD in prayer. Oh! what a lovely sight must it have been, to have seen the Apostle thus encircled! And do not overlook, that their little ones were of the party. Yes! those godly parents would seek for early impressions on their offspring, in teaching them to reverence the LORD's faithful ministers, from whom, under God, they owed the knowledge of divine things; and to bring their household with them to be benefited by their prayers. Where shall we look for such a sight again, as this shore witnessed? LORD! look with mercy on thy Church, and suffer not a prayerless spirit to be so common, as it is, in the present hour!

7 And when we had finished *our* course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day.

8 And the next *day*, we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Cesarea; and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, (which was *one* of the seven) and abode with him.

9 And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.

This *Cæsaria* in *Palestine*, was rendered memorable by the LORD's grace to the Gentiles, in the call of *Cornelius*. See Chap. x. and Commentary. And, it should seem, that *Philip*, one of the first deacons, Chap. vi. 5. whose ministry is blessedly recorded Chap. viii. now resided here. The prophesying of his daughters was in perfect agreement to Scripture promise. Joel ii. 28.

10 And as we tarried *there* many days, there came down from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus.

11 And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles.

12 And when we heard these things, both we,

and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.

13 Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep, and to break mine heart? for I am ready, not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus.

14 And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.

What a beautiful portrait might be drawn of the Apostle, in the situation here described! Yea, rather, what an unequalled representation by that which no picture can set forth, hath God the HOLY GHOST given the Church, in the Apostle's words. *I am ready*, (said he,) *not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the LORD JESUS*. Blessed saint of God! Paul had met with continual exercises to deter him from this journey. It was painful the separation from the Church, at *Ephesus*. He was soon after told by some, and who spake by the SPIRIT, that his journey would be productive of great opposition. This prophet, which came from *Judea*, manifested by outward signs, in binding his own hands and feet with *Paul's* girdle, that so the HOLY GHOST declared, the owner of the girdle should be bound, at *Jerusalem*. And now, the whole body of friends importuned him with earnestness of entreaty, that he would relinquish the journey. *What mean ye* (said he) *to weep and to break mine heart? I am ready!* Oh! how prepared are those whom the LORD prepares. Flesh and blood must everlastingly be unprepared. But, when the LORD animates the soul, all other feelings give way. However dear life is, yet CHRIST and his cause is dearer! Reader! let you and I beg of *Paul's* LORD, to make us more like *Paul*, in spirit!

15 And after those days, we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem.

16 There went with us also *certain* of the disciples of Cesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge.

17 And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

18 ¶ And the *day* following, Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present.

19 And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.

20 And when they heard *it*, they glorified the

Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe, and they are all zealous of the law :

21 And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying, That they ought not to circumcise *their* children, neither to walk after the customs.

22 What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together : for they will hear that thou art come.

23 Do therefore this that we say to thee : we have four men which have a vow on them ;

24 Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave *their* heads : and all may know that those things whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing ; but *that* thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law.

25 As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written *and* concluded, that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from *things* offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.

26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them, entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.

In addition to what I have already observed, on the subject of *Paul's* giving in to *Jewish* customs, upon this, and the like occasions, (See Chap. xviii. 23. and the Commentary on that place,) I would only detain the Reader to remark here, how much this temporizing spirit produced the very reverse of what it was intended. From what motive it was, that the Apostle was prevailed upon to comply with their advice, is not said : but, from *Paul's* general conduct on this subject, there can be no doubt, that it was foreign to his own sentiments. Let the Reader consult but his Epistle to the *Galatians*, and especially Chap. ii. 11 to the end, and Chap. v. 1—6. and he must conclude, that the Apostle's heart was not in this business. And, is it not probable, that the proposal made by those friends at *Jerusalem*, arose

from their having heard, that *Paul* had done the same thing at *Cenchrea*? So that a departure in one instance, only makes way for another. And even our friends, as we here discover, take advantage therefrom of our weakness. Precious *JESUS*! where shall we look for perfection, but to thee? thou *holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens!* Heb. vii. 26.

27 And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him,

28 Crying out, Men of Israel, help: this is the man, that teacheth all *men* every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple; and hath polluted this holy place.

29 (For they had seen before with him in the city, Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that *Paul* had brought into the temple.)

30 And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took *Paul*, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut.

31 And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.

32 Who immediately took soldiers, and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of *Paul*.

33 Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded *him* to be bound with two chains: and demanded who he was, and what he had done.

34 And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle.

35 And when he came upon the stairs, so it was

that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people.

36 For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him.

37 And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? who said, Canst thou speak Greek?

38 Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?

39 But Paul said, I am a man *which am* a Jew of Tarsus, *a city* in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people.

40 And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people: and when there was made a great silence, he spake unto *them* in the Hebrew tongue, saying,

I do not think it necessary to detain the Reader, with any particular observations, on this history. The sacred Writer hath given it to the Church, in a very interesting manner, as is here recorded, and it can need no comment to explain. But, taking it altogether, in one collected point of view, I would beg the Reader to remark with me, how very graciously the Lord was watching over his faithful servant the whole time, to screen him from the death one class of enemies intended for him, and from the scourging about to be laid upon him by another. The sight of the Roman captain terrified the Jews, who were about to kill *Paul*. And, after this, (as the next Chapter relates, ver. 26.) the Centurion was frightened, who at the command of the Roman Captain had bound *Paul* in readiness for scourging, when he found *Paul* was a Roman. And these things were connected with a third preventing providence, namely, *Paul* being permitted to speak to the people; and thereby not only gaining time to rescue the Apostle from their violence at that moment, but affording an opportunity of relating his wonderful conversion, under the Roman authority, thus protecting his person, before his countrymen the Jews. All these are very striking circumstances in proof, how the Lord Jesus watched over his servant, in so critical a season: and though permitting the Apostle, for wise purposes, to be so sharply exercised! yet still overruling the whole, as should ultimately promote the Lord's glory, and *Paul's* welfare.

Reader! it is blessed to observe, how astonishingly at times, the

LORD manifests the sovereignty of his power, in the deliverance of his people. When the enemy seems to triumph with an high hand, and all hope for the moment, seems to be gone; how suddenly, and unexpectedly, the LORD then appears for them, and displays his strength, in creature weakness. We have numberless examples of the kind in Holy Writ. *Jacob's* distress concerning his brother: Gen. xxxii. The Church: Exod. iii. The three children in Babylon: Dan. iii. But perhaps none more striking, and suited to this of the Apostle, than what is recorded of Israel, in the times of the Kings. It is said, that *the LORD saw the affliction of Israel that it was very bitter, for there was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel. And the LORD said, that he would not blot out the name of Israel from under heaven:* So he gave them a gracious, and unlooked for deliverance, by the hand of an unworthy instrument, even *Jeroboam*, the son of Joash. 2 Kings xiv. 26, 27. And thus was it with *Paul*. The *Jews* on one hand, and the *Roman* power on the other; all foes to *Paul*. But, when the LORD works for his people, he works beyond all creature strength, against all creature probabilities, and against all expectation of human foresight, or contrivance. And, whether the Apostle alluded to this instance, or to any other, I will not determine; but certain it is, he had in view circumstances so particularly trying, that in his apprehension, all expected deliverance was over from human attempts, when he said: *We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves; but in God, which raiseth the dead.* 2 Cor. i. 9. And, blessings of every kind are doubly sweet, when the LORD's hand in the appointment is discernible, and the LORD's power is manifested in creature weakness. Gen. xxii. 14. Zech. xiv. 7.

REFLECTIONS.

READER! what a sweet prospect is here shewn, to the ministers and congregations of the faithful, in the representations of *Paul* and his companions, going about in their visitation of the different Churches? The imagination cannot conceive any thing equally lovely! And, though private Christians do not, because the LORD hath not called them to it, in their sweet societies and meetings, exercise any ministerial function with each other; yet are they both taught, and exhorted, by such examples, to have all their assemblings together, opened, and closed in prayer. And, when the LORD, who is in the midst of them, according to his own most sure promise, pours out upon them a spirit of prayer, so that they commend each other to the LORD, the very place where they are assembled is sanctified, whether on the shore, or in the house: blessings are implored for those going away, and for those that remain behind; and the sweet union of CHRIST's love forms them one in Him, that whether absent from each other, or present, they are accepted in JESUS!

How unpromising soever the removal of our friends may appear, though like *Paul*, bonds, or imprisonment await the believer; this reflection is always full of comfort: the LORD's people must be the LORD's care. That Scripture should never be forgotten: *Yea, he loveth the people; all his saints are in thy hands!* Oh! then, how

sweetly one of the Apostles reasoneth upon it: *Casting*, saith he, *all your care upon him, for he careth for you.* Let Paul be at *Ephesus*, or *Jerusalem*; let the LORD's people be at home, or abroad; the consciousness of JESUS being with them, secures all. How wonderfully were all the circumstances of evil, made to minister to greater good, in his instance. The Jews would have killed him. The Roman power would have scourged him. But, the LORD puts *a hook in the nose, and a bridle in the lips of both*; and GOD shall be glorified, by his servant's preaching a sermon to them, and which they shall hear. Reader! observe these things, and then remember that sweet promise: *All things work together for good, to them that love GOD, to them who are called, according to his purpose.*

CHAP. XXII.

CONTENTS.

Paul addresses the Assembly, and relates the Particulars of his Conversion. He is interrupted by the Clamour of the Jews. He is again rescued by the Chief Captain, and conveyed into the Castle.

MEN, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence *which I make now unto you,*

2 (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence, and he saith,)

I detain the Reader at the opening of *Paul's* address, to remark, with what composure the Apostle delivered his discourse, with what dignity of manners! and yet more worthy our notice, that he should speak unto them in the sacred language, in which, from the first, the LORD hath spoken unto his people. How exceedingly to be desired, would it be, had our minds a suitable reverence for the original tongue, to approach as near that standard of purity the Hebrew, as possible, in all our solemn seasons. And especially when we call to mind, how graciously the LORD watched over his Church of old, to keep his people from the *Ashdod* language of the heathen. Behold! how the very tongue of *Abraham* the Hebrew, and his children, commanded the reverence and attention of Paul's enemies, while he spake to them in it. Nehem. xiii. 23—25.

3 I am verily a man *which am* a Jew, born in *Tarsus*, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.

4 And I persecuted this way unto the death,

binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.

5 As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders : from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished.

6 And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus, about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me.

7 And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ?

8 And I answered, Who art thou, Lord ? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.

9 And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid ; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.

10 And I said, What shall I do, Lord ? and the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus ; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.

11 And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.

12 And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt *there*,

13 Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight : and the same hour I looked up upon him.

