

THE AGES DIGITAL LIBRARY  
**COMMENTARY**

**DARBY'S SYNOPSIS OF THE  
BOOKS OF THE BIBLE  
PART 2: NEW TESTAMENT**

*by John Nelson Darby*

**Books For The Ages**  
AGES Software • Albany, OR USA  
Version 2.0 © 1996, 1997



## John Nelson Darby, 1800-1882

AGES Software is indebted to STEM Publishing, UK, for generously granting permission to reproduce their electronic text of Darby's *Synopsis of the Bible*. The Synopsis and the complete works of John Nelson Darby are available on a single CD-ROM, *The Darby Disk*. Contact L. J. L. Hodgett, STEM Publishing, 7 Primrose Way, Cliffs End, Ramsgate, Kent, CT12 5LF., U.K., Tel/Fax: 01843 584686, for information on acquiring this resource. Please contact STEM for publishing rights. The format which follows is copyright 1996 by AGES Software.

## THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

The Acts of the Apostles are divided essentially into three parts — chapters 1, 2 to 12; and 13 to the end. Chapters 11, 12 may be termed transitional chapters founded on the event related in chapter 10. Chapter 1 gives us that which is connected with the Lord's resurrection; chapters 2-12 that work of the Holy Ghost of which Jerusalem and the Jews were the center, but which branches out into the free action of the Spirit of God, independent of, but not separated from, the twelve and Jerusalem as the center; chapter 13, and the succeeding chapters, the work of Paul, flowing from a more distinct mission from Antioch; chapter 15 connecting the two in order to preserve unity in the whole course. We have indeed the admission of Gentiles in the second part, but it is in connection with the work going on among the Jews. These latter had rejected the witness of the Holy Ghost to a glorified Christ, as they had rejected the Son of God in His humiliation; and God prepared a work outside them, in which the apostle of the Gentiles laid foundations that annulled the distinction between Jew and Gentile, and which unite them — as in themselves equally dead in trespasses and sins — to Christ, the Head of His body, the assembly, in heaven.\*

[\* It is a sorrowful but instructive thing to see, in the last division of the book, how the spiritual energy of a Paul closes, as to its effect in work, in the shadow of a prison. Yet we see the wisdom of God in it. The boasted apostolicism of Rome never had an apostle but as a prisoner; and Christianity, as the Epistle to the Romans testifies, was already planted there.]

Let us now examine the chapters in their course. Chapter 1 supplies us with the narrative of that which relates to Jesus risen, and the actions of the apostles before the descent of the Holy Ghost. The Lord's communications present several very interesting points. Jesus, the risen man, acts and speaks by the Holy Ghost after His resurrection as before it. Precious token of our own position, as reminding us that we shall have the Holy Ghost after our resurrection, and that, being no longer engaged in restraining and mortifying the flesh, His divine energy in us will be entirely consecrated to eternal joy and worship, and to the service committed to us

by God. The risen Lord then gives His disciples commandments in connection with the new position He assumes. Their life and their service are to be formed and guided in view of His resurrection — a truth of which they had irrefragable proofs. They were still on earth, but they were pilgrims there, having Him in view who had gone before them raised from among the dead. Their relations with Him are still connected with their position on earth. He speaks to them of the kingdom, and of that which concerned the kingdom. Jerusalem was the starting-point of their ministry, even more than of His own. For He had gathered together the poor of the flock wherever He had found them, especially in Galilee;\* but now, resurrection having made Him in power the vessel of the sure mercies of David, He calls Israel afresh to own as Prince and Savior the One whom they had rejected as the living Messiah on earth. The Epistles of Peter are connected with the gospel in this point of view.

[\* The mission given in Luke 24 is the one fulfilled both in Peter's and Paul's discourses in the Acts, but especially in chapters 2 and 13, not that of Matthew 28 which, indeed, was only to Gentiles. Luke's was on His ascension from Bethany, Matthew's in resurrection from Galilee, where He had sought the poor of the flock (compare Matthew 4:15).]

2 Nevertheless, to exercise this ministry, they were to wait for the accomplishment of the Father's promise, the Holy Ghost, with whom they were to be baptised, according to John's testimony, which the Lord assured them should soon take place. The mission of the Holy Ghost led them, at the same time, out of the Jewish field of purely temporal promises. The Father's promise of the Holy Ghost was a very different thing from that of the restoration of the kingdom of Israel by the power of Jehovah, the God of judgment. It was not for them to know the time and season of this restoration, the knowledge of which the Father kept in His own possession; but they should themselves receive the power of the Holy Ghost, who would come down upon them; and they should be witnesses unto Jesus (as they had known Him, and according to the manifestation of Himself after His resurrection), both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth — thus making Jerusalem the starting-point and first object, according to the mission, Luke 24:47. Nevertheless, their testimony was founded on their beholding their Master and their Lord caught up from their midst, and received into the clouds of heaven, which hid Him from their sight. While

looking steadfastly upwards, as this took place, two messengers from heaven come and announce to them that He will return in like manner. His manifestation in this lower world, beneath the heavens, is therefore here intended. He will return to earth to be seen of the world. We have not the rapture of the assembly, nor the assembly's association with Him while absent. With the knowledge of Jesus taken up out of the world, and to come again into the world, as the termini and elements of all their teaching, they return to Jerusalem, there to wait for the Holy Ghost who was promised unto them. It is not into Galilee that they go. They are to be witnesses in Jerusalem of the heavenly rights of that Christ who had been rejected on earth by Jerusalem and the Jews.\*

[\* In this sense it is not a continuation of Christ's mission on the earth, continued in the Matthew mission from Galilee.]

3 All this clearly shows the position in which they were placed, and the mission committed to them. But before they receive the Holy Ghost for its fulfillment, some other characteristic circumstances find their place in this chapter. They act, under the guidance of Peter, according to intelligence in the word, before they are endowed with power from on high. These two things are therefore distinct from each other.

It appears that, although Peter was not directly led of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit put His seal on that which was done in accordance with the word in the Old Testament understood by the apostle. We have before seen that Christ, after His resurrection, opened the understanding of His disciples that they might understand the scriptures. They now act, not having received the Holy Ghost, according to a Jewish principle. They present the lot to the Lord, that He may decide. Nevertheless the lot was not all, nor was it drawn without making a distinction. Apostolic authority flowed from the nomination of Christ Himself. Intelligence of the scriptures makes them understand that which ought to be. The object which the Lord had assigned to their service narrowed the choice to the little circle of those who could fulfill that object. Their history made them capable, as Jesus had said, of being His witnesses, because they had been with Him from the beginning, and could now testify that this same Jesus, whom the Jews had rejected and crucified, was indeed risen from among the dead.

4 Apostolic authority is exercised in Jerusalem on the Jewish principle, before the gift of the Holy Ghost. In this there was neither research nor the exercise of the human mind. "His bishopric let another take" guided their conduct; the capacity to testify of Jesus in His life on earth, and now of His resurrection and ascension, decided on the needed qualifications; the lot of Jehovah determined the individual who was to take Judas' place. Two are chosen, according to these needful qualifications, and the lot falls upon Matthias, who is numbered with the eleven apostles. But they were still without the promised power.

**CHAPTER 2** relates the fulfillment of this promise, in answer to the spirit of dependence manifested in their united prayers.

The Spirit comes from above, in His own power, to possess and fill the dwelling-place prepared for Him.

This event, important beyond all others with respect to man's condition here below, has here a very simple character, because there is no question of the causes of this marvelous gift, of the work on which it depends, of the glory with which it is connected and which it reveals, and of which it is the earnest: we have here only the fact of its power. The disciples "were endued with power from on high."

The form of its appearance, however, is characteristic. On Jesus the Holy Ghost descended in the shape of a dove, because He was not to make His voice heard in the streets, nor break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. But here it was the power of God in testimony, the word; which was like consuming fire, judging all that came before it. Nevertheless it was in grace, and was to go beyond the narrow limits of Jewish ordinances to proclaim the wonderful works of God to every tongue and nation under the sun. It was that mighty wind from heaven, which manifested itself to the disciples, and came upon them in the form of tongues of fire, each one divided into several. This marvel attracts the multitude; and the reality of this divine work is proved by the fact that persons from numerous countries hear these poor Galileans proclaim to them the wonderful works of God, each one in the language of the country whence he came up to Jerusalem.\* The Jews, who did not understand these languages, mock; and Peter declares to them in their own tongue, and according to their own prophecies, the true character of that which had

taken place. He takes his stand upon the resurrection of Christ, foretold by the prophet-king, and upon His exaltation by the right hand of God. This Jesus, whom they had crucified, had there received the promise of the Father, and shed forth that which produced the effects that they heard and saw. They were therefore to know assuredly, that God had made that same Jesus whom they had rejected both Lord and Christ.

[\* The rationalistic notion that it was a kind of excited gibberish, just as the unbelieving Jews thought, is absurd beyond conception. Think of Paul's thanking God that he spoke more kinds of gibberish than they all, and God giving a gift for interpreting gibberish!