14 And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth.

15 For thou shalt be his witness unto all men, of what thou hast seen and heard.

16 And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

17 And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance;

18 And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.

19 And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee:

20 And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.

21 And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.

I would beg to call the Reader's attention to the grace of God the HOLY GHOST, in his love to the Church, in causing the account of *Paul's* conversion to be thrice recorded, for their improvement. And I would beg the Reader to pause, and ask himself, whether there must not have been some very pressing reason for it, wherefore the LORD should so have done. Had it been intended only as the history of a matter of fact, once would, in this case, have answered every purpose. But, when we behold it brought forward again, and again, as it is here, and Chap. xxvi.; I venture to conclude, that the LORD the SPIRIT had a special design in the thing itself. The Apostle indeed, to the Church of the *Galatians*, and to his beloved *Timothy*, hath assigned a very blessed cause. Gal. i. 11—16. 1 Tim. i. 15. 12—16. Reader! let us bless God the HOLY GHOST, for his grace in this particular. And, let us seek grace from the LORD, that the sweet record, so often brought before the Church, may have all the intended effect of it, upon our hearts.

I do not think it necessary to detain the Reader with any further observations, on the subject of *Paul's* conversion, in this place; having somewhat largely dwelt upon it at the ninth Chapter, where it is first recorded: to which I refer. But, I would take occasion, from what the Apostle hath here added, which was not in that history, being remote from the time that this must have been, to observe, Paul had a *second* vision of the LORD, and which was not in the road to *Damascus*, but at *Jerusalem*. And, I would ask, (but not determine,)

was not this the appearing of the LORD JESUS to *Paul*, which he speaks of? 1 Cor. ix. 1. and xv. 8. And, I would also say, (though not speaking decidedly,) might not this be the time, which *Paul* speaks of elsewhere, when the LORD taught him about the Ordinance of the Holy Supper, and which, from CHRIST's Person, and authority, he received, and delivered to the Church of *Corinth*. 1 Cor. xi. 23.

22 And they gave him audience unto this word, and *then* lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a *fellow* from the earth : for it is not fit that he should live.

23 And as they cried out, and cast off *their* clothes, and threw dust into the air,

24 The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging ; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him.

25 ¶ And as they bound him with thongs, *Paul* said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?

26 When the centurion heard *that*, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest : for this man is a Roman.

27 Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea.

28 And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And *Paul* said, But I was *free* born.

29 Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him : and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.

30 On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from *his* bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought *Paul* down, and set him before them.

It is worthy remarking, that the Jews did not attempt to interrupt *Paul*, as long as he continued to relate the circumstances of his conversion: but, when he came to speak of the LORD's commissioning him to the *Gentiles*; their anger could not be any longer restrained. And, Reader! you may remark it, as one universal principle, which pervades the whole human race, by the fall. God's sovereignty in the call of his Church, as distinguished from the Adam-nature fall, is the subject of hatred in every man's breast, before that the LORD hath made him acquainted with the plague of his own heart, and the grace of God, in bringing him out of it. The LORD JESUS taught his disciples to expect this. He shewed them, that in preaching these truths, they must look for the malice of the world; and not marvel at their hatred. John xv. 18—21. And, agreeably to this standard of our LORD's, it is this doctrine, which calls forth the particular displeasure of the ungodly. Let the Reader remark it, as he passeth on in life, for it is worth his closest observation. Preachers of the word, yea, what in the present hour, are called Gospel preachers, if they throw into the back ground, the LORD's distinguishing love to his people; and never speak of the LORD's sovereignty, in the eternal choice of his Church, before all worlds; they may, and will, pass by, for the most part, without calling forth, as *Paul* here did, the outcry, and interruption of the world. But God's sovereignty, and CHRIST's special love, with the HOLY GHOST's distinguishing grace; if these are insisted on before the people, depend upon it, these will rouse the resentment, and call forth the indignation, of all, who know nothing of these precious truths in their own souls. Yea, not only the ungodly world, but yet more pointedly *professors* of the Gospel, whose knowledge consists in head-apprehension, not heart-influence; these will be more bitter than even the openly profane. And nothing upon earth, can more decidedly shew, the blindness, ignorance, and prejudice of the human mind, untaught of God!

I cannot suffer the Reader to proceed, without calling upon him again in this place, as in the former Chapter, to remark, how the LORD, by his overruling providence, checked the Centurion's thongs, as he had done before the violence of the Jews, by the sight of the Roman Captain, from pulling his servant in pieces. It is very blessed to behold, what slender means the LORD at times makes use of, to stop the enemy's hand. The want of sleep in king *Ahasuerus*, laid the foundation for the deliverance of the whole Jewish nation from destruction. Esther vi. 1, &c. The dream of another Eastern monarch gave birth to the introduction of *Daniel*, and his companions, to the highest places, in the empire. Dan. ii. throughout. And here, the presence of this Roman Captain before the Jews, saved *Paul* from immediate death; and afterwards, the mere privilege of a *Roman* Citizen, from all the unfeeling cruelties of the *Roman* punishment. Reader! what a blessed thing it is, to eye CHRIST, as the Prophet saw him, behind the vast machine, of *wheel within wheel*, in the government of the Universe? Ezek. i. 27, 28. What a yet sweeter view in this contemplation is it, to behold the Church, and all its concerns, with every individual of it, in the LORD's hands? Ephes. i. 22. And, what a still higher source of comfort, holy joy, and confidence, than all, is it, when by faith, full, firm, ardent, unceasing faith, we can live upon CHRIST, in the assurance, that in this government, and this concern of

the LORD JESUS, he is unceasingly engaged for his people, and extending to the least, as well as the greatest, all that we are interested in, for life, and death; and time, and eternity!

It should seem, that *Paul's* freedom, arising from birth, could not have been as was usual with the children of the *Romans*, in the city of Rome, for *Paul* was born, as he had just before said, at *Tarsus*, and was a Jew. But *Tarsus* was made a free city by *Mark Anthony*, so reported by *Pliny*; and hence his birthright. Be this however as it might be, it was a very happy circumstance in this critical moment, and the Apostle, though prepared for bonds or death, had an undoubted right to avail himself of his citizenship, that he might escape unjust oppression.

REFLECTIONS.

My soul! behold the great Apostle, rescued from Jew, and Gentile, and with a mind awakened, animated, and strengthened by the LORD, boldly addressing both, and declaring the glory of God, in the wonderful work of his conversion! And do not fail to remark, with what candour, and openness, he confesseth his former state of unregeneracy; when persecuting unto the death, the precious followers of the LORD JESUS! He seems to be at once regardless, what shame, and confusion of face he takes to himself; so that he may but thereby give the greater glory to his LORD. Is it so with thee, my soul? While CHRIST's name is so precious: art thou laying lower in the dust before God, in token of thine unworthiness? Is *Paul's* language thine, when he saith: *And the grace of our LORD was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in CHRIST JESUS!* Oh! then, tell it abroad as he did, and in every direction, proclaim the blessed truth: *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that CHRIST JESUS came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief!*

Reader! do not fail to remark, the steadfastness of *Paul*, amidst all the rage and malice of his enemies. He was indeed free born, when by his new birth in regeneration, the LORD had made him free. This was a freedom, unpurchasable with money. And, as it made *Paul* a true citizen of no mean city; so it secured him all the everlasting and eternal privileges of a kingdom, which cannot be moved, whose Builder, and Maker, is God.

CHAP. XXIII.

CONTENTS.

Paul pleadeth his Cause before the Council. A Dissension takes Place in consequence of it among his Accusers. He is sent to Felix.

AND *Paul*, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

2 And the high priest, *Ananias*, commanded

them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.

3 Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, *thou* whited wall : for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law ?

4 And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest ?

5 Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest : for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

While we cannot but admire the faithfulness, and intrepidity, of the great Apostle, in thus challenging his enemies, and contending for his integrity ; we must not strain *Paul's* words too far, as though he meant to say, that he had always lived without guilt upon his conscience before God. This was far from the Apostle's meaning. All he intended to assert, indeed all he did assert, was, that his conscience could not reproach him with having done any thing to expose him to their laws, or their just displeasure. It is a point well worth attending to, in our estimate of men and things, to observe, that in the Scripture account of holy men, and of their integrity, nothing more is implied, than that in life, they conduct themselves in all the departments of it, uprightly, and with a good conscience towards men. They draw a line of distinction, between the judgment of men, and the tribunal of God. Thus *David* calls upon the LORD to plead his cause, with unrighteous judges. *Judge me, (said he,) O LORD, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity that is in me.* Psm. vii. 8. But, when *David* contemplated God's tribunal and not man's, he cried out: *Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O LORD, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.* Psm. cxliii. 2. And thus, in like manner, other holy men of old, considered the vast difference : See Job xxvii. 5, 6, 7. with Job ix. 20, 21. So that *Paul's* justifying himself in this place, is wholly with an eye to human laws, in the transactions of one man with another.

The passionate behavior of *Ananias*, and the hasty retort of *Paul*, both proved the common Adam-nature to which they both belonged. Though grace had renewed the mind of *Paul*, yet the unrenewed body had all the old man of sin remaining ! So *Paul* said, and so all the children of God know, by experience. Rom. vii. 23, to the end. But, though *Paul* spake hastily, yet there was truth in what he said : and it should seem to have been somewhat prophetic. Sinners are smitten of the LORD, when judgment overtakes them. And the unjust judge can expect no other. Reader ! do not overlook the humble acknowledgment of the Apostle, of his error, by haste and inadvertency. True grace, will always induce such effects.

6 But when *Paul* perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried

out in the council, Men *and* brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.

7 ¶ And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the multitude was divided.

8 For the Sadducees say, that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit; but the Pharisees confess both.

9 And there arose a great cry: and the scribes *that were* of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.

10 And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring *him* into the castle.

I need not dwell upon the evident design of *Paul*, by this declaration of his. Neither will it be necessary for me to go into the subject, of those very different sects, of which the present Council consisted. But, I would rather take occasion from hence to remark, what an awful day must it have been, in the Jewish Church, when the Seventy, or *Sanhedrim*, forming the High Court for judgment in all things sacred, was made up of such a motley body of men. Reader! do, I beseech you, look at the Scripture account, of the LORD's institution of this Council, as stated in the book of *Numbers*. Attend to what the LORD himself said, concerning this Council of Seventy of the Elders, chosen for this express purpose. Remark *JEHOVAH's* promise, of putting his *SPIRIT* upon them; and then, look at this degenerate Council, with such a character as *Ananias* at the head of them! Oh! what an awful change! See Numb. xi. 16, 17. See also Chap. iv. 7. and Commentary.

11 And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

Pause over this verse for the sweetness of it. How very gracious was it in the LORD *JESUS*, thus to favor his servant with another vision, as he had done before! (see chap. xviii. 9. and Commentary.) And how blessed in the LORD, by way of shewing him that all the

contrivances of his enemies for his destruction at *Jerusalem*, should not affect his life; that the LORD had business for him yet to perform at *Rome*. And this was peculiarly consolatory to the Apostle, because though *Agabus* by the SPIRIT had prophesied of his being *bound* at *Jerusalem*, yet now from the LORD himself he was taught, that at this time he was not to *die* there. Precious LORD JESUS! who shall count, yea, what imagination of men, or angels, can fully conceive the boundless love of thine heart? And, oh! how sweet to my soul is the recollection, (in the very moment of writing this *Poor Man's Commentary*,) that to *Paul*, upon this occasion here recorded, and upon every other to thy Church and people, all that love of thine, and the communication of it, flows from thy double nature, thy God-Man love, to endear it ten thousand fold to our souls!

12 And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying, that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

13 And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.

14 And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul.

15 Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain, that he bring him down unto you to-morrow, as though ye would inquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.

16 And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul.

17 Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him.

18 So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee.

19 Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went *with him* aside privately, and asked *him*, What is that thou hast to tell me?

20 And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to-morrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly.

21 But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee.

22 So the chief captain *then* let the young man depart, and charged *him*, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me.

Reader! pause over the sad relation here recorded of those awful men! What a proof is here of the desperately wicked heart of man! See with what earnestness they entered into an oath, or as the Jews called it, *cherem*, or *anathema*, for shedding blood, which, if broken, called for God's curse upon them that made it! Behold no less the awful state of the chief priests and elders, who, as men, and especially as members of the *Sanhedrim*, the moment the proposal was made to them of bringing down *Paul* to the council for this purpose, should have brought them forth before the council to be punished for the intentional murder. But, Reader! mark with yet more earnest attention the overlooking and disposing grace of the LORD, to save his servant, and frustrate the devices of the wicked. See what a poor instrument in *Paul's* sister's son the LORD makes use of for this purpose. No doubt the LORD who sent his angel, and opened the prison doors upon several occasions before, (Acts v. 18, 19, 20. chap. xii. 7. and xvi. 26.) might have done it now. But the work and mercy were not less the LORD's, because brought about by human means. And, oh! how frequently is the same grace manifesting itself now in life, in the daily ten thousand instances of it, were our inattentive minds awakened to watch and see how the LORD is watching over us. 2 Chron. xvi. 9. Who would have thought that this youth (for so he is called, verse 17.) should have been chosen by the LORD for to be the highly honored instrument to save the life of this great Apostle! And how is his memory honored in the Church through all generations from that hour for the service, without which we should never have known that *Paul* had a sister, or that sister a son. Let all our youths, (if any such read this *Poor Man's Commentary*.) learn from hence, how sure it is that the eye of the LORD is always upon them. And let the thought keep their minds under a constant regard to his Almighty inspection. And let them be looking

to the LORD, while conscious that the LORD is always looking upon them, that they may seek for grace to be sanctified before Him. Who shall say, whether the LORD may not, as in the instance here recorded concerning *Paul*, employ them to his service, and make them the honored instruments of his mercy to others, and bless them in their own souls also? I beg all such, if the LORD should bring those lines before them, not to pass away from this train of thoughts before that they have turned to those scriptures, and carefully read them. 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. 2 Chron. xxxiv. 1, 2, 3. Prov. i. 8—16. 2 Tim. iii. 14, 15.

23 ¶ And he called unto *him* two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Cesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night;

24 And provide *them* beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring *him* safe unto Felix the governor.

25 And he wrote a letter after this manner :

26 Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix, *sendeth* greeting.

27 This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them : then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman.

28 And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council :

29 Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds.

30 And when it was told me, how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment of his accusers also, to say before thee what *they had* against him. Farewell.

31 Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought *him* by night to Antipatris.

32 On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle:

33 Who when they came to Cesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him.

34 And when the governor had read *the letter*, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that *he was* of Cilicia;

35 I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgement hall.

I should not have thought it necessary to have detained the Reader at this place, but to remark to him how the LORD must have wrought upon this chief captain's mind, through fear for his own safety to provide for *Paul's*. It appears from his letter to *Felix*, as here inserted, that he wanted to shew the governor what an high regard he had for the *Roman* name, but he artfully concealed that he had bound *Paul*, while he tells him that he understood he was a *Roman*. And I pray the Reader yet further to observe, with what contempt he speaks of the accusations brought against *Paul*, which he called *questions of their law*. The resurrection of the dead, and a world to come, which *Paul* was called in question for, (see verse 6.) was, in this poor heathen's view, things of no moment! Reader! think of your mercies in CHRIST! Since the SON of GOD brought life and immortality to light through his Gospel, oh! how precious the thought, that these things are no longer questionable. 2 Timothy i. 10. Oh! what unspeakable mercies hath JESUS brought his Church! And, oh! what distinguishing grace, when a soul is made the happy partaker of CHRIST, and all his mercies with him? Heb. iii. 14. Reader! what saith your heart to both?

REFLECTIONS.

I WOULD summon my own heart, while I call upon the Reader's also, in the review of *Paul's* appeal before the council, to solemnly enquire whether we have *lived in all good conscience before God unto this day?* It is an important question, and not hastily and presumptuously to be answered. We are such partial judges of evil thoughts, when that judgment respects ourselves, that self-love too often gives a bias to the *opinion*. But, when we come to be weighed in the balance of unerring truth, not according to our view of things, but according to God's righteous judgment, the question then becomes solemn indeed, how is the LORD sanctified in the soul? Reader! doth it not strike you, (I bless the LORD it doth me,) that it is well for poor fallen sinful creatures, we have a better righteousness than our own to trust in, and to plead before God, under all the misgivings of conscience, and under all the accusations of sin and Satan!

Let not the Reader overlook (I pray the LORD I may not) the LORD's watchful care over his servant, amidst the host of foes with which he was surrounded. Beautiful is that scripture, and here it was fully proved. *The LORD knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation.* Paul had no knowledge, but the LORD had, how he should escape, when both *Jew* and *Gentile* seized upon his person. It would be very blessed for me, if I always had this in remembrance. There are numberless anxieties I crowd into life for want of recollecting, that these things are my LORD's concern, and not mine. JESUS hath said by his servant, Casting *all* your care upon him, for he careth for you. I know this in theory as well as words can make it. And frequently under this authority I *do* cast *all* my care upon the LORD, and bring the whole to his throne of grace. But soon after, yea, sometimes in a few moments after, I discover that I must have fetched them all away again, and taken them up, for they are all upon me. Oh! thou dear LORD! is it thus I learn my unworthiness and faithlessness to know more thy grace and all-sufficiency?

CHAP. XXIV.

CONTENTS.

Paul accused by Tertullus, answereth in his Defence. Felix defers Judgment. Paul preacheth before Felix and his Wife. The Governor is superseded in Office, and leaves Paul in Bonds.

AND after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and *with* a certain orator, *named* Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul.

2 And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse *him*, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence,

3 We accept *it* always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.

4 Notwithstanding that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words.

5 For we have found this man *a* pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes:

6 Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law.

7 But the chief captain Lysias came *upon us*, and with great violence took *him* away out of our hands,

8 Commanding his accusers to come unto thee : by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him.

9 And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so.

In all this flaming speech there is not a single charge except that of being a follower of CHRIST, whom by way of contempt they called the *Nazarene*. A *pestilent fellow*, and a *mover of sedition*, were general words of abuse, and without proof. And although this orator prefaced his accusation of *Paul* with a fulsome compliment to *Felix*, yet the whole offence of the Apostle was for preaching CHRIST. And the chief priest, *Ananias*, and the Jews, could find nothing beside to criminate the Apostle!

But they were all unconscious, while charging *Paul* as a ringleader of the sect of the *Nazarenes*, what indirect honor they were thereby conferring on the Apostle. If the Reader will consult my *Poor Man's Concordance*, under the article *Nazarene*, he will there see the subject treated somewhat largely. I shall only here therefore observe, that as the LORD JESUS was specially and peculiarly called the *Nazarene*, being in fact in his human nature the only *Nazarite* to God; it was the highest of all possible honors to call *Paul* a ringleader of the holy order. The word is derived from *Netzar*, signifying *separated*. And in reference to CHRIST, it means the peculiar separation of that holy portion of our nature, underived from the fallen stock, but formed by the overshadowing power of the HOLY GHOST, and sanctified to the vast purpose of union with the GODHEAD. So personally and peculiarly is CHRIST, as CHRIST, the true *Nazarite*, yea, the only *Nazarite*, to whom all others were but types and shadows. Lament. iv. 7.

And it is worthy our closest observation, in proof of this, as if JEHOVAH would have CHRIST specially known by this name, that the LORD JESUS is by way of eminency so distinguished both in heaven and earth, by *angels*, *devils*, yea, by the LORD himself, who sweetly called himself by the name from heaven, when speaking to the Apostle *Paul*. The Apostles. John i. 45. Angels. Mark xvi. 6: *Roman* soldiers. John xviii. 5. The servant maid in *Pilate's* hall. Matt. xxvi. 71. *Pilate* himself. John xix. 19. CHRIST's servants in working miracles. Acts iii. 6. Acts iv. 10. *Devils*. Mark i. 24. And our dear LORD himself. Acts xxii. 8. Reader! these are sweet testimonies to this one great point, when that point is considered in terms equal to its importance, that JESUS CHRIST is the one and only *Nazarite* to God.

10 ¶ Then *Paul*, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a

judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself :

11 Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship.

12 And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city :

13 Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me.

14 But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law, and in the prophets :

15 And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.

16 And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and *toward* men.

17 Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings.

18 Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult.

19 Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me.

20 Or else let these same *here* say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council,

21 Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead, I am called in question by you this day.

Let the Reader behold the composedness which marked *Paul's* conduct before this unjust assembly. Until *Felix* waved his hand to him to speak, the Apostle stood silent. Indeed there was nothing to

answer. For if the Reader will count the time as *Paul* stated, from the day he left *Cæsarea*, to the then present hour, it was only twelve days, nine of which they had confined him. What pestilence or sedition could he have been guilty of in such an interval, three-fourths of which he had been a prisoner. And the three first days he was engaged in performing the religious worship in the temple, for which he came up to *Jerusalem*. But I hope the Reader will not overlook the chief and leading point which *Tertullus* labored at, which was to insinuate, that this sect, as he called the followers of the LORD JESUS, were enemies to government. This was the master-piece of Satan, in the accusation brought against our LORD. Luke xxiii. 2. John xix. 12. And this, more or less, in every age of the Church, hath been the grand means made use of to undermine the cause of CHRIST. Psm. ii. 1, 2. Exod. i. 10. Nehem. v. 17. How little do these men know that the real stability of earthly kingdoms is founded in the interests of CHRIST's. Indeed the very purposes for which all monarchies of the world are carried on, are in a way of ministry to promote the ultimate end of the kingdom of the LORD JESUS. *The earth helped the Woman*. Rev. xii. 16, 17. Prov. viii. 15, 16.