5 The character of this testimony will be remarked here. It is essentially that of Peter. It goes no farther than the affirmation of the fact, that He who had been rejected by the Jews is made in heaven Lord and Christ. It begins with Jesus known of the Jews on earth, and establishes the truth of His being raised again, and exalted to the position of Lord. God has done this. The apostle does not even proclaim Him as the Son of God. We shall see that, if it is not done by Peter in the Acts, Paul on the contrary does it from the first moment of his conversion. Peter states the result at that moment in power, and does not speak of the kingdom. He only reminds them that the Spirit was promised in the last days, and alludes to the terrible day of the coming judgment, which would be preceded by alarming signs and wonders. Without speaking of the fulfillment of the promise of the kingdom, the time of which the Father had kept secret, he puts the fact of the gift of the Holy Ghost in connection with the responsibility of Israel, to whom God still acted in grace, by preaching to them a glorified Christ, and by giving them proofs of His glory in the gift of the Holy Ghost, made sensible to all. This is the presence of the Holy Ghost according to John 15:26, 27. The testimony as a whole, however, is founded on and carries out the mission of Luke 24. Only in Luke we have nothing of baptism. See Luke 24:47-49, to which this fully corresponds. The testimony was addressed to the Jews; nevertheless it was not confined to them,\* and it was separative. "Separate yourselves from this untoward generation." This separation was founded on a real and moral work — "repent": the past was all to be judged, and publicly demonstrated by their reception amongst Christians by baptism, in order to receive the remission of their sins, and participate in this heavenly gift of the Holy Ghost. "Repent, and be baptised 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.” This work is individual. There was judgment on all the past, the admission amongst them by baptism, and the consequent participation in the Holy Ghost, who dwelt where they came. We see at once the difference between the moral change already wrought, the repentance which their godly sorrow works, and the reception of the Holy Ghost. This was consequent on the remission of their sins to which they were brought. This gift depended in a regular way on their admission amongst Christians, the house where He dwelt, built in the name of Jesus. Afterwards the promise is declared to belong to them and to their children — to the house of Israel as such — to them and to their children after them. But it went beyond the limits of God’s ancient people. The promise was also to those that were afar off; for it was fulfilled, in connection with faith in Christ, to all who through grace should come into the new house — all whom the Lord, the God of Israel, should call. The call of God characterised the blessing. Israel, with her children, was owned, but a remnant called out from among them. The Gentiles, being called, shared the blessing.

[\* The testimony is in terms which, applying to Jews there and scattered abroad, yet opened the door to the Gentiles in the sovereignty of God — ”all that are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call.” God is still the God of man; but He calls whom He pleases.]

6 The result of this ineffable gift is related to us. It was not merely a moral change, but a power which set aside all the motives that individualised those who had received it, by uniting them as one soul and in one mind. They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine; they were in communion with each other and the apostles; they broke bread; they spent their time in prayer. The sense of God’s presence was powerful among them; and many signs and wonders were wrought by the hands of the apostles. They were united in the closest bonds; no man called anything his own, but all divided their possessions with those that needed. They were daily in the temple, the public resort of Israel for religious exercises, whilst having their own apart — breaking bread at home daily. They ate with joy and gladness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people around them.



7 Thus the assembly was formed; and the Lord added to it daily the remnant of Israel, who were to be saved from the judgments that should fall on a nation which had rejected the Son of God, their Messiah; and, thank God, from yet deeper ruin. God brought into the assembly — thus owned of Him by the presence of the Holy Ghost — those whom He spared in Israel.\* A new order of things had commenced, marked by the presence of the Holy Ghost.\*\* Here was found the presence and the house of God, although the old order of things still existed until the execution of judgment upon it.

[\* This is the force of “those that were to be saved,” v. 47.]

[\*\* God never dwelt with man but on the ground of redemption, not with Adam nor Abraham. Compare Exodus 29:46.]

The assembly was formed therefore by the power of the Holy Ghost come down from heaven, on the testimony that Jesus, who had been rejected, was raised up to heaven, being made of God both Lord and Christ. It was composed of the Jewish remnant who were to be spared, with the reserve of bringing in Gentiles whenever God should call them. It was as yet formed in connection with Israel in the patience of God, yet apart in power, God’s dwelling place.

In CHAPTER 3 the Spirit addresses His testimony to the people by the mouth of Peter. God still acted in patience towards His foolish people, and with more than patience. He acts in grace towards them, as His people, in virtue of the death and intercession of Christ — alas! in vain. Their unbelieving leaders silenced the word.\*

[\* It is striking to see the counsels of God and their accomplishment in grace, as far as they were now being fulfilled, so clearly distinguished from the responsibility of those with whom God was dealing. In chapter 2 Peter says, “Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” God was gathering, according to His own knowledge of what was coming. In chapter 3 he says, “God hath sent him to bless you in turning every one of you away from his iniquities.” So He had, and patience still waited, though God acted in present grace according to the result known to Himself:80 in Jeremiah often. Had they repented, God would surely have turned from judgment, as stated also in Jeremiah.]

The attention of the people is attracted by a miracle that restored strength to a poor lame man, known to all who frequented the temple; and, the multitude crowding to behold him, Peter preaches Christ to them. The God

of their fathers, said he, had glorified His servant Jesus, whom they had denied, when Pilate would have set Him free. They had denied the Holy One and the Just — desired a murderer — killed the Prince of Life; but God had raised Him from the dead. And His name, through faith, had healed the impotent man. Grace could esteem their act done as through ignorance, and that as to their rulers also. We here see the Holy Ghost responding to the intercession of Christ: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!” Guilty of the ten thousand talents, the great King remits it them, sending the message of mercy which calls them to repentance. To this Peter invites them: “Repent ye, and be converted; so\* that the time of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send Jesus, whom the heaven must receive,” he tells them, until the time ordained of God for the restoration which should accomplish all that the prophets had foretold. That is to say, he preaches repentance to the Jews as a nation, declaring that, on their repentance, Jesus, who had ascended up to heaven, would return; and the fulfillment of all the blessings spoken of by the prophets should take place on their behalf. The return of Jesus with this object depended (and still depends) on the repentance of the Jews. Meanwhile He remains in heaven.

[\* Not “when.” There is no pretense for so translating it.]

8 Moreover Jesus was the prophet announced by Moses: and whosoever would not hear Him should be cut off from the people. His voice still sounded in especial grace by the mouth of His disciples. All the prophets had spoken of these days. They were the children of the prophets, the natural heirs of the blessings which they had announced for Israel, as well as of the promises made to Abraham of a seed in whom all nations should be blessed. To them also in consequence, God, having raised up His servant Jesus,\* had sent Him to bless them, in turning away every one of them from his iniquities.

[\* This refers to the time of His life on the earth, though on His intercession there was a renewal of the mercy in testimony to a glorified Christ, who would return on their repentance.]

In a word, they are invited to return by repentance, and enjoy all the promises made to Israel. The Messiah Himself should return from heaven to establish their blessing. The whole nation is here addressed as natural heirs of the promises made to Abraham. But, while they were speaking,

the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came to lay hands on them, being grieved that they preached the resurrection, which their unbelief and dogmatic system did not receive. They put them in prison, for it was evening. The hope of Israel was set aside; the grace of God had spoken in vain, great and patient as it was. Many, however, believed their word: five thousand persons already confessed the Lord Jesus.

9 We have seen the address which God, in His grace, sent to Israel by the mouth of Peter. We shall now see, not only the reception (already noticed) which it met with from the rulers of the people, but the deliberate answer of their inmost heart, as we may call it. On the morrow the rulers, the elders, and the scribes assemble at Jerusalem, together with Annas and his kindred; and, setting the apostles in their midst, they demand by what power or in what name they have wrought this miracle on the impotent man. Peter, full of the Holy Ghost, declares — announcing it to all Israel, and with the utmost readiness and entire boldness — that it was by Jesus, whom they had crucified, and whom God had raised from the dead. Thus the question between God and the rulers of Israel was very formally stated, and that by the Spirit of God. Jesus was the stone rejected by them, the builders, which had become the head of the corner. Salvation could nowhere else be found. No carefulness not to offend, with regard to the adversaries and the rulers; with the people, as such, ignorant and misled, everything to win them. The council recognised them as former companions of Christ: the man who had been healed was there. What could they say or do in the face of the multitude who had witnessed the miracle? They could only exhibit a will in decided opposition to the Lord and His testimony, and yield to the public opinion, which was necessary to their own importance, by which too they were governed. With threats they commanded the apostles to teach no more in the name of Jesus. We may remark here, that Satan had Sadducean instruments arrayed against the doctrine of the resurrection, as he had Pharisees as suited instruments against a living Christ. We must expect the well-ordered opposition of Satan against the truth.

Now Peter and John allow of no ambiguity with respect to their course. God had commanded them to preach Christ: the prohibition of man had no weight with them. “We cannot,” say they, “but speak the things which we

have seen and heard.” What a position for the rulers of the people! Accordingly, a testimony like this plainly demonstrates that the leaders of Israel were fallen from the place of interpreters of the will of God. The apostles do not drive them away — do not attack them: God would judge them; but they act immediately on the part of God, and disregard their authority altogether with respect to the work that God had committed to themselves. The testimony of God was with the apostles, and not with the rulers of the temple; and the presence of God was in the assembly, and not there.

Peter and John return to their own company, for a separate people who knew each other was formed; and all, moved by the Holy Ghost (for it was there that God dwelt by His Spirit, not now in the temple), lift up their voice to God, the Governor of all things, to acknowledge that this opposition of the rulers was but the accomplishment of the word and the counsels and the purposes of God. These threatenings were but the occasion of asking God to manifest His power in connection with the name of Jesus. In a word, the world (including the Jews, who formed a part of it in their opposition) had stood up against Jesus, the Servant of God, and opposed itself to the testimony rendered to Him. The Holy Ghost is the strength of this testimony, whether in the courage of those who bore witness (v. 8), or in His presence in the assembly (v. 31), or in the energy of service (v. 33), or in the fruits that are again produced among the saints with a power which makes it manifest that the Holy Ghost has dominion in their hearts over all the motives that influence man, making them walk by those of which He is the source. It is the energy of the Spirit in the presence of opposition, as before it was His natural fruit in those among whom He dwelt. Fresh persons sell their goods, and lay their price at the apostles’ feet; among others, a man whom the Holy Ghost takes pleasure in distinguishing — Barnabas, from the island of Cyprus.

To sum up this chapter demonstrates, on one side, the condition of the Jews, their rejection of the testimony which was addressed to them in grace; and on the other, the power of the Holy Ghost and God’s presence and guidance elsewhere, namely, in the midst of the disciples.

These three chapters (2-4) present the first forming of the assembly, and its blessed character through the Holy Spirit dwelling in it. They present to us its first beauty as formed of God, and His habitation.

Alas! evil shows itself there also (chap. 5). If the mighty Spirit of God is there, the flesh also is there. There are some who wished to have the credit of devotedness which the Holy Ghost produces, although devoid of that faith in God, and that self-renunciation, which, showing itself in the path of love, constitutes all the value and all the truth of this devotedness. But it only gives fresh occasion to manifest the power of the Spirit of God, the presence of God within, against evil; as the preceding chapter showed His energy outside, and the precious fruits of His grace. If there be not the simple fruit and of good already described, there is the power of good against evil. The present state of the assembly, as a whole, is the power of evil over good. God cannot endure evil where He dwells; still less than where He does not dwell. However great the energy of the testimony which He sends to those who are outside, He exercises all patience until there is no remedy within. The more His presence is realised and manifested (and even in proportion as that is done), the more He shows Himself intolerant of evil. It cannot be otherwise. He judges in the midst of His saints, where He will have holiness; and that according to the measure of the manifestation of Himself. Ananias and Sapphira disregarding the presence of the Holy Ghost, whose impulse they pretended to follow, fall down dead before the God whom, in their blindness, they sought to deceive in forgetting Him. God was in the assembly.

Mighty, though painful, testimony to His presence! Fear pervades every heart, both within and outside. In fact, the presence of God is a serious thing, however great its blessing. The effect of this manifestation of the power of a God present with those whom He acknowledged as His own was very great. Multitudes joined themselves by faith to the confession of the name of the Lord — at least from among the people, for the rest dared not. The more position we have in the world, the more we fear the world which gave it us. This miraculous testimony to the power of God was also displayed in a still more remarkable way, so that people came from far to profit by it. The apostles were constantly together in Solomon's porch.

But alas! the manifestation of the power of God, in connection with the despised disciples of Jesus, and working outside the beaten track in which the self-importance of the high priest and those that were with him found its path, together with the progress made by that which they rejected, and the attention drawn to the apostles by the miracles that were wrought, excite the opposition and jealousy of the rulers; and they put the apostles in prison. In this world good ever works in the presence of the power of evil.

A power different from that of the Holy Ghost in the assembly now displays itself. The providence of God, watching over His work, and acting through the ministry of angels, frustrates all the plans of the unbelieving heads of Israel. The priests shut up the apostles in prison. An angel of the Lord opens the prison doors, and sends the apostles to pursue their accustomed work in the temple. The officers whom the council send to the prison find it shut, and everything in order; but no apostles.

Meanwhile the council are informed that they are in the temple, teaching the people. Confounded and alarmed, the council send to fetch them; but the officers bring them without violence, fearing the people. For God holds everything in check, until His testimony be rendered, when He will have it rendered. The high priest remonstrates with them on the ground of his former prohibition. Peter's reply is more concise than on the former occasion, and is rather the announcement of a settled purpose, than the rendering a testimony by reasoning with those who will not hearken, and who showed themselves to be adversaries. It is the same in substance as what he had said when previously brought before the rulers: God is to be obeyed rather than men. Opposed to God, the heads of Israel were merely men. In saying this, all was decided: the opposition between them and God was evident. The God of their fathers had raised up Jesus, whom the rulers of Israel had crucified. The apostles were His witnesses, and so was the Holy Ghost, whom God had given to those who obeyed Him. All was said; the position clearly announced. Peter, in the name of the apostles, formally takes it on the part of God and of Christ, and in agreement with the seal of the Holy Ghost, who, given to believers, bore witness in the Savior's name. Nevertheless there is no pride, no self-will. He must obey God. He still takes his place in Israel ("the God," he says, "of our fathers"); but the place of testimony for God in Israel. The advice of

Gamaliel prevails to turn aside the purposes of the council, for God has always His instruments ready, unknown perhaps to us, where we are doing His will; nevertheless they cause the apostles to be beaten, and command them not to preach, and send them away. They were at a loss what to do — only made the opposition of their will the more evident, while how simple the path when sent of God, and consciously doing His will! We must obey God.

The object of this latter part of the chapter is to show that the providential care of God, whether miraculously by means of angels, or by disposing the hearts of men to accomplish His purposes, was exercised on behalf of the assembly, even as the Spirit of God bore testimony in it and manifested in it His power. The apostles, in no wise terrified, return, full of joy at being counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus; and every day, in the temple, or from house to house, they cease not to teach and to preach the good news of Jesus the Christ. However weak they might be, God Himself maintains His testimony.

Other evils, unhappily, assail the church (chap. 6). The flesh begins to show itself, in the midst of the power of the Holy Ghost, the trouble arising from the different circumstances of the disciples, and in those things in which grace had been especially manifested, on the side on which they were connected with the flesh. The Hellenists (Jews born in Grecian or heathen countries) murmur against the Hebrews (natives of Judea), because the widows of the latter were favored, as they imagined, in the distribution of the goods bestowed on the assembly by its wealthier members. But here the wisdom given by the Spirit meets the difficulty, profiting by the occasion to give development to the work, according to the necessities that were growing up; and seven persons are named to undertake this business, for which the apostles would not forsake their own work. We also find, in the case of Philip and Stephen, the truth of what Paul says: “Those who have used the office of a deacon well, purchase to themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

Observe here, that the apostles put prayer before preaching in their work, their conflict with the power of evil being more especially carried on in it, as well as their realisation of the power of God for the strength and

wisdom they needed; and, in order that they might act directly on God's part, it was necessary that grace and unction should be maintained in their hearts.

Observe also the grace that discovers itself under the influence of the Spirit of God in this matter: all the names, as far as we can judge, are those of Hellenists.

The influence of the word extended, and many priests were obedient to the faith. Thus, until now, the opposition from without, and the evil within, did but minister occasion to the progress of the work of God, by the manifestation of His presence in the midst of the church. Take especial notice of this fact. It is not only that the Spirit does good by His testimony, but, although evil is there without and within, yet where power displays itself, that evil does but bear witness to the efficacy of His presence. There was evil, but there was power to meet it. Still it showed there was leaven even in the Pentecostal cake.

The energy of the Spirit manifests itself especially in Stephen, who is full of grace and power. The Hellenist Jews oppose him; and, not being able to answer him, they accuse him before the council, and in particular of having announced in the name of Jesus the destruction of the temple and of the city, and the change of the customs of their law. Here, observe, we see the free power of the Holy Ghost, without any sending by any other to the work, as in the apostles appointed by Christ Himself. It is not authority in the apostles, it is not in the Jews of Palestine. He distributes to whom He will. It is the godly and devoted Hellenist who renders the last testimony to the heads of the nation. If priests believe on the one side, Jews from without Judea bear testimony on the other, and prepare the way for a still more extended testimony; but at the same time for the definitive rejection, morally, of the Jews as the basis and center of the testimony, and of the work of gathering together. For as yet Jerusalem was the center of testimony and gathering. Peter had testified of a glorious Christ promising His return on their repentance, and they had stopped His testimony. Now judgment is pronounced on them by the Holy Ghost through the mouth of Stephen, in whom they show themselves open adversaries to this testimony. It is not the apostles who, by official authority, break off with Jerusalem. The free action of the Holy Ghost anticipates a breach, which



did not take place so as to form a part of the scripture narrative. The thing is done by the power of God; and the taking up to heaven of the witness raised up by the Spirit to denounce the Jews as adversaries, and to declare their fallen condition, placed the center of gathering in heaven according to the Spirit — that heaven to which the faithful witness, who was filled with the Spirit, had gone up. Already, while on earth, he had the appearance of an angel to the eyes of the council who judged him; but the hardness of their hearts would not let them stop in the path of hostility towards the testimony rendered to Christ — a testimony which comes out here in a special way as the testimony of the Holy Ghost.

Stephen,\* as far as we are told, had not known the Lord during His life on earth. Certainly he was not appointed, like the apostles, to be a witness of that life. He was simply the instrument of the Holy Ghost, distributing to whom He would.

[\* He is the expression of the power of the Holy Ghost witnessing to Christ glorified, who had been now thus presented to Israel, who had already rejected Him in humiliation. From the fall to the flood, man, though not left without witness, was otherwise left to himself. There were no special ways and institutions of God. The result was the flood, to cleanse, so to speak, the earth from its horrible pollution and violence. In the new world God began to deal with man. Government was set up in Noah. But in Abraham one was, by electing grace, called out, and God's promises given to him when the world had turned to demons. This began the history of God's people, but the question of righteousness was not raised. This the law did, claiming it from man. Then prophets came in patient grace. Then, the last appeal of God for fruits, and testimony of grace, the Son was sent. He was now rejected, and on His intercession the Holy Ghost had witnessed to His glory by Peter (Acts 3) for their repentance, and now dealt with them as to it by Stephen.]