22 And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of *that* way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter.

23 And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let *him* have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister, or come unto him.

24 ¶ And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.

25 And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgement to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

26 He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.

27 ¶ But after two years, Porcius Festus came into Felix' room; and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.

There is somewhat truly awful in the character of *Felix*, as here given. He had been governor under the Roman emperor in this province many years. Some writers state *thirteen*. And from what is here said of him, that he had *a more perfect knowledge of that way*, that is, the Christian way, than *Lysias*, the chief captain, who sent *Paul* to him for judgment, or *Tertullus*, and the other accusers, it should seem that he had informed himself of some of the leading points of the Gospel. This was the more probable, because the event of the conversion of *Cornelius*, (chap. x.) which took place at *Cæsarea*, he must have heard of; and the Church of CHRIST formed there in consequence thereof, was now under his own government. See chap. xviii. 22. *Philip*, the Evangelist, also lived under his government, chap. xxi. 8. So that it was hardly possible *Felix* could have been ignorant, either of the doctrines of the Gospel, or of the exemplary lives of the followers of the LORD JESUS. Philip. iv. 8, 9.

It appears from history, that this *Drusilla*, whom *Felix* had taken to wife, was married at the time he took her to another man, so that he was living in open adultery. Strange that such characters as *Felix* and *Drusilla*, should desire to hear any thing of the LORD JESUS CHRIST! And no doubt the motive was more for curiosity or ridicule than seriousness. But whatever they proposed to themselves from *Paul's* discourse, the effect on *Felix's* conscience turned out the very reverse, as his trembling manifested. Reader! it is very blessed at times to behold, as in the instance here shewn, how the guilty minds of sinners are alarmed in the dreadful prospect of that judgment to come! It becomes an additional testimony to the faith. The LORD even now doth not leave himself without witness in the hearts of sinners!

But, Reader, do not fail to observe also, how totally different from grace in the soul is this trembling of a guilty conscience, as in the instance of *Felix*, unawakened by the HOLY GHOST. Had the work been of the LORD, like the Jailor at *Philippi*, when *Felix* trembled at the apprehension of a judgment to come, like him, though a governor, he would have sprung from his seat, and fell down before his prisoner, and unawed by all around, he would have cried out in words to the same effect as his, *what must I do to be saved?* Acts xvi. 23—34. We hear nothing of the kind from *Felix*. He trembled for the hour, and the conscience hardened again! like the thaw made by the sun on the frost which freezes again at night.

And it forms an exact correspondence to such a character, in what followed in *Felix's* life. *Paul* had said in his defence, that he had come up to Jerusalem to bring *alms* and offerings, (verse 17.) *Felix* concluded, that from the little time *Paul* had been at Jerusalem, this money could not be all gone. Under this impression he gave liberty for *Paul's* friends to visit him. And he sent for *Paul* the oftener to commune with him, but not it should seem about righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come, but with an hope that the poor prisoner would have help from his friends, and would offer him money that he might loose him. But though this attempt of *Felix* was carried on for two whole years, during which space he found *Paul* too poor to get any thing from, and too honest to purchase a liberty unjustly kept from him by money; at his departure from his government, so regardless was he of all that was right, and so unfeeling to the suffer-

ings of his prisoner, that to gratify the Jews, he left *Paul* bound. Thus he closed his last act of government with injustice and cruelty. And how he closed his last act of life, to go before that judgment *Paul* had made him tremble only in describing, is better conceived than expressed. If the Reader would see what the word of God hath said of all such men, he will find some strong representations of their awful departure in Job xxi. 7—15. Psm. xlix. 6—14. Isaiah xiv. 4—18.

REFLECTIONS.

READER! dismiss not this chapter without taking one short view more of this mock court of pretended justice, before whom the Apostle *Paul* was brought to answer for his life. Behold, on the one side, *Tertullus* hired for this purpose, that by his eloquence he might lead the minds of his hearers from what was right; and *Ananias* the high priest, to give weight by his presence to the accusations against *Paul*, and the whole body of the Jews with open mouth forming a clamorous cry to criminate the Apostle! On the other hand, behold the poor defenceless prisoner, while hearing their violent abuse, standing silent, and not presuming to open his mouth, until commanded by the governor. And, behold this time-serving prince presiding at such a court, whose object was to get money, and not administer justice! And where are the different parties now? What is become of the oratory of *Tertullus*? What are his present views of the sect of the *Nazarenes*, or of *Paul*, the ringleader? And what hath *Felix*, and all the characters of his complexion found of judgment, when from the trembling at the representation only, they have now entered into the full manifestation of it in reality, in the eternal world?

Blessed LORD JESUS! how sweet to the souls of all thy redeemed ones, is the recollection that thou art judge of quick and dead! And amidst all the unjust decisions, and painful perversions, thy people are not unfrequently brought under, in the present time-state of the Church, the thought of thy righteous judgment brings relief to every case. He that is the believer's judge, is in the same moment his advocate and brother. He will vindicate the cause of his people, and finally and fully restore perfect order among all the works of God.

CHAP. XXV.

CONTENTS.

Paul is accused to Festus, the Governor. After some Time he is brought forth to Trial. He appeals to Cæsar. Festus and Agrippa confer on the Subject.

NOW when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Cesarea to Jerusalem.

2 Then the high priest, and the chief of the

Jews, informed him against Paul, and besought him,

3 And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him.

4 But Festus answered, That Paul should be kept at Cesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly *thither*.

5 Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with *me*, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.

I beg the Reader at the opening of this Chapter to remark, that notwithstanding the awful state those perjured persons had fallen into, by having sworn not to eat or drink till they had killed *Paul*, (see chap. xxiii. 12, &c.) yet still the high priest, and the leading body of the Jews thirsted for his blood. No time could wear away this enmity. No alteration can ever take place in this deep-rooted hatred against CHRIST and his people. Reader! depend upon it, the same exists in the present hour. A zeal like that of *Paul's*, for the glory of CHRIST, unalloyed with a mixture of pharisaical righteousness, the preachers of such a doctrine must ever be the objects of general hatred and displeasure. No foes of CHRIST equalled the self-righteous Pharisee, while the Son of GOD was upon earth! And no enemy now is greater against the pure truths of the Gospel, than characters of the same description.

6 And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Cesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment-seat, commanded Paul to be brought.

7 And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove.

8 While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Cesar, have I offended any thing at all.

9 But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?

10 Then said Paul, I stand at Cesar's judgment-seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest.

11 For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Cesar.

12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Cesar? unto Cesar shalt thou go.

What an awful view we have here again of a corrupt judge. *Festus*, as well as *Felix*, plainly saw, that there was nothing in which those unprincipled men could criminate *Paul*. He knew also, that he had been unjustly detained in prison for more than two years by *Felix*. And in the face of these palpable cruelties, to propose another hearing at a distant day, and to be carried to Jerusalem for that purpose, was the grossest act of oppression and cruelty imaginable. Oh! *Festus*! how hast thou long since gone up to the Jerusalem, the Zion of God, which is above, and there been judged before *Paul's* LORD, for thy cruelties to his dear servant? Thy conscience then was hardened past all feeling, and thy pleasing the Jews at the expence of God's truth, amused thy unfeeling soul. But thy sins were only accumulating, like the gathering of gun-powder in the barrel, *treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God*. And how long since, hath that fire seized upon thy full-bosomed soul of guilt, and sunk thee into that place of endless torment, which, kindled in God's anger, burneth for ever to the lowest hell! Deut. xxxii. 22.

This appeal of *Paul*, no doubt, was made from the encouragement he had derived from the LORD's vision to him; in which JESUS had told him, that *he must bear witness for him at Rome*. Chap. xxiii. 11. And very sweet, and seasonable, was that gracious visit of the LORD, to his poor prisoner. In the confidence of which, he demands a hearing before the then Emperor of *Rome*, who was *Festus's* lord. And, by this means, he not only pleaded his right, as a *Roman*, so to be tried; but he perfectly for the time, got free from his enemies at *Jerusalem*. Reader! do not overlook the love of JESUS, on this occasion, to *Paul*. And, when you have thanked the LORD JESUS, for this grace to the Apostle *then*; connect with it the assurance, that the same grace JESUS sheweth to all his people *now*. Oh! how sweet are all the love-visits of JESUS!

Reader! even at this distance of time, I feel my poor heart disposed to bless God, for his timely instruction given to *Paul*, to make this appeal. Methinks I see the Governor, looking most pitiful indeed! He is obliged to take counsel with those around him, how to act. And he that just before had said: wilt thou go up to Jeru-

saalem and there be judged before me? is now compelled to conduct himself towards his poor prisoner, as if *Paul* had said in answer: be judged before thee? No! To your sovereign and master, I appeal for judgment. By *Cæsar* only will I be judged! And here the Court broke up. The Jews sent home disappointed. The Governor humbled. *Paul* triumphant. And how often doth the Lord thus baffle the designs of bad men, and deliver his people?

13 And after certain days, king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Cesarea to salute Festus.

14 And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix.

15 About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgement against him.

16 To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.

17 Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgement-seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth.

18 Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed:

19 But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.

20 And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked *him* whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters.

21 But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Cesar.

22 Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To-morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him.

I pass by all that is said here, of the pomp and grandeur of the persons in the intimacy of *Festus*, things but of a moment, to attend to what is more important; the concerns of the Church at this time. One circumstance is very striking, as related in this paragraph. *Festus* here talks of the manner of the *Romans*, in their delivery of criminals to death. And, as *Paul* was brought before *Festus* by the Jews, in hopes that he would have condemned him to death, though a Jew; nothing can be more plain, than that the Jews had now totally lost the power in themselves to judge, and condemn any; for it was solely exercised by the *Roman* power. But, if the Reader will compare what is here said, with what took place at the death of *Stephen*; (see Chap. vii. 57, 58, and Commentary there;) he will discover, that a great change had taken place since that time. The *Sanhedrim*, in *Stephen's* case, did actually try, condemn, and execute, this martyr to the GODHEAD of CHRIST, without applying to the *Roman* power. Whereas now, they no longer possessed it, as is evident in *Paul's* trial, both before *Felix*, and *Festus*; and his appeal to *Cæsar*. And here opens, and confirms, a blessed proof of Jacob's prophecy. Gen. xlix. 10. The Gentiles were now gathering to CHRIST. The sceptre of *Judah* was totally departed, and the *Shiloh* come. How blessed is it to trace the sweet evidences of our holy faith, thus by scriptural testimonies!