He begins therefore their history from the beginning of God's way, that is, from Abraham, called out by the revelation of the God of glory, slow indeed to obey, but at length led by the patient grace of God into Canaan. Nevertheless, he was a stranger in the promised land; and bondage was to be the portion of his descendants, until God interposed in grace. The lot, therefore, of the blessed patriarch was not that of possessing the promises, but of being a stranger; and that of his descendants was to be captives until God delivered them with a strong arm. Nothing can be more striking than the calm superiority to circumstances displayed by Stephen. He recites to the Jews a history they could not deny, a history they boasted in, yet it

condemned them utterly. They were doing as their fathers had done. But two persons are specially prominent in Stephen's account, in connection with the goodness of God towards Israel at this period — Joseph and Moses. Israel had rejected them both, given up Joseph to the Gentiles, rejected Moses as judge and leader. It was, in cases which the Jews could not deny or object to, the history of Christ also, who, too, at the time appointed of God, will indeed be the Redeemer of Israel. This is the substance of Stephen's argument. The Jews had always rejected those whom God had sent and in whom the Holy Ghost had acted, and the testimony of the same Holy Ghost in the prophets who had spoken of the Christ whom they had now betrayed and slain. Besides this, according to Moses, they had worshipped false gods, even from the time of their deliverance out of Egypt\* a sin which, however great the long-suffering of God, would cause them to be carried away, now that they had filled up the measure of their iniquity, beyond the Babylon which had already been their punishment.

[\* Observe, too, here, that however long the patience of God had lasted, repentance not being its result, the first sin, the first departure from God, bears its penalty at the end.]

It is a most striking summing up of their whole history — the history of man with all the means of restoration supplied. The full measure of guilt is stated. They had received the law and had not kept it, rejected the prophets who had testified of Christ, and betrayed and murdered Christ Himself — always resisted the Holy Ghost. What they did trust in, the temple, God rejected. God Himself has been, as it were, a stranger in the land of Canaan; and if Solomon built Him a house, it was in order that the Holy Ghost might declare that He who had heaven for His throne, and earth for His footstool, whose dominion was universal, would not dwell in houses of stone, which were the creation of His own hand. Thus we have the complete summing up of their history, connected with the last days of their judgment. They always resisted the Holy Ghost, as they had always disobeyed the law. Judaism was judged, after the long patience of God and all His ways of grace with man as means were exhausted. For Israel was man under the special dealings and care of God. Man's guilt now is not only sin, but sin in spite of all that God has done. It was the turning-point of man's history. Law, prophets, Christ, the Holy Ghost, all tried, and man at enmity against God. The cross had really proved it, but this had

added the rejection of the testimony of the Holy Ghost to a glorified Christ. All was over with man, and began anew with the second Man ever in connection with heaven.

Their conscience convicted, and their heart hardened, their will unchanged, the members of the council were filled with rage, and gnashed upon him with their teeth. But if Stephen was to bear this definitive testimony against Israel, he was not merely to render the testimony, but much more to place it in its true relative position, by a living expression of that which a believer was in virtue of the presence of the Holy Ghost here below dwelling in him. In their history we have man always resisting the Holy Ghost; in Stephen, a man full of Him consequent on redemption.

Such are the elements of this touching and striking scene, which forms an epoch in the history of the assembly. The heads of Israel gnash their teeth with rage, against the mighty and convincing testimony of the Holy Ghost, with which Stephen was filled. They had rejected a glorified Christ, as they had slain a humbled one. Let us follow out the effect as to Stephen himself. He looks stedfastly up to heaven; now fully opened to faith. It is thither that the Spirit directs the mind, making it capable of fixing itself there. He reveals to one who is thus filled with Himself the glory of God on high, and Jesus in that glory at the right hand of God, in the place of power — Son of man in the far higher place than that of Psalm 2, that of Psalm 8, though all things were not yet put under Him (compare John 1:50, 51). Afterwards He gives the effect of the testimony born in the presence of the power of Satan, the murderer.

“I see,” said Stephen, “the heavens opened.” Such then is the position of the true believer — heavenly upon the earth — in presence of the world that rejected Christ, the murderous world; the believer, alive in death, sees by the power of the Holy Ghost into heaven, and the Son of man at the right hand of God. Stephen does not say “Jesus.” The Spirit characterises Him as the Son of man! Precious testimony to man! Nor is it to the glory of God that he testifies (this was natural to heaven) but to the Son of man in the glory, heaven being open to him, and then looks to Him as the Lord Jesus, to receive his spirit, the first example and full testimony of the state of the believer’s soul after death with Christ glorified.

With regard to the progress of the testimony, it is not now that Jesus is the Messiah, and He will return if you repent (which, however, does not cease to be true), but it is the Son of man in heaven, which is open to the man that is filled with the Holy Ghost — that heaven to which God is about to transport the soul, as it is the hope and the testimony of those that are His. The patience of God was doubtless still acting in Israel; but the Holy Ghost opened new scenes and new hopes to the believer.\* But remark that Stephen, in consequence of seeing Jesus in heaven, perfectly resembles Jesus upon earth — a fact precious in grace to us: only that the glory of His Person is in all cases carefully guarded. Jesus, though heaven was opened to Him, was Himself the object to which heaven looked down, and who was publicly owned and sealed of the Father. He did not need a vision to present an object to His faith, nor did it produce any transformation into the same image by revelation of the glory. But “Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit” is found in “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And the affection for Israel which expresses itself in intercession, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,” is found again in “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge”; save that here the Holy Ghost does not now affirm that they are ignorant.

[\* The Holy Ghost opens heaven to our view, and enables us to contemplate that which is found there; and forms us on earth according to the character of Jesus. As to the change that took place in the progress of God’s dealings, it appears to me that it was the realisation by the Spirit of the effect of the veil being rent. Jesus is seen still standing; because, until the rejection by Israel of the testimony of the Holy Ghost, He did not definitely sit down, waiting for the judgment of His enemies. Rather He remained, in the position of High Priest, standing; the believer with Him on high by the Spirit, and the soul having thus far joined Him there in heaven; for now, by the blood of Christ, by that new and living way, it could enter within the veil. On the other hand, the Jews having done the same thing with regard to the testimony of the Holy Ghost that they did with regard to Jesus, having (so to speak) in Stephen sent a messenger after Him to say, “We will not have this man to reign over us,” Christ definitively takes His place, seated in heaven, until He shall judge the enemies who would not that He should reign over them. It is in this last position that He is viewed in the Epistle to the Hebrews; in which consequently they are exhorted to come out of the camp of Israel, following after the victim whose blood had been carried into the sanctuary; thus anticipating the judgment, which fell upon Jerusalem intermediately by means of the Romans, in order to set the nation aside, as it will be finally executed by Jesus Himself. The position of Stephen therefore resembles that of Jesus, the testimony being that of the Spirit to Jesus glorified. This makes the great principle of the Epistle to the Hebrews very plain. The doctrine of the church, announced by Paul after the

revelation made to him on his way to Damascus, goes further than this; that is, it declares the union of Christians with Jesus in heaven, and not merely their entrance into the holy place through the rent veil, where the priest might only go in previously, behind the veil which hid God from the people.]

But it is well to dwell a moment on that which brings out more clearly the especial position of Stephen, the vessel of the Spirit's testimony, so definitively rejected by the Jews; and the divine character and Person of Jesus, even where His disciple is most like Him. Heaven is open to Jesus, the Holy Ghost descends upon Him and He is acknowledged the Son of God. Heaven opens on Jesus, and the angels descend upon the Son of man: but He has no object presented to Him; He is Himself the object on which heaven is gazing. Heaven will open at the end of the age, and Jesus Himself come forth on the white horse (that is, in judgment and triumph). Here, too, heaven opens, and the disciple, the Christian, full of the Holy Ghost, sees into it, and there beholds Jesus at the right hand of God. Jesus is still the object, before of heaven, now of the believing man who is filled with the Holy Ghost; so that, as to the object of faith and the position of the believer, this scene is definitively characteristic. Jesus has no object, but is the object of heaven when it opens; the saint has, and it is Jesus Himself in heaven when it is open. Rejected, and rejected by the Jews, like Jesus, partaking in His sufferings, and filled with His Spirit of grace, Stephen's eyes are fixed on high, on the heaven which the Holy Ghost opens to him; and he sees the Son of man there ready to receive his spirit. The rest will come later; but it is not only Jesus, whom the heavens must receive until the times of restitution, but also the souls of His believing people until the moment of resurrection, and the whole church, in spirit, detached from the world that rejected Him, and from Judaism that opposed the testimony of the Holy Ghost. The latter, Judaism, is no longer at all recognised; there is no longer any room for the long-suffering of God towards it. Its place is taken by heaven, and by the assembly, which, so far as it is consistent, follows her Master there in spirit, while waiting for His return.

Saul was present at Stephen's death, and consenting to it.\*

[\* We may remark here, that the sanctuary, so to speak, is open to all believers. The veil indeed was rent by the death of Christ, but the grace of God was still acting towards the Jews, as such, and proposed to them the return of Jesus to the earth; that is to say, outside the veil, in the event of their repentance, so that the blessing would then have been upon the earth —

the times of refreshing by the coming of Christ, which the prophets had announced. But now it is no longer a Messiah, the Son of David, but a Son of man in heaven; and, by the Holy Ghost here below, an opened heaven is seen and known, and the great High Priest (standing as yet) at the right hand of God is not hidden behind a veil. All is open to the believer; the glory, and He who has entered into it for His people. And this, it appears to me, is the reason why He is seen standing. He had not definitely taken His place as seated (in perpetuity) on the heavenly throne, until the testimony of the Holy Ghost to Israel of His exaltation had been definitively rejected on earth. The free testimony of the Spirit which is developed, here and afterwards, is highly interesting, without touching apostolic authority in its place, as we shall see. As to the Jews, till the High Priest comes out, they cannot know that His work is accepted for the nation; as, in the day of atonement, they had to wait till he came out that they might know it. But for us the Holy Ghost is come out while He is within, and we know it.]

This is the end of the first phase of the assembly of God — its history in immediate connection with Jerusalem and the Jews, as the center to which the work of the apostles related, “beginning at Jerusalem”; carried on, however, in a believing remnant, but inviting Israel, as such, to come into it, as being nationally the object of the love and care of God, but they would not. Some accessory events follow, which enlarge the sphere of labor and maintain the unity of the whole, previously to the revelation of the call of the Gentiles, as such, properly speaking, and of the assembly as one body, independent of Jerusalem, and apart from the earth. These events are — the work of Philip in the conversion of Samaria and of the Ethiopian; that of Cornelius, with Peter’s vision that took place after the vocation of Saul, who himself is brought in by a Jew of good report among the Jews as such; the labors of Peter in all the land of Canaan; and, finally, the connection established between the apostles at Jerusalem and the converted Gentiles at Antioch; the opposition of Herod, the false king of the Jews, and the care which God still takes of Peter, and the judgment of God upon the king. Afterwards comes the direct work among the Gentiles, having Antioch for its starting-point, already prepared by the conversion of Paul, through means and with a revelation that were quite peculiar. Let us follow the details of these chapters.

After the death of Stephen persecution breaks out. The victory, gained by a hatred the accomplishment of whose object was allowed by Providence, opens the floodgates to the violence of the Jewish leaders, enemies to the gospel. The barrier that restrained them once broken, the waves of passion overflow on all sides. People are often held back by a little remaining

conscience, by habits, by a certain idea of the rights of others; but when the dykes are broken, hatred (the spirit of murder in the heart) satiates itself, if God permit, by actions that show what man is when left to himself. But all this hatred accomplishes the will of God, in which man would perhaps otherwise have failed, and which in some respects he could not or ought not even to have executed, that is to say, the will of God in sovereign judgment. The dispersion of the assembly was Israel's judgment — a judgment which the disciples would have found it difficult to declare and to execute by the communication of greater light to them; for whatever may be the blessing and energy in the sphere where the grace of God acts, the ways of God in directing all things are in His own hand. Our part, too, in His ways as to those without, is in grace.

The whole assembly then, except the apostles, is scattered. It is questionable also, that the apostles did right in remaining, and whether a more simple faith would not have made them go away, and thus have spared the assembly many a conflict and many a difficulty in connection with the fact that Jerusalem continued to be a center of authority.\* The Lord had even said with Israel in view, "When they persecute in one city, flee into another"; and after His resurrection He commands them to go and disciple all nations. This last mission we do not find executed in the history of the Acts and the work among the Gentiles, and, as we see in Galatians 2, by a special agreement entered into at Jerusalem, it fell into the hands of Paul, being placed on an entirely new footing. The word tells us nothing of the accomplishment of this mission of the twelve towards the Gentiles, unless it be the slight general intimation in the end of Mark. God is mighty in Peter toward the circumcision and in Paul towards the Gentiles. It may be said that the twelve were not persecuted. It is possible, and I say nothing decided on the point; but it is certain that the passages which I have quoted have no fulfillment in the Bible history, and that another arrangement, another order of things, took place in lieu of that which the Lord prescribed, and that Jewish prejudices had in fact an influence, resulting from this concentration at Jerusalem, from which even Peter had the greatest difficulty to free himself.

[\* This is no wise prevents the manifestation of the sovereign wisdom of God. The development of the doctrine of the assembly in its oneness, and as the body of Christ, was but so much the more perfect and unmixed, as we find it taught by Paul; who was called outside of Judaism by the revelation of a

heavenly Christ. Neither do these ways of sovereign wisdom in God make any change at all in the responsibility of man. The outward unity of the assembly was also preserved by this means, by the connection kept up between the other places and Jerusalem, until the work among the Gentiles outside Judaism made these connections extremely difficult and precarious. This, however, rendered the grace and the wisdom of God but so much the more apparent.]

Those who were scattered abroad preached the word everywhere, but only to the Jews, before some of them arrived at Antioch (chap. 11:19).

Philip however went down to Samaria, and preached Christ to them, and wrought miracles. They all give heed to him and are even baptised. A man who until then had bewitched them with sorcery, so that they had said he was the great power of God, even he also submits to the power which eclipsed his false marvels, and convinced him so much the more of its reality as he was conscious of the falseness of his own. The apostles make no difficulty with regard to Samaria. The history of Jesus must have enlightened them in that respect. Moreover, the Samaritans were not Gentiles. Still it was a Hellenist who preached the gospel there.

A new truth comes out here in connection with the regular process of the assembly — namely, that the apostles conferred the Holy Ghost by means of prayer and the laying on of hands: a very important fact in the history of God's dealings. Moreover Samaria was a conquest which all the energy of Judaism had never been able to make. It was a new and splendid triumph for the gospel. Spiritual energy to subdue the world appertained to the assembly. Jerusalem was set aside: its day was over in that respect.

The presence of the power of the Holy Ghost acting in Peter preserves the assembly as yet from the entrance of hypocrites, the instruments of Satan. The great and powerful fact that God was there manifested itself and made the darkness evident which circumstances had concealed. Carried along by the strong current, Simon had yielded, as to his intelligence, to the authority of Christ whose name was glorified by Philip's ministry. But the true condition of his heart, the desire of his own glory, the complete opposition between his moral condition and all principle — all light from God — betrays itself in presence of the fact that a man can impart the Holy Ghost. He desires to buy this power with money. What a thought! It is thus that the unbelief which appears quite to pass away, so that the things of God are outwardly received, betrays itself by something which,



to one who has the Spirit, is so grossly contrary to God that its true character is manifest even to a child taught by God Himself.

Samaria is thus brought into connection with the center of the work of Jerusalem, where the apostles still were. Already the Holy Ghost's being bestowed on the Samaritans was an immense step in the development of the assembly. Doubtless they were circumcised, they acknowledged the law, although the temple had in a certain degree lost its importance. The body of believers was more consolidated, and, so far as they still held to Jerusalem, it was a positive gain; for Samaria, by receiving the gospel, entered into connection with her ancient rival, as much as the apostles themselves were so, and submitted to her. Probably the apostles, during that time of persecution, did not go to the temple. God had opened a wide door to them outside, and thus made them ample amends in their work, for the success of the rulers of Israel who had stopped it in Jerusalem; for the energy of the Spirit was with them. To sum up: that which is presented here is the free energy of the Spirit in others than the apostles, and outside Jerusalem which had rejected it; and the relations maintained with the apostles and Jerusalem by their central action, and the authority and power with which they were invested.

Having accomplished their work, and themselves evangelised several villages of the Samaritans, Peter and John return to Jerusalem. The work outside goes on, and by other means. Philip, who presents the character of prompt unquestioning obedience in simplicity of heart, is called to leave his prosperous work with which all his personal importance (if he had been seeking it) was connected, and in which he was surrounded with respect and affection. "Go," said the angel of the Lord, "toward the south, unto the way that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza." It was a desert. Philip's ready obedience does not think of the difference between Samaria and Gaza, but of the Lord's will: and he goes. The gospel now extends to the proselytes from among the Gentiles, and makes its way to the center of Abyssinia. The Queen's treasurer is admitted among the disciples of the Lord by baptism, which sealed his faith in the testimony of the prophet Isaiah; and he goes on his way, rejoicing in the salvation which he had taken a toilsome journey from a far country to seek in legal duties and ceremonies, but with faith in God's word, in Jerusalem. Beautiful picture of the grace of the gospel! He carries away with him, and to his home, that

which grace had bestowed on him in the wilderness — that which his wearisome journey to Jerusalem had not procured him. The poor Jews, who had driven away the testimony from Jerusalem, are outside everything. The Spirit of the Lord carries Philip far away, and he is found at Azotus; for all the power of the Lord is at the service of the Son of man for the accomplishment of the testimony to His glory. Philip evangelises all the cities unto Caesarea.

A work and a workman of another character begin now to dawn upon the scene.

We have seen the inveterate opposition of the heads of Israel to the testimony of the Holy Ghost, their obstinacy in repelling the patient grace of God. Israel rejected all the work of the God of grace in their behalf. Saul makes himself the apostle of their hatred to the disciples of Jesus, to the servants of God. Not content with searching them out at Jerusalem, he asks for letters from the high priest, that he may go and lay hands on them in foreign cities. When Israel is in full opposition to God, he is the ardent missionary of their malice — in ignorance, no doubt, but the willing slave of his Jewish prejudices.

Thus occupied, he approaches Damascus. There, in the full career of an unbroken will, the Lord Jesus stops him. A light from heaven shines round about him, and envelopes him in its dazzling brightness. He falls to the earth, and hears a voice saying unto him, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” The glory which had thrown him to the ground left no doubt — accompanied as it was by that voice — that the authority of God was revealed in it. His will broken, his pride overthrown, his mind subdued, he asks, “Who art thou, Lord?” The authority of the One who spoke was unquestionable; Saul’s heart was subject to that authority: and it was Jesus. The career of his self-will was ended for ever. But moreover the Lord of glory was not only Jesus; He also acknowledged the poor disciples, whom Saul desired to carry prisoners to Jerusalem, as being Himself.