I must detain the Reader with an observation more, on what is said in this paragraph, of the Apostle's assertion, respecting the resurrection of CHRIST. *Festus* was astonished, he told *Agrippa*, that when he expected *Paul's* accusers to have brought forth a charge against him, of some high crimes and misdemeanors; it was nothing but of certain questions, and superstitions: and particularly, said he, *of one Jesus which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive*. Reader! do mark the contempt with which this heathen spake of that glorious event, which is to you, and to me, our chief happiness, and greatest joy!

But, while this wretched man, considered this momentous truth as a trifle of no value to regard; let you and I rather advert to the conduct of *Paul*, and enquire how, or from what cause it was, the Apostle became so confident. Certain it is, that *Paul* had never seen CHRIST in the flesh, during our LORD's ministry; for he saith himself, that he was as *one born out of due time*. 1 Cor. xv. 8. And that he was, many years after CHRIST's return to glory, a bitter enemy to the cause of CHRIST, is also equally certain. As, therefore, he was not one of those witnesses *Peter* speaks of, *who were chosen before of God* for this purpose to be his witnesses, *who did eat and drink with Jesus after he arose from the dead*; it becomes a subject of no small interest to enquire, how *Paul* got his assurance of CHRIST's resurrection, and what it was, which made him so confident, that *Jesus* which was dead, he affirmed to be alive?

And here opens to us, a subject of peculiar sweetness and delight. For nothing can be more evident, than that *Paul's* positiveness in affirming, that this One glorious *Jesus* which had been dead, was alive, arose, from his own personal knowledge. *Jesus* himself had spoken to *Paul* from heaven, at his conversion. Acts ix. 4, 5. And *Jesus* had again made a *second* manifestation of himself to *Paul*, as it is written: Acts xxii. 17—21. and 1 Cor. xv. 8. And what confirmed

yet more the whole in the Apostle's mind, of the resurrection of JESUS, were the blessed effects which followed, in his own heart. The resurrection of JESUS became a palpable truth with *Paul*, from his own. Well might the Apostle affirm, that this One LORD JESUS which was dead, was alive; because, CHRIST's resurrection and return to glory, had been confirmed to *Paul's* heart by the blessed effects of it, in his resurrection by grace. And the same evidence rests now in the heart of every regenerated believer. Reader! you and I, and every child of God, in whose spirit the HOLY GHOST witnesseth, that we are the children of God, possess the same witness in ourselves. By the descent of the HOLY GHOST upon our hearts, we prove the ascension, and consequently the resurrection of the LORD JESUS, having returned to glory, and sent him down. And, from this best of all assurances, like *Paul*, we may speak of JESUS as once dead, but now affirm, that he is alive. This is the sweetest and most precious of all evidences!

23 And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth.

24 And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and *also* here, crying that he ought not to live any longer.

25 But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him.

26 Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my Lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and especially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write.

27 For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes *laid* against him.

Notwithstanding all this parade of *Festus* and his Court, I should not have thought it worth detaining the Reader to have made any observations upon it, had it not been to have called his attention to those blessed testimonies, which arise out of it, respecting the LORD and his people. The LORD JESUS had told his disciples, that *they should be*

brought before Governors and Kings for his sake, for a testimony against them. Matt. x. 18. And JESUS had said the same to *Paul*, Chap. ix. 15, 16. And, here we see it fulfilled. And *Paul* alludes to the same, when he saith: *we are made a spectacle to the world, and to angels, and to men!* 1 Cor. iv. 9. And, what a spectacle indeed, of derision, did the Apostle appear, amidst such an host of infidels! But, what an object of honor, to the view of angels, and the world of the spirits of just men made perfect, looking on, and beholding the faithful Apostle! Hail! thou highly favored servant of thy LORD!

REFLECTIONS.

READER! learn from *Paul's* history, in the unceasing pursuits of those men for his blood, the bitterness of heart in a state of nature, against the doctrine of grace; and be convinced, that in every individual of the fallen sons of *Adam*, the case is the same. *The carnal mind is enmity against God.* Oh! the blessedness, when brought out of this *Adam*-nature, by sovereign mercy; and brought into an heartfelt acquaintance, with the LORD JESUS CHRIST. None but they who know the truth, from a personal experience of its Almighty power, as *Paul* did, having part in the first resurrection, can, like him, enjoy it. But, where a saving work of GOD the HOLY GHOST, hath taken place in the soul, by regeneration; that person will have the same confidence as the Apostle had, and with the same holy joy, be always speaking, as he did, of One JESUS, who was dead, whom the heart affirms to be alive.

Blessed LORD JESUS! be thou everlastingly loved and adored, for thy grace, and wisdom, imparted to thy servant *Paul*, when thus ready to be swallowed up by his enemies. Surely, LORD, it was thy strength, made manifest in creature weakness. It was JESUS who taught him, in such a moment, to make an appeal to *Cæsar*: though *Cæsar* no more than *Festus* was a friend to *Paul*, or his LORD. Here, LORD, thy promise was fulfilled, in giving him *a word and wisdom, which all the adversaries of thy poor prisoner, could neither gainsay nor resist!* And thus, in a moment, their whole policy fell to the ground! And, thus the LORD is continually doing now, amidst the exercises of his people, by which they are *more than conquerors, through Him that loveth them!*

CHAP. XXVI.

CONTENTS.

Paul is permitted to speak for Himself. He makes his Defence: declares his Conversion, and the Manner of it. He is interrupted by Festus. He again reassumes his Discourse, and speaks to Agrippa. The whole Court break up, astonished at what they had heard, and separate.

THEN Agrippa said unto *Paul*, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then *Paul* stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself;

2 I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee, touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews :

We shall enter at once into an apprehension of *Paul's* design in this defence, if we consider the frivolous and false charges, which indirectly the Jews had brought against him. A *pestilent fellow*, and a *mover of sedition*, the Orator *Tertullus* would have insinuated *Paul* was, by way of bringing him under the Governor's displeasure, as an enemy to *Cæsar* ; but the conduct of the Apostle was too peaceable, and orderly, to suffer by such accusations. *Paul*, therefore, very wisely, entered not into the smallest defence of his conduct, in this department, but confined himself, to what referred to his attachment to the cause of CHRIST. That he had honored the temple, instead of prophaning it ; was fulfilling the law, instead of breaking it ; and giving the highest glory to God, instead of blaspheming God ; the Apostle would fully prove, by shewing, that in preaching CHRIST all these things were included. *Paul*, therefore, enters with delight upon his defence, waves his hand, as was the custom of public speakers in those days to do, by way of calling attention, professeth himself happy in the opportunity afforded him, and begs in particular the patient indulgence of *Agrippa*, that he might go through the short, but interesting subject, which would explain the whole of his conduct, and fully prove his innocency.

3 Especially, *because I know* thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews, wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.

4 My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews ;

5 Which knew me from the beginning, (if they would testify) that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

6 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers :

7 Unto which *promise* our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come, for which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.

8 Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead ?

9 I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

10 Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests: and, when they were put to death, I gave my voice against *them*.

11 And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled *them* to blaspheme: and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted *them* even unto strange cities.

12 Whereupon as I went to Damascus, with authority and commission from the chief priests,

13 At mid-day, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.

14 And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? *it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

15 And I said, Who art thou, Lord? and he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.

16 But rise, and stand upon thy feet; for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness, both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;

17 Delivering thee from the people, and *from* the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,

18 To open their eyes, *and* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision :

20 But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

21 For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill *me*.

22 Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come ;

23 That Christ should suffer, *and* that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.

The Reader will observe, (and therefrom I hope be led to observe yet more, how much the mind of the Apostle must have been under the blessed influence of the HOLY GHOST,) that the one great drift of all *Paul's* defence, was not his own defence, but in the defence of the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and his full, and finished salvation. This was the great point *Paul* had in view. And, to establish this, he begins in a most masterly manner to shew, first, his original bitter hatred to CHRIST, and his Gospel ; and then, to set forth the wonderful change wrought upon him, by his conversion, immediately from heaven, by the LORD JESUS CHRIST himself. No plan could have been so happily chosen, as this which *Paul* adopted. For if, as the Apostle proved, and in proof appealed to all the Jews who knew him from a youth, to confirm, he had been born, and lived, a very strict and rigid *Pharisee* ; the question instantly arose, from whence this wonderful change ? *Paul* answers it by declaring it was a call from Heaven. And how then could the Apostle be disobedient, to the heavenly vision ?

But, while the Reader will remark with me these things, which both carry with them the highest, and most decided testimonies, in proof of divine truths ; and no less hold forth, in a very blessed point of view, for the comfort of the Church, the glorious account of *Paul's* conversion : there is one thing more, which I hope the Reader will not fail to notice, which is highly important ; I mean, the overruling power of God, in affording this renewed occasion, and in so public a manner, for the Apostle to go through the account once more, of his wonderful conversion. Surely this was the LORD's great design all along, in the imprisonment of *Paul*. Hence, he shall be apprehended at *Jerusalem*. A multitude shall assemble, both of Jews and Gentiles,

upon the occasion. And, while the one party would have killed him, and the other party would have had him examined by scourging, neither of them shall touch him to his hurt; but he shall boldly stand upon the stairs of the Castle, and rehearse before them all, the miraculous account of his Conversion. See Acts xxi. 30 to the end, and Chap. xxii. 1—22.

In like manner, upon the occasion, as here related, at *Cæsarea*, what a wonderful coincidence of circumstances are brought together, to produce such an audience, as the present? Not only a large concourse of people of *Cæsarea*, but this *Agrippa*, who was king of a large territory, as the history of those times shew, under the Roman emperor, and *Bernice*, and, no doubt, the usual attendants of Princes; all shall have rehearsed before them, *Paul's* history, *whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear*; they shall be told of God's sovereignty, and grace, to this man. And wherefore all this? The LORD Jesus answered this question, when silencing the fears of *Ananias*, at *Paul's* conversion. *Go thy way*, said the LORD unto him, *for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.* Acts ix. 15. And, here it is explained. Even though in chains, *Paul* shall twice deliver, in the most public manner possible, and before an immense congregation, (which, but for an overruling providence of the LORD, leading to it, never could have taken place;) the account of his conversion. The people of *Jerusalem*, and the people of *Cæsarea*, yea, and strangers from afar, shall be all brought together for this purpose, and shall hear it. Both Jews, and Gentiles, shall be assembled on this occasion, who never would have mingled in any religious worship; and shall receive this testimony to *the truth as it is in Jesus*, whether under grace, for their everlasting joy, or in despising the means of grace, to their everlasting shame and confusion. Dan. xii. 10.