How many things were revealed in those few words! The Lord of glory declared Himself to be Jesus, whom Saul persecuted. The disciples were one with Himself. The Jews were at open war with the Lord Himself. The whole system which they maintained, all their law, all their official

authority, all the ordinances of God, had not prevented their being at open war with the Lord. Saul himself, armed with their authority, found himself occupied in destroying the name of the Lord and His people from off the earth: a terrible discovery, completely overwhelming his soul, all-powerful in its effects, not leaving one moral element of his soul standing before its strength. Extenuation of the evil was fruitless; zeal for Judaism was zeal against the Lord. His own conscience had only animated that zeal. The authorities constituted of God, surrounded with the halo of centuries of honor, enhanced by the present calamities of Israel which had now nothing but her religion — these authorities had but sanctioned and favored his efforts against the Lord. The Jesus whom they rejected was the Lord. The testimony which they endeavored to suppress was His testimony. What a change for Saul! What a new position, even for the minds of the apostles themselves who remained at Jerusalem, when all were dispersed — faithful indeed in spite of the opposition of the rulers of Israel, but themselves in connection with the nation.

But the work went deeper yet. Misguided no doubt, but his conscience in itself — for he thought he ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth — left him the enemy of the Lord. Blameless righteousness according to law, as man could measure it, more than left him hardened in open opposition to the Lord. His superiors, and the authorities of the ancient religion — all his soul was based on morally as well as religiously — all was smashed within him for ever. He was broken up in the whole man before God. Nothing remained in him but discovered enmity against God, save as his own will was also broken in the process, he who an hour before was the conscientious, blameless, religious man! Compare, though the revelation of Christ carried him much farther, Galatians 2:20; Philippians 3; 2 Corinthians 1:9; 4:10; and a multitude of passages.

Other important points are brought out here. Saul had not known Jesus on earth. He had not a testimony because he had known Him from the beginning, declaring that He was made Lord and Christ. It is not a Jesus who goes up into heaven where He is out of sight; but the Lord who appears to him for the first time in heaven, and who announces to him that He is Jesus. A glorious Lord is the only one whom he knows. His gospel (as he expresses it himself) is the gospel of the glory. If he had known

Christ after the flesh, he knows Him thus no more. But there is yet another important principle found here. The Lord of glory has His members on earth. "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." It was Himself: those poor disciples were bone of His bones and flesh of His flesh. He looked upon them and cherished them as His own flesh. The glory and the oneness of the saints with Jesus, their Head in heaven, are the truths connected with the conversion of Saul, with the revelation of Jesus to him, with the creation of faith in his heart, and that in a way which overthrew Judaism in all its bearings in his soul; and that in a soul in which this Judaism formed an integral part of its existence, and gave it its whole character.

Another point, borrowed from his account of the vision later in the book, which is remarkable in connection with his career: "Separating thee," says the Lord, "from the people and from the Gentiles, to whom I now send thee." This moral end of Saul separated him from both — of course from the Jews, but did not make a Gentile of him either — and united him with a glorified Christ. He was neither a Jew nor a Gentile in his spiritual standing. All his life and ministry flowed from his association with a heavenly glorified Christ.

Nevertheless he comes into the assembly by the usual means — like Jesus in Israel — humbly taking his place there where the truth of God was established by His power. Blind for three days and fully engrossed — as was natural — with such a discovery, he neither eats nor drinks; and afterwards, besides the fact of his blindness, which was a quiet, continual, and unequivocal proof of the truth of that which had happened to him, his faith must have been confirmed by the arrival of Ananias, who can declare to him from the Lord that which had happened to him, although he had not been out of the city — a circumstance so much the more striking because, in a vision, Saul had seen him come and restore his sight. And this Ananias does: Saul receives sight, and is baptised. He takes food and is strengthened. The conversation of Jesus with Ananias is remarkable, as showing with what distinct evidence the Lord revealed Himself in those days, and the holy liberty and confidence with which the true and faithful disciple conversed with Him. The Lord speaks as a man to his friend in details of place and circumstances, and Ananias reasons in all confiding openness with the Lord in regard to Saul; and Jesus answers him, not in

harsh authority, though of course Ananias had to obey, but with gracious explanation, as with one admitted to His confidence, by declaring that Saul is a chosen vessel to bear His name before Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel; and that He will show him how great things he must suffer for His sake.

Saul makes no delay in confessing and declaring his faith; and that which he says is eminently worthy of notice. He preaches in the synagogue that Jesus is the Son of God. It is the first time that this is done. That He was exalted to the right hand of God — that He was Lord and Christ — had been already preached; the rejected Messiah was exalted on high. But here it is the simple doctrine as to His personal glory; Jesus is the Son of God.

In the words of Jesus to Ananias, the children of Israel come last.

Saul does not yet begin his public ministry. It is, so to speak, only the expression of his personal faithfulness, his zeal, his faith, among those that surrounded him, with whom he was naturally connected. It was not long before opposition manifested itself, in the nation that would have no Christ, at least according to God, and the disciples sent him away, letting him down by the wall in a basket; and through the agency of Barnabas (a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith, whom grace had taught to value the truth with regard to the new disciple) the dreaded Saul found his place among the disciples even at Jerusalem.\* Wonderful triumph of the Lord! Singular position for himself there, had he not been absorbed by the thought of Jesus. At Jerusalem he reasons with the Hellenists. He was one of them. The Hebrews were not his natural sphere. They seek to put him to death; the disciples bring him down to the sea, and send him to Tarsus, the place of his birth. The triumph of grace has, under God's hand, silenced the adversary. The assemblies are left in peace, and edify themselves — walking in the fear of God and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, the two great elements of blessing; and their numbers increase. Persecution accomplishes the designs of God. The peace which He grants gives opportunity for ripening in grace and in the knowledge of Himself. We learn the ways and government of God in the midst of the imperfection of man.

[\* This was, it would appear, later, but is noticed here to put him, so to speak, in his place among Christians.]

Peace being established through the goodness of God — sole resource of those who truly wait upon Him in submission to His will — Peter passes throughout all parts of Israel. The Spirit of God relates this circumstance here, between the conversion of Saul and his apostolic work, to show us, I doubt not, the apostolic energy in Peter existing at the very time when the call of the new apostle was to bring in new light, and a work that was new in many important respects (thus sanctioning as His own work, and in its place, that which had been done before, whatever progress in accomplishment His counsels might make); and in order to show us the introduction of the Gentiles into the assembly as it was at first founded by His grace in the beginning, preserving thus its unity, and putting His seal upon this work of heavenly grace.

The assembly existed. The doctrine of her oneness, as the body of Christ, outside the world, was not yet made known. The reception of Cornelius did not announce it, although paving its way.

The undiminished power of Peter, his apostolic authority, in the midst of which the entrance of Cornelius into the spiritual house of God takes place, in connection with Peter's ministry, and that, after the calling of Saul, which opened a new perspective — all these facts taken together confirmed that which went before. The original work was in no wise set aside to bring in another. Nevertheless, Peter's vision did not reveal the assembly as the body of Christ, neither did the admission of Cornelius. They only showed that in every nation he who feared God was acceptable to Him — in a word, that the favor of God was not limited to the Jews, and that there was no need of becoming a Jew in order to share the salvation that is in Christ. The oneness of the body united to its Head in heaven was not brought out by this event; but it prepared the way for the promulgation of that truth, since in fact the Gentile was admitted on earth without becoming a Jew. The thing was done on earth individually, although the doctrine itself was not taught. Repentance unto life eternal was granted to the Gentiles as such. The Holy Ghost — the seal of christian blessing among the Jews, the fruit of redemption accomplished by Jesus — was given to Gentiles as to Jews. The latter might be astonished at it; but there was no resisting God. Through grace they could praise Him for it.

From chapter 9:32 to 11:18, we find then, the power of the Spirit of God with Peter in the midst of Israel, and the admission of Gentiles into the earthly assembly, without their becoming Jews, or submitting to the ancient order which was passing away; the seal of the Spirit put upon them; and the heads of the assembly at Jerusalem, and the most ardent of the circumcision, accepting the fact as the will of God, and praising Him while submitting to it, in spite of their prejudices. The door then is open to the Gentile. This was an immense step. The precious doctrine of the assembly had yet to be announced.

Peter had proclaimed the call of the Gentiles in his first discourse; but to realise it, and give form to its conditions, in connection with that which had already existed historically, required the intervention, the authority, and the revelation of God. Progress is evident through the patient grace of God; for it was not the wisdom of man. Altogether Jewish at the commencement, the people of Jerusalem were taught that Jesus would return if they repented. This testimony of grace is rejected, and, in the person of him who maintained it, the firstfruits of the assembly go up to heaven. The Holy Ghost, in His sovereign liberty, acts in Samaria and among the proselytes. The assembly being scattered by the persecution, Saul is brought in by the revelation of a glorious Christ, and by a testimony from His mouth which implies the union of saints on earth with Himself their Head in heaven as only one body. After this a pious Gentile, converted but still a Gentile, receives faith in Christ and the Holy Ghost; so that, marked out by this testimony — this seal from God Himself to his faith — the apostle and the disciples who were the most attached to Judaism receive him; Peter by baptising him, and the others by accepting Peter's act.

Let us notice here, that salvation is not only the fact of being quickened and pious, but that of complete deliverance so as to present us to Himself in righteousness, which God grants to every one who has life through the operation of God. Cornelius was pious and earnestly so; but he hears words of a work done for him whereby he may be, and (as we know) was saved. Finally the seal of the Holy Ghost, upon believing in Jesus,\* is the ground on which those whom God accepts are acknowledged. That is to say, it is the full evidence for man.

[\* If we examine closely the scriptures in its statements and facts, we shall find, I think, as to detail, that it is faith in the work of Jesus for the remission of sins which is sealed.]

**CHAPTER 11:19** begins the narration of the new order of things by which the ministry of Paul is distinguished. Among those who were scattered abroad on the occasion of Stephen's death, and who went as far even as Antioch preaching the Lord Jesus, there were some who, being men of Cyprus and Cyrene, were more habitually connected with Greeks. They addressed the Greeks therefore in this ancient capital of the Seleucidae, and many received their word and turned to the Lord. The assembly at Jerusalem, already prepared through the conversion of Cornelius, by which God had shown them the entering in of the Gentiles, accept this event also and send Barnabas — himself a man of Cyprus — to Antioch. A good man and filled with the Holy Ghost, his heart is full of joy on seeing this work of the grace of God; and much people is added unto the Lord.

As yet all is linked with the work at Jerusalem, although extending now to the Gentiles. Barnabas, apparently no longer sufficient for the work and at all events led of God, departs in search of Saul, who had gone to Tarsus, when they sought to kill him at Jerusalem. And these two meet with the assembly at Antioch, teaching much people. Still everything takes place in connection with Jerusalem, whence some prophets come down and announce a famine. The links between the flock and Jerusalem as a center are shown and strengthened, by the sending of relief to that religious metropolis of Judaism, and of Christianity looked at as having its commencement in the Jewish remnant who believed in Jesus as the Christ.

Barnabas and Saul are themselves charged with this service, and go up to Jerusalem to accomplish it. This circumstance carries us back to Jerusalem, where the Spirit has still something to show us of the ways of God.

**CHAPTER 12.** Herod, to please the Jews, begins to persecute the assembly in that city. We may remark here, that the company of believers at Antioch are also called the assembly (church), which is the case nowhere else as yet. All were accounted as forming a part integrally of the work at Jerusalem,\* even as all Jews were in connection with that center of their religious system, however numerous their synagogues or great the influence of their rabbis. Every Jew, as such, sprang from Jerusalem. Barnabas and Saul assemble with the church or assembly at Antioch. A



local assembly, conscious of its existence — distinct from, while connected with, Jerusalem — has been formed; and assemblies without a metropolis begin to appear.

[\* There is a question of the reading in chapter 9:31, which does not however affect the general thought, that a local assembly, distinct from Jerusalem, composed primarily of Gentiles, was now formed.]

To return to Jerusalem. Herod, an impious king, and in certain respects a type of the adversary-king at the end, begins to persecute the faithful remnant at Jerusalem. It is not only the Jews who are opposed to them. The king — whom, as Jews, they detested — unites himself to them by his hatred to the heavenly testimony, thinking to win their favor by this means. He kills James, and proceeds to take Peter and put him in prison. But God preserves His servant, and delivers him by His angel in answer to the prayers of the saints. He allows some to be slain (happy witnesses to their heavenly portion in Christ), and preserves others to carry on the testimony on earth, in spite of all the power, apparently irresistible, of the enemy — a power which the Lord baffles by the manifestation of that which belongs to Him and to Him alone, and which He employs when He will and how He will. The poor saints, although praying fervently (they had prayer-meetings in those days), can hardly believe, when Peter comes to the door, that God had really granted their prayer. The desire presents itself sincerely to God; faith can scarcely reckon upon Him.

Herod, confounded by the power of Him whom he resisted, condemns the instruments of his hatred to death, and goes away to the Gentile seat of his authority. There displaying his glory, and accepting the adulatory homage of the people, as though he were a God, God Himself smites him, and shows that He is the governor of this world, however great the pride of man. But the word of God extends through His grace; and Barnabas and Saul, having fulfilled their ministry, return to Antioch, taking with them John whose surname was Mark.

**CHAPTER 13.** We come now to the beginning of the direct history of the work, new in some important respects, that is, connected with Paul's mission by the immediate intervention of the Holy Ghost. It is not now Christ upon earth, who by His personal authority sends forth the twelve, afterwards endowed with the power of the Holy Ghost from on high to announce His exaltation to heaven and His return, and to gather under the

standard of the cross those who should believe in Him. Paul has seen Christ in glory, and therefore has united himself to the assembly already gathered. But here there is no Christ personally present to send him forth as the witness of His presence on earth, or of His rejection as One whom Paul had known in earth. The Holy Ghost Himself sends him, not from Jerusalem, but from a Greek city, in which in free and sovereign power He had converted and gathered together some Gentiles, doubtless some Jews likewise, but forming an assembly whose existence was first marked by the fact that the gospel had been preached to the Greeks.

In **CHAPTER 13** we find ourselves again in the assembly at Antioch, and in the midst of the independent\* action of the Spirit of God. Certain prophets are there, Saul among them. They fasted and were occupied with the service of the Lord. The Holy Ghost commands them to separate unto Him Barnabas and Saul for the work to which He had called them. Such was the source of the ministry of these two. Assuredly it bore testimony to Him in whom they had believed, and whom Saul, at least, had seen, and it was under His authority they acted; but the positive and obvious source of their mission was the Holy Ghost. It was the Holy Ghost who called them to the work. They were sent forth (v. 4) by Him — an all-important principle as to the Lord's ways upon earth. We come out from Jerusalem, from Judaism, from the jurisdiction of the apostles nominated by the Lord while He was on earth. Christ is no longer known after the flesh, as Saul (when become Paul) expresses it. They have to strive against the Judaic spirit — to show consideration for it as far as it is sincere; but the sources of their work are not now in connection with the system which that work no longer knows as a starting-point. A glorious Christ in heaven, who owns the disciples as members of His body as Himself on high — a mission from the Holy Ghost on earth which only knows His energy as the source of action and authority (bearing testimony of course to Christ) this is the work which now opens, and which is committed to Barnabas and Saul. Barnabas, it is true, forms a link between the two. He was himself a Hellenist of Cyprus; it was he who presented Saul to the apostles after his conversion near Damascus. Barnabas had more largeness of heart — was more open to the testimonies of divine grace — than even the apostles and the others who had been nurtured in a strict Judaism; for God in His grace provides for everything. There is always a Barnabas, as

well as a Nicodemus, a Joseph, and even a Gamaliel, whenever needed. The actings of God in this respect are remarkable in all this history. Would that we only trusted more entirely, while by the Spirit doing His will, to Him who disposes all things!

[\* The acting of the Spirit is always independent; but here I mean to express that it was outside the authority of the apostles. This authority is not the source of that which is done; nor does that which is done refer itself to it.]

Nevertheless even this link is soon broken. It was still in connection with the “old cloth,” the “old bottles”; blessed as the man himself was, to whom the Holy Ghost rendered so fine a testimony, and in whom we see an exquisite character. He determined to take his kinsman also (see Colossians 4:10), Mark. Mark returns to Jerusalem almost from the beginning of the work of evangelisation in the Gentile regions; and Saul continues his work with such instruments as God formed under his hand, or a Silas who chose to remain at Antioch when (the particular service which had been committed to him at Jerusalem being ended) he might naturally have returned thither with Judas.

Sent forth thus by the Holy Ghost, Barnabas and Saul, with John Mark as their ministering servant, go away to Seleucia, then to Cyprus; and being at Salamis, a town in that island, they preach the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. Whatever therefore might be the energy of the Holy Ghost, He acts in connection with the counsels and the promises of God, and that with perfect patience. To the end of his life, notwithstanding the opposition of the Jews, vexatious and implacable as it might be, the apostle continues — as the ways and counsels of God in Christ had commanded — to the Jews first, and then to the Gentiles. Once brought in where truth and grace were fully revealed in God’s assembly, there was no difference between Jew and Gentile. God is one in His character and fully revealed, and the veil rent; sin is one in its character and is opposed to God; the foundation of truth changes not, and the oneness of the assembly is connected with the height of grace in God and comes down to the deep totality of sin, in respect of which that grace has displayed itself. But, with regard to the ways of God upon earth, the Jews had the first place, and the Spirit, who is above all, can therefore act in full liberty in recognising all the ways of God’s sovereignty; even as Christ, who made Himself a servant in grace, submitted to them all, and now, being exalted on

high, unites all these various ways and dispensations in Himself as head and center of a glory to which the Holy Ghost bears witness, in order to accomplish it here below, as far as may be, by grace.

This does not prevent his giving a distinct and positive judgment as to the condition of the Jews when the occasion requires it.

Even here, at the commencement of his ministry, the two things are presented together. We have already noticed that he begins with the Jews. Having traversed the island, he arrives at the seat of government. There the proconsul, a prudent and thoughtful man, asks to hear the gospel. Beset already by a false prophet (who took advantage of the felt need of a soul which, while ignorant, was earnestly desirous of something that could fill up the void it experienced in the nothingness of pagan ceremonies, and in its disgusting immorality), he sends for Barnabas and Saul. Elymas withstands them. This was natural. He would lose his influence with the governor if the latter received the truth that Paul preached. Now Elymas was a Jew. Saul (who is henceforth named Paul) filled with the Holy Ghost, pronounces on him the sentence, on God's part, of temporary blindness, executed at the moment by the mighty hand of God. The proconsul, struck with the power that accompanied his word, submits to the gospel of God.