And, Reader, before you pass away from the consideration of these things, as relating to the different audiences before whom *Paul* delivered in his testimony; I would beg of you to pause, and contemplate, if you can, to what extent this design of God the HOLY GHOST then reached to others, not present at those meetings, to whom the wonderful story must have been related, after those assemblies broke up, and the multitudes were scattered abroad, both far and near? Who shall say, what blessed effects followed, in the conversion of numbers, who heard these things; and where that hearing was accompanied with the gifts of the HOLY GHOST? Who shall calculate the blessedness, which, from that hour to the present, hath arisen, from God the HOLY GHOST, having caused the record of this miraculous conversion of *Paul* to be in his holy Scriptures, and commissioning the hearing, or the reading of it, in Churches, and families; and among the people? Yea, to ages yet unborn, the precious record of *Paul's* conversion must, and will have a blessed tendency, of the highest good; for we know, and from God the HOLY GHOST's own assurance concerning this man, that *it was for this cause he obtained mercy, that in him, first JESUS CHRIST might shew forth all long suffering for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.* 1 Tim. i. 16. Hence, among other causes, of which, in the present short-sighted state of our faculties, we have no discernment, we here discover enough to admire, and in that admi-

ration to adore, the wonderful design of God the HOLY GHOST, in the government of his Church, in opening such repeated opportunities for his servant proclaiming the circumstances of his conversion; and for causing double records to be made, and handed down, to all ages of his people, of an event, so full of grace to the Church, and of glory to God. Reader! will you not feel constrained, in the view of such rich, free, and unmerited mercy, (the relation of which hath been blessed to thousands,) to look up, and bless God the HOLY GHOST, for this instance, among numberless others, in giving to his Church, the repeated record of *Paul's* conversion?

I shall not think it necessary to go over the several parts of the Apostle's sermon; having already noticed some of the more striking passages, in the review of the account: Chap. ix. and Chap. xxii. I therefore would refer the Reader to the Commentary on both those Chapters. I shall rather desire, in addition to what is there offered, that the Reader will make the whole review of the subject, somewhat more personal, that the gracious mercy of God the HOLY GHOST, in the record, as it concerns himself, may be blessed. Of all the arguments upon earth, as far as written testimonies can go, in proof of any one truth; none can produce greater, and few equal, to this of *Paul's* conversion. When we contemplate what he here said, of the manner of his life from his youth: his zeal in the Jewish religion: his earnestness to promote it: his extravagant anger at the first, against CHRIST and his people: the astonishing change wrought by his conversion: and the whole of his eventful life, which followed: such an history, attested as it is, by every evidence that can be desired; cannot but carry conviction wherever it comes, as far as outward testimony can reach, of the truth it is intended to establish. But, my Reader will bear with me while I say, that if it goes no further than this, in obtaining the cold, uninterested consent of the understanding, without influencing by grace the heart; it is of little consequence, whether believed, or not. But, when by divine teaching, *Paul's* history carries some resemblance, however faint, to our own; and while we read his conversion, we know of a work of grace having passed in our own hearts; every tittle of the abundant grace *Paul* speaks of, which was shewn him, we can fully subscribe to, and say as he did: *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that CHRIST JESUS came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.* 1 Tim. i. 15.

24 And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.

25 But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

26 For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him: for this thing was not done in a corner.

27 King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.

It is well worth the Reader's notice, that the interruption *Festus* made to *Paul's* discourse, and the idea he had conceived that the Apostle was mad, is the very same conduct still pursued by all carnal men in their opposition to the Gospel, and the preachers of free grace in CHRIST. To the LORD JESUS himself the same was said. *Mark* iii. 21. Yea, some went further. *John* x. 21. And his Apostles felt under similar reproach. *2 Cor.* v. 13. But, alas! the insanity is all on the other side. And the HOLY GHOST hath given the cause. *1 Cor.* ii. 14, 15.

Let the Reader notice also the boldness of *Paul*, when he said, that *Agrippa* could not be ignorant of what the whole *Roman* empire had sounded with; namely, the Person, death, and resurrection of the LORD JESUS! *Agrippa* himself had professed his belief in the Jews' religion, as history records of him. And, consequently, he could not be ignorant what the Prophets had said of the *Messiah*. And, as the coming of CHRIST, his miracles, and ministry, his death on the cross, and the prodigies which attended that death, and his resurrection which followed, were not done in a corner, but as fully known and attested, as the light of the sun at noon-day, in confirmation that He was the *Messiah*; *Paul* assumed it for a fact, that *Agrippa* must acknowledge their truth. And, under these impressions, he boldly put the question to the King, and as instantly answered it himself. *Believest thou the Prophets? I know that thou believest!*

28 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

29 And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.

Agrippa's answer leads to a very solemn train of thoughts. How many of the *almost* Christians, but never in reality so, are *now* in the world, *have been* in all ages of the Church, and *will be* found in the last day? Doth the Reader know of such? Are their characters clearly definable? Yes! They cannot be mistaken. And, although they have different shades under the same title, yet, the whole may be, and are indeed, classed under the one general name of *unregenerated professors*. These are the *almost*, but never-to-be, Christians. They were born under the meridian of Christianity, but never new-born in CHRIST. *John* iii. 3.

Without running over a large field of observation by way of drawing the line, according to scriptural decision, between the *almost* and the *real* Christian; it will be sufficient to remark, that the *almost* Christian may have great light and understanding in head, when there is no grace in the heart. Such an one may profess great delight in hearing sermons, seem much affected under the word, apparently alive to the promotion of all charities, and the promotion of the

LORD's glory in the earth, and yet not a single act of true saving grace all the while hath passed upon his heart. Yea, he may go further. Some views of his own sinful state by nature he may have; some apprehensions of the Person and glory of CHRIST, in an historical knowledge of him, by reading or hearing sermons; some sorrow for sin, with an apprehension of the consequences of unrepented sin, and the conviction that none but CHRIST can save from the wrath to come: these, and similar lessons may be learnt in nature's school, where the word of God is read, or heard, or preached; but without a better teaching, and the regenerating work of God the HOLY GHOST upon the soul, all, and much more, will leave the persons so taught, among the *almost* Christians, and never make them real followers of CHRIST in the regeneration. The HOLY GHOST by *Paul*, hath drawn the portrait of those men with a strong pencil, in his holy word, when he describes them as once *enlightened* with head knowledge; *tasting*, but not enjoying, the *heavenly gift* of his holy word; made *partakers* of the HOLY GHOST in his outward ministry and ordinances; *tasting*, so as to distinguish the *good word* of God from the word of man; but not as new-born babes desiring the sincere milk of the word, that they might grow thereby, and *tasting the powers of the world to come*, in miracles wrought in CHRIST's name, and to confirm his word, which in the early days they saw, yea, many of them, (as *Judas*,) wrought; but in all these, there is not a single word to shew, that God the HOLY GHOST had regenerated their persons; and, consequently, there is not a single act of the graces of the SPIRIT, which flow from regeneration, such as faith, love, and obedience, to manifest their regenerated nature; and, therefore, the whole of what is here said, may, and not unfrequently will, be found in the character of the *almost*, but never *real* Christian. See Heb. vi. 4, 5, 6. and the Commentary upon the passage.

Let the Reader look at *Paul* for a contrast to this *almost* Christian, when in his very modest and unassuming answer, he said to *Agrippa*, *I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds*. What tenderness and affection, arising from grace in the heart, were expressed in these words? Excepting the chains, in which he stood before them as a prisoner, which he wished not to his greatest natural enemy; neither the humble poverty of his circumstances in outward things in which he lived, and earned his bread by tent making; excepting these, it was the most cordial wish of his soul, if the LORD willed it, that all then present were, as he himself was, in spiritual things, and living in the enjoyment of them.

Reader! if you wish to behold the portrait of a *real* Christian, in the character of *Paul*, the HOLY GHOST hath fully drawn it. He hath shewn, that in the days of his unregeneracy, he was as all men by nature are, *sometime foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another*. But, (saith *Paul*,) *after that, the kindness and love of God our SAVIOR toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but, according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the HOLY GHOST; which he shed on us abundantly though JESUS CHRIST our SAVIOR*. Titus iii. 3—6. Here we see in the first part, the original features of nature,

in the universal tints of character by which all Adam's children are known, and in which they are all born, and in which they all live and die, unless regenerated by grace. And here we see in the *second* part of this picture, the source of that vast change, which God the HOLY GHOST makes by his own Almighty power on the heart, when, by forming the nature anew, he makes them new creatures in CHRIST JESUS. So that they are now made *partakers of the divine nature, having, through that grace imparted to them in their new-birth, escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.* 2 Pet. i. 1—4. And thus being regenerated by the HOLY GHOST, given by the FATHER to the SON, and redeemed from the Adam-nature of a fallen state by CHRIST, called with an holy calling, pardoned and justified by the blood and righteousness of CHRIST, sanctified in their grace union with CHRIST, and daily renewed by the HOLY SPIRIT; they are not *almost*, but *real* Christians, being *members of CHRIST's body, his flesh, and his bones!* Ephes. v. 30.

30 And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them :

31 And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death, or of bonds.

32 Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cesar.

The great end the LORD the SPIRIT had appointed by this meeting, being now accomplished, (I pray the Reader not to lose sight of this,) the business is over. The several hearers have now heard for their life or death. *Paul's* sermon will at the last day be again brought forward, as the ministration of mercy or condemnation. The one class of mercy for the blessed opportunity. Heb. x. 39. The other of condemnation. Psm. l. 7.

And now the assembly is broken up, the congregation separate, and the prisoner is sent back to his prison. He might have been set at liberty, said *Agrippa*, if he had not appealed unto *Cesar*. No, *Agrippa!* that must not be, for the LORD had shewed his servant, that he must bear witness also at *Rome*. Acts xxiii. 11. How little and contemptible would this whole assembly have appeared, even in their own eyes, amidst all their pomp and splendor, could they but have seen the parts they were then made to act for the divine glory. They were to hear for their own condemnation, if not made *the savor of life unto life*; and they were to prepare for the sending the LORD's messenger and witness to *Rome*. *Howbeit*, (said the LORD of a similar character of old,) *he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so.* Isaiah x. 5, 6, 7. It is truly blessed to a child of God, to trace the LORD's hand in all the LORD's appointments. *My counsel shall stand,* saith the LORD, *and I will do all my pleasure.* Isaiah xli. 10.

REFLECTIONS.

It will be a blessed improvement of this chapter, under the HOLY GHOST's teachings, if, by contemplating the different characters at this assembly, our souls are led to see how dignified was the poor prisoner in his chains, compared to the nobles in their mistaken splendor. Could any eye have been opened to discern objects spiritually, while looking upon the meeting, as the Prophet's servant was in the Mount, he would have beheld the prisoner in the robes of JESUS's righteousness, and Festus and his royal host wearing the chains of sin, and prisoners to *Satan*. Oh! what mistaken views do we make of all the objects of time and sense, while the vail of nature's darkness is upon our hearts!

Reader! let you and I once more, (we never shall too often,) bless GOD the HOLY GHOST for the thrice record of *Paul's* conversion in his blessed word. Add a blessing to it, O LORD, and cause it to be a sweet savor in the souls of thy people, to numbers now on earth, as it hath been in times past, to numbers now in heaven. Yea, bless it to numbers yet unborn, even to endless generations! Amen.

C H A P. XXVII.

CONTENTS.

We have here the Apostle entering on Ship-board, to be conducted to Rome. The Voyage is attended with danger. The LORD comforts Paul with a Visit in the Night. He foretells the Loss of the Ship, but of the saving of all the Crew. They are shipwrecked, but escape all to Land.

AND when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto *one* named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band.

2 And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; *one* Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us.

3 And the next *day* we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously intreated Paul, and gave *him* liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself.

4 And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary.

5 And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, *a city* of Lycia.

6 And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy ; and he put us therein.

7 And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone ;

8 And hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called, The fair havens: nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea.

It is very blessed to watch the LORD's dealings with his people. Here seems to have been an overruling providence of the LORD, in relation to this voyage, in that *Paul* should be accompanied with several dear friends and companions. *Luke*, the writer of the Acts, it should appear, from certain passages in *Paul's* writings, was with him in this voyage. 2 Tim. iv. 11. Philemon 24. And, as he saith afterwards, when writing his last Epistle to *Timothy*, that he left *Trophimus* sick at *Miletus*, he must have been also with *Paul* at this time. And *Aristarchus* is mentioned by name, as here. This man, though but little known by us, we have reason to believe, was very dear to *Paul*; and what is infinitely more important, well-known in the book of life. He is spoken of, Acts xix. 29. xx. 4. Philemon 29. And we at length here of him as *Paul's* fellow-prisoner. Coloss. iv. 10. Oh! what multitudes have there been of the LORD's faithful ones hidden from public view, like some sweet flower of the desert which hath opened its beauties to the sun, and shed its perfumes to the air unnoticed, and unknown of men, but which will be found transplanted into the garden of the LORD, when the great day shall appear!

Do, Reader, remark the courteous behavior of *Julius* the Centurion towards *Paul*. The LORD gave him favor, as he did in the instance of *Joseph* with *Potiphar*. Gen. xxxix. 1—6. And before that *Julius* and *Paul* parted, the Centurion found, as *Potiphar* had in the case of *Joseph*, what a blessed thing it is, to have the LORD's people with us in every thing, verse 24.

It must have been a refreshing season indeed to the disciples at *Sidon*, (for as *Tyre* and *Sidon* were nigh each other, no doubt, upon such an occasion they met, see chap. xxi. 3, 4.) Here CHRIST himself exercised his ministry in the days of his flesh. Matt. xv. 21. And we read, that the Church in this place was made glad, when *Paul* and *Barnabas* passed through this neighborhood some time before. See Acts xv. 3.

9 Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, *Paul* admonished them,

10 And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage;

not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.

11 Nevertheless the centurion believed the master, and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul.

12 And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, *and there to winter, which is an haven of Crete,* and lieth toward the south west and north-west.

13 And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained *their* purpose, loosing *thence* they sailed close by Crete.

14 But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon.

15 And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let *her* drive.

16 And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat ;

17 Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship ; and fearing lest they should fall into the quick-sands, strake sail, and so were driven.

18 And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next *day* they lightened the ship ;

19 And the third *day* we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship.

There is nothing more striking to represent the life of God's people in their passage through the world, than that of the storms and tempests of the deep. The Psalmist hath as accurately, as beautifully described it, when he saith, *They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep.* I beg the Reader to turn to the cviith Psm. 23—31. and read the finest piece of writing on this subject the imagination can conceive. The Sacred Writer describes what Paul and his companions here felt, the raising of the stormy wind, the lifting up of the waves to heaven, and going down again to the depths beneath, the reeling of the people, and the melting of the heart through fear. Their crying to the LORD in their trouble, and the LORD's delivering them from their distresses. Such is the voyage of

life to the saints of God! Storms and tempests every where abound. But CHRIST is an *hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest!* And sweetly he manifests himself to them, as a *strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones, is as a storm against the wall.* Isaiah xxxii. 2. xxv. 4.

I admire the very gracious behavior of *Paul* on this occasion, in admonishing the ship's company of the dangers they were about to encounter. No doubt, among the gifts of the SPIRIT, *Paul* possessed that of *prophecy*. 1 Cor. xii. 10. And, though in this first exercise of it before the crew, they very lightly regarded what he said; yet it laid the foundation for greater respect to what he said after. It hath been thought by some, that the fast here spoken of, was the great fast observed by the Jews on the day of atonement. Levit. xxiii. 27, 28. The winter now approaching, and in those days, navigation being but very imperfectly known, sailing was considered dangerous.

20 And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on *us*, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.

21 But after long abstinence, *Paul* stood forth in the midst of them, and said, *Sirs*, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss.

22 And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of *any man's* life among you, but of the ship.

23 For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve,

24 Saying, Fear not, *Paul*: thou must be brought before Cesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.

25 Wherefore, *sirs*, be of good cheer: for I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me.

26 Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.

The description here given of the heavenly bodies affording so obscure a light, and the tempest of the sea raging so furiously, must have rendered the state of this ship's company very deplorable indeed. But, though all hope of being saved by human means was over, yet *Paul* knew the resource he had in the LORD. His confidence, therefore, so far from abating, gained strength, and his affectionate address to the crew, accompanied with a declaration of the message he had received from the LORD, had a very blessed effect, as it appears, upon the minds of the people. His foretelling that they

should be cast upon a certain island, was no doubt intended as a proof, that when the event took place, they might put the greater confidence in what he had told them of the LORD.

I must not suffer the Reader to pass on, without observing, that a beautiful instruction of a spiritual nature ariseth from hence, which the believer in CHRIST would do well to keep in view. In the voyage to the city of the living God, the Church, and every individual of the Church, more or less, meet with storms and tempests, threatening shipwreck. And not unfrequently, while suffering the fury of the waves of the sea, the heavenly bodies seem to suspend their light. No Sun of righteousness for many days can they discover, neither do they find light from the ministers of JESUS, as the stars he holds in his right hand. And, while these things are so, unless great grace, like that given to the Apostle, be given to the LORD's people, all hopes of being saved, are for the time lost. They indeed, who, like him, can bless a taking God, as well as a giving God, can, and do, live upon the LORD, when all other resources dry up.

27 But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country;

28 And sounded, and found *it* twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found *it* fifteen fathoms.

29 Then fearing lest they should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.

30 And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship,

31 Paul said to the centurion, and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.

32 Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off.

33 And while the day was coming on, Paul besought *them* all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried, and continued fasting, having taken nothing.

34 Wherefore I pray you to take *some* meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.

35 And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all; and when he had broken *it*, he began to eat.

36 Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took *some* meat.

37 And we were in all in the ship, two hundred threescore and sixteen souls.

38 And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.

How truly interesting the whole narrative is. And what a lovely view the LORD hath given us of *Paul*. No doubt, his chearfulness in the midst of the storm, very much contributed to animate the whole ship's company. I do not apprehend, that when *Paul* admonished them to eat some food, saying, that it was the *fourteenth day* they had fasted, and had taken nothing, that he meant they had been all that while without the smallest food. For strictly, and properly speaking, had this been the case, life would have been, in some instances at least, if not in all, destroyed for want of food. But I rather suppose, that he meant they had not, on account of the storm, taken their usual meals in a regular manner; but only caught a morsel of food now and then, as the tempest would suffer them. Some have read the passage different from our translation, and rendered it, as if *Paul* had said, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried for, and continued fasting, having taken nothing, that is, ye have continued this whole day fasting. So that in this sense, they had not fasted but this day. And, certainly, this sense is much more probable, for in the other view of fourteen whole days' fasting of two hundred, threescore, and sixteen persons, nothing short of a miracle could have kept them all alive.

It hath been supposed by some, that *Paul* made this meal somewhat sacramental, by taking bread as *CHRIST* did, and giving thanks. But it appears to me to be a wrong idea. The Ordinance of the Supper would have been unsuited to the whole ship's company in their then circumstances. And we can hardly suppose, that the Apostle would have brought that sacred service, which is peculiarly and specially intended for the sweet memorial of *CHRIST*'s death in the *LORD*'s family, to be received in common with those who know not the *LORD*.

39 And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship.

40 And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed *themselves* unto the sea, and loosed

the rudder bands, and hoisted up the main-sail to the wind, and made toward shore.

41 And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground : and the fore part stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.

42 And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out and escape,

43 But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from *their* purpose, and commanded that they which could swim, should cast *themselves* first *into the sea*, and get to land ;

44 And the rest, some on boards, and some on *broken pieces* of the ship. And so it came to pass that they escaped all safe to land.

How our nature shudders at the cruel and desperately wicked purposes of the soldiers, in the proposal they made to kill the prisoners. Reader! do observe, not all the horrors of the shipwreck they had escaped, could soften the hardened nature of the unawakened mind. The devil raged more in their hearts than the storm of the sea upon their bodies. But, while we trace this temptation to the devil, do not fail to remark also, how the hand of the LORD was in this business, by his gracious influence on the mind of the Centurion, to counteract and defeat their inhuman policy. Oh! how blessed is it to trace the LORD's mercies both in providence and grace! Neither Jews nor Gentiles at *Jerusalem* and *Cæsarea*, neither tempest of sea, or the raging of men or devils on land, shall destroy *Paul*; for the LORD hath said, *Fear not Paul, thou must be brought before Cæsar. Be of good cheer, for as thou hast testified of me at Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.* chap. xxiii. 11. And how often may it be seen in the life of every child of GOD, both in spiritual concerns, and temporal, that *when the enemy cometh in like a flood, the SPIRIT of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him?* Isaiah lix. 19.

How very beautiful, yet simple, the language with which the chapter closeth: *And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.* Yes! The LORD had said it, and so it must be accomplished. Even from the mouth of an enemy, the LORD hath forced the confession; *God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent. Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?* Numb. xxxiii. 19. And, depend upon it, so it shall come to pass with all the LORD's family, embarked as they are with CHRIST, and passing through the storms and tempests of the present time state of the Church. JEHOVAH hath given to his dear SON ail them that sail with him. And *he will bring them unto the haven, where they would be!* Oh! that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! Psm. cxvii. 30, 31.

REFLECTIONS.

How blessedly the Prophet *Nahum* spake, when he said, *the Lord hath his way in the whirlwind, and in the storm!* And how fully proved, was that way manifested, in all the circumstances of this voyage? Well might the Apostle say, *in perils often, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren.* But, said he, as upon another occasion, *out of them all, the Lord delivered me.* Reader! it is well to be brought into exercises, that we may discern the LORD's hand in bringing out. The loudest cries of the awakened soul, are, when all is dark and discouraging, and when neither sun nor stars appear for many days. A child of GOD will then indeed pray, and pray hard, and in earnest, while the hand of chastening is upon him, and the grace of the LORD is within him, leading him forth in acts of faith and trust, upon the LORD his righteousness. Who of the LORD's people but would gladly pass through a storm, like this of *Paul's*, to have *Paul's* LORD with them, in the storm in such visions of the night? Oh! the unspeakable felicity, whether in storms or calms, in rough or smooth seasons, when a soul can say, there stood by me this night, the LORD and Angel of the Covenant, *whose I am, and whom I serve.* Reader! it is not simply an act of faith, but faith is then become the substance, realized into possession; when you and I, can, on sure grounds, say, I am God's property by grace; sure I am, that I shall be equally enabled to say, then am I God's care by his covenant love and faithfulness. LORD! help all thy redeemed to cast all their care upon thee, and into thy hands; for Jesus will bring home the whole, and every one to land, and bring them in to his everlasting haven, *where they would be!*

CHAP. XXVIII.

CONTENTS.

The LORD disposeth the Hearts of a barbarous People, on whose Ground Paul and the Ship's Company were cast, to receive them kindly. Paul healeth the Sick in the Island. They at length depart, and go to Rome. Paul preacheth in Rome two Years.

AND when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita.

2 And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one because of the present rain, and because of the cold.

3 And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid *them* on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.

4 And when the barbarians saw the *venomous*

beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.

5 And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.

6 Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.

This island on which the shipwrecked crew, *Paul* and his company landed, is the place that is now called *Malta*, in the Mediterranean Sea. We are not to understand by those islanders being called barbarous people, that it hath respect as much to their manners, as to their language. Their courtesy to *Paul*, and the rest of the ship's company, was great indeed. But it is supposed, that they are the rather called barbarous, because their dialect was a broken mixture of different tongues, so that it became difficult to understand them, or to be understood by them, when speaking in the pure language of the Latin, used at that time by the *Romans*; or in the Greek, by those of *Greece*. But, certainly, it was the Lord which gave *Paul* and his company favor with this people, or they would hardly have received with so much kindness, so large a company, as two hundred, threescore, and sixteen souls; much less have entertained them so long as they remained there, and laded them with such things as they needed, on their departure, (verses 10, 11.) Reader! it is always blessed to observe, the Lord's predisposing the minds of men to favor his people. On *Paul's* account, the men of *Malta* shall treat them all kindly. For *JESUS's* sake, his redeemed shall be taken care of, and fed, if it be needful, and rather than want food, at their enemies' table. See *Exod. xii. 36. Isaiah xvi. 4.*

The circumstance of this viper, seems to have been graciously ordained by the Lord, to answer much good. By the miracle of *Paul's* safety, from the bite of the venomous reptile, the Lord proved that scripture, *Mark xvi. 18. and Luke x. 19.* And, from the different sentiments, induced in the minds of those islanders, from what they saw; first, in supposing him a murderer, and then making a transition to fancy him a god; who shall say, what might follow by grace on the hearts of some of them, during the three months *Paul* remained there, in bringing them to the knowledge of the truth.

7 In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was *Publius*; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously.

8 ¶ And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever, and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.

9 So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed:

10 Who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded *us* with such things as were necessary.

There is somewhat very interesting in the account of this *Publius*. He must have been a man of great generosity, as well as wealth. He had no consciousness who this guest was, when he took him in. He reminds one of the patriarchs, when, like *Abraham* and *Lot*, they received angels as strangers. And, how graciously the Lord of *Paul* took the kindness, in the recompense he enabled *Paul* his servant to make him and his people, in healing the sick of the island. And who shall make the calculation of all the mercies which they might have received beside? It is said, that *Paul* went in, and prayed, and laid his hands on the father of *Publius*, and healed him. And may we not hope, the souls of some of those islanders were brought acquainted with the LORD JESUS CHRIST by *Paul's* ministry, while he was blessed of the LORD to their bodies?

11 ¶ And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux.

12 And landing at Syracuse, we tarried *there* three days.

13 And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli:

14 Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days, and so we went toward Rome.

15 And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.

16 And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself, with a soldier that kept him.

We have here the Apostle brought to his journeys' end. And thus the LORD's promise was made good. How welcome *Paul* was to the disciples at *Rome*, may be inferred from many of them coming so far to meet him. *Appii forum* could hardly be less than *fifty* miles, and the three taverns, not less than *thirty*. Surely the LORD sent them, and *Paul* considered it so, for he found increasing confidence from the sight of them. And thus the LORD frequently strengthens the hands and hearts of his people, in their mutual love and sympathy with each other, and all in Him.

17 And it came to pass, that after three days, *Paul* called the chief of the Jews together; and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men *and* brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.

18 Who, when they had examined me, would have let *me* go, because there was no cause of death in me.

19 But when the Jews spake against *it*, I was constrained to appeal unto Cesar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of.

20 For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see *you*, and to speak with *you*; because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.

21 And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee.

22 But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.

It is a little strange, that *Paul's* enemies the Jews, both at *Cæsarea* and *Jerusalem*, had not sent their hue and cry after him, before his arrival at *Rome*. But, perhaps, it may be accounted for on this ground. The Jews were afraid to appear against *Paul* before the Emperor at *Rome*. For, though the edict passed by *Claudius*, which drove all the Jews from *Rome*, (*Acts* xviii. 2.) became null at his death, and *Nero*, the then emperor, had not as yet troubled himself about them, (though afterwards he became a bitter enemy both to the Christians and the Jews,) yet, recollecting that law of *Claudius*, they thought it prudent, perhaps, to remain quiet.

Let the Reader observe, with what contempt they spake of the faith of CHRIST. They called it a sect, and one that was every where spoken against. Reader! do not deceive yourself, neither be deceived by others. The pure faith of the gospel, which ascribes the *whole* of salvation to JESUS, unmingled with men's works, is as much spoken against now, and by numbers who profess the gospel, as the faith once delivered to the saints, was of old by the Jews. And that solemn question of JESUS, was never more suited than now, to be brought home to the hearts and consciences of all who profess his truths; *when the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*

23 And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into *his* lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and *out of* the prophets, from morning till evening.

24 And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.

25 And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers,

26 Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand: and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive:

27 For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

28 Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and *that* they will hear it.

29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.

What a delightful discourse must this have been? From morning till evening it continued. What a scope of scripture the Apostle took in, for one end of the Old Testament to the other? But, what was the result? Namely, that which hath always been, and always must

be, where the congregation is made up, as it was here, and as it is for the most part every where, of a mingled company; they who belong to CHRIST, and they who do not. And, it is worthy the Reader's closest observation, that in the application *Paul* made of that memorable scripture, taken from the Prophet, and which *Paul* here expressly saith, was not the words of the Prophet, but of GOD the HOLY GHOST; the LORD defines the character of those to whom it is said, *Go unto this people!* The LORD doth not say, *Go tell my people.* Oh! no. Here the line is drawn. But go tell *this* people. And this suits *all* people, of every age and nation, whether Jews or Gentiles, whose final rejection of the Word of Grace, fully proves, that they are here intended, and marked in their true character. And so infinitely important are those words, which GOD the HOLY GHOST spake, in deciding this solemn truth, that the LORD the SPIRIT hath been pleased to have it recorded, (after he had spoken it by the Prophet,) no less than six times in his holy word. Matt. xiii. 14. Mark iv. 12. Luke viii. 10. John xii. 40. Here in this place; and Romans xi. 8. Reader! ponder it well!

30 ¶ And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him,

31 Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

This was a blessed season to the Church at *Rome*, which the LORD JESUS granted them. And, from the awful character of the then emperor *Nero*, under whose cruelty afterwards, both *Peter* and *Paul* suffered martyrdom, we can only ascribe it to the LORD JESUS, that he lulled this wretched prince asleep, while *Paul* thus for two whole years was preaching to the people of God. Supposing, what is generally believed, that *Festus* detained *Paul* a year; *Felix*, we know, confined him *two*; Acts xxiv. 27. and, here again, *two years* at *Rome*; the whole made *five*. But, it was the Church's mercy, that during the last confinement, he had not only time to preach, but leisure and direction from the LORD, to write those blessed Epistles, which have been made so blessed to the Church, and will be, till time shall be no more. The Epistle to the *Ephesians*, was evidently written at this time, see Ephes. iii. 1. and the date at the end. *Colossians* also, chap. iv. 18. and date. To *Philemon*, 9, 10. and date. *Philippians*, chap. i. 7. xiii. 16. and date. And, it is more than probable, that it was at the same time he wrote, and sent his Epistles to *Galatia* and the *Hebrews*. See the date of each. Some have supposed, that *Paul* at the end of the two years, was brought to trial, and suffered martyrdom. But this could not be. For his Epistle to *Philippi* speaks of the confidence he had of being freed. Philip. i. 25. and chap. ii. 16—24. And his second Epistle to *Timothy* was written *two years* after, and is said in the date, to have been written from *Rome*, when *Paul* was brought before *Nero* the *second* time. And in this Epistle, *Paul* then speaks of his expectation of death. Chap. iv. 6.

REFLECTIONS.

READER! let us bless God the HOLY GHOST for those precious Acts of his Apostles in his Church, for most blessed and delightful they are, as monuments of the Lord's grace in his servant's ministry. Think what multitudes now in glory, enjoyed the sweet savor of them, while on earth. Think how daily now the LORD is blessing them to his people. And, think what numbers yet unborn, will in succession rise up to the enjoyment of them, when you and I shall have been gathered to our fathers, and have seen corruption. Let us close our perusal of this sweet book of God, with thanks to the Almighty Author of it, for all the mercy shewn in it, and by it, to ourselves, and to all that are past. And let our prayers be added, that the LORD may continue to bless its use to endless generations. Amen.

THE
EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE
TO THE
ROMANS.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.

WE here enter upon the inspired writings of the Apostle *Paul*. They may well be called inspired; for *Paul* himself was taught by the HOLY GHOST, to tell the Church, that *all Scripture is given by inspiration of GOD*. So that in truth, GOD the SPIRIT is the Author, and his Servants are but the Pen-men of all the holy records. And hence we do right, when at any time we make quotations from the Word of GOD, instead of saying, (as is but too commonly done,) the Apostle, whose name the writing bears, saith thus, or thus: We consider GOD the HOLY GHOST himself the speaker, by his servant, and give the LORD the glory. For this would tend, under GOD, to keep alive in our remembrance, both the Person and authority of Him that speaks; and cause us to look beyond the words *which man's wisdom teacheth, to the words which the HOLY GHOST teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual*.

The Epistle to the *Romans*, is placed first in point of order