I do not doubt that in this wretched Bar-Jesus we see a picture of the Jews at the present time, smitten with blindness for a season, because jealous of the influence of the gospel. In order to fill up the measure of their iniquity, they withstood its being preached to the Gentiles. Their condition is judged: their history given in the mission of Paul.\* Opposed to grace, and seeking to destroy its effect upon the Gentiles, they have been smitten with blindness — nevertheless only for a season.

[\* I do not know if the change of name pointed out on this occasion — the meaning of which has excited the curiosity of etymologists is not simply an alteration by which its Jewish form was lost, in order to assume a Roman or Gentile aspect.]

Departing from Paphos, they go into Asia Minor; and now Paul definitively takes his place in the eyes of the historian of the Spirit. His whole company are only those who were with Paul, an expression in Greek which makes Paul everything (Paul's company Lit. "those around

Paul"). When they reached Perga, John Mark leaves them to return to Jerusalem — a milder and more moderate form of the Judaic influence, but showing that, wherever it exercised itself, if it did not produce opposition, it at least took away the vigor needful for the work of God as it was now unfolding among the Gentiles. Barnabas however goes farther, and still continues with Paul in the work. The latter, when they were come to Antioch,\* again begins first with the Jews. He goes on the sabbath day into the synagogue, and, on the invitation of the ruler, proclaims Jesus, rejected by the Jews at Jerusalem and crucified, but by the power of God raised up again, and through whom they might be justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses. Here the testimony of Paul is very like that of Peter, and is very particularly allied to the beginning of the Epistle to the Hebrews, with regard to the character of the testimony: verse 33 is quite Peter's testimony in Acts 3. In verse 31 he sets the twelve distinctly in the place of testimony to Israel, as those who had personally accompanied the Lord, and who had seen Him after His resurrection. "They are," he says, "his witnesses unto the people." But Paul's testimony (which, as to the fulfillment of the promises by the coming of Christ, and the mercies of David made sure in His resurrection, returns into the order of Peter's preaching) departs from it in an important point. He says nothing of God's having made Jesus both Lord and Christ. He announces that the remission of sins is proclaimed in His name, exhorting his hearers not to neglect this great salvation.\*\*

[\* In Pisidia.]

[\*\* Both, as we have seen, follow (in the main) the commission in Luke 24.]

Many follow Paul\* and Barnabas in consequence of this announcement, and are exhorted by them to continue in the grace which had been proclaimed to them. The mass of the people come together the following sabbath to hear the word of God; the Gentiles having besought that this gospel of grace might be preached to them again. Their souls had found more truth in the doctrine of the one only God, acknowledged by the Jews, than in the senseless worship of the Pagans, which, to an awakened and unsatisfied mind, no longer presented any food that could appease it — a mind that was too active to allow the imagination to amuse itself with ceremonies which had no charms but for ignorance, which could be captivated by the pageantry of festivals, to which it was accustomed, and

which gratified the religious element of the flesh. Still, the coldly acknowledged doctrine of one only true God, although it set the mind free from all that shocked it in the senseless and immoral mythology of Paganism, did not at all feed the soul as did the powerful testimony of a God acting in grace, born by the Holy Ghost through the mouth of messengers whom He had sent — a testimony which, while faithful to the promises made to the Jews, yet addressed itself as a “word of salvation” (v. 26) to all those who feared God. But the Jews, jealous of the effect of the gospel which thus met the soul’s need in a way that their system could not, withstand Paul and blaspheme the doctrine of Christ. Paul therefore and Barnabas turn boldly to the Gentiles.

[\* Here Paul is placed before Barnabas; in the former chapter, Barnabas has the first place.]

It was a decisive and important moment. These two messengers of the Holy Ghost quote the testimony of the Old Testament with regard to God’s purpose towards the Gentiles, of whom Christ was to be the light — a purpose which they accomplished according to the intelligence in it that the Spirit gave them, and by His power. The passage is in Isaiah (chap. 49), where the opposition of Israel, that made the testimony of Christ useless to themselves, gave God occasion to declare that this work was but a small thing, and that Christ should be a light to the Gentiles, and great even to the ends of the earth.

We shall do well to observe this last circumstance, the energy in action imparted by spiritual intelligence, and the way in which prophetic declarations turn into light and authority for action, when the Spirit of God gives the true practical meaning — the application. Another might not perhaps understand it; but the spiritual man has a full guarantee for his own conscience in the word which he has understood. He leaves the rest to God.

The Gentiles rejoice at the testimony, and the election believe. The word spreads through all the region. The Jews now show themselves in their true character of enemies to the Lord and to His truth. With regard to them Paul and Barnabas shake off the dust of their feet against them. The disciples, whatever might be their difficulties, are no hindrance to this. The position here taken by the Jews — which, moreover, we find everywhere

— makes us understand what a source of grief and pain they must have been to the apostles.

**CHAPTER 14.** Their missionary labors continue in Iconium with the same opposition from the Jews who, incapable themselves of the work, stir up the Gentiles against those who are performing it. As long as it was only opposition, it was but a motive for perseverance; but, being warned in time of an assault that was planned against them, they depart to Lystra and Derbe. There, having healed a cripple, they excite the idolatrous respect of these poor pagans; but, filled with horror, they turn them from their error by the energy of the Holy Ghost — faithful to the testimony of their God. Hither also the Jews follow them. Now, if man will not ally himself with the idolatry of the heart, and accept exaltation from men, the power of his testimony, which they began by admiring as long as they thought they could elevate man and acquire importance through their flatteries being accepted, ends by exciting the hatred of their hearts. The Jews bring this hatred into action and stir up the people, who leave Paul for dead. But he rises up and re-enters the city, remaining tranquilly there another day, and on the morrow he goes with Barnabas to Derbe.

Afterwards they revisit the cities through which they had passed, and at Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, they confirm the disciples in the faith, and teach them that they must pass through tribulation to inherit the kingdom. They choose elders for them; and passing through some other cities to the place where they had disembarked, they return to Antioch, from whence they had been commended to God for the work, causing great joy to the disciples there in that the door of faith was opened to the Gentiles. This is the first formal mission among the Gentiles where assemblies are formed, elders appointed by the apostles, and the hostility of the Jews to the grace of God, outside their nation and independently of their law, is distinctly marked. The word assumes a positive character among the Gentiles, and the energy of the Holy Ghost displays itself to this end, constituting and forming them into assemblies, establishing local rulers in them, outside and independently of the action of the apostles and assembly at Jerusalem, and the obligation of the law which was still maintained there.

A question concerning this (that is, whether it could be allowed) is soon raised at Antioch. It is no longer the opposition of the Jews hostile to the

gospel, but the bigotry of those who had embraced it, desiring to impose the law on the converted Gentiles. But the grace of God provides for this difficulty also.

**CHAPTER 15** contains the account of this. Certain persons come from Jerusalem, where all was still going on in connection with the requirements of the law; and they seek to impose these requirements on the Gentiles in this new center and starting-point of the work which was formed at Antioch. It was the will of God that this matter should be settled, not by the apostolic authority of Paul, or by the action of His Spirit at Antioch only, which might have divided the church, but by means of conference at Jerusalem, so as to maintain union, whatever might be the prejudices of the Jews. The ways of God in this respect are remarkable, showing the way in which He has maintained sovereign care in grace over the church. In reading the Epistle to the Galatians, we see that in reality things were in question that touched Christianity to the quick, that affected its very foundations, the deep principles of grace, of the rights of God, of the sinful condition of man — principles on which the whole edifice of man's eternal relations with God is founded. If any one was circumcised, he was under the law; he had given up grace, he had fallen away from Christ. Nevertheless Paul the apostle, Paul full of faith, of energy, of burning zeal, is obliged to go up to Jerusalem, whither he had not desired to go, in order to arrange this matter. Paul had labored at Antioch; but the work in that city was not his work. He was not the apostle at Antioch as he was that of Iconium, of Lystra, and afterwards of Macedonia and of Greece. He went out from Antioch, from the bosom of the church already formed there. The question was to be settled for the church, apart from the apostolic authority of Paul. The apostle must yield before God and His ways.

Paul disputes with the men from Judea, but the end is not gained. It is determined to send some members of the church to Jerusalem, but with them Paul and Barnabas, so deeply interested in this question. Moreover Paul had a revelation that he should go up. God directed his steps. It is good however to be obliged to submit sometimes, although ever so right or so full of spiritual energy.

The question then is entered upon at Jerusalem. It was already a great thing that the subjecting of the Gentiles to the law should be resisted at



Jerusalem, and still more that they should there decide not to do it. We see the wisdom of God in so ordering it, that such a resolution should have its origin at Jerusalem. Had there been no bigotry there, the question would not have been necessary; but alas! good has to be done in despite of all the weakness and all the traditions of men. A resolution made at Antioch would have been a very different thing from a resolution made at Jerusalem. The Jewish church would not have acknowledged the truth, the apostolic authority of the twelve would not have given its sanction to it. The course at Antioch and of the Gentiles would have been a course apart; and a continual struggle would have commenced, having (at least in appearance) the authority of the primitive and apostolic church on the one side, and the energy and liberty of the Spirit with Paul for its representative on the other. The Judaizing tendency of human nature is ever ready to abandon the high energy of the Spirit, and return into the ways and thoughts of the flesh. This tendency, nourished by the traditions of an ancient faith, had already given sorrow and difficulty enough to him who was specially laboring among the Gentiles according to the liberty of the Spirit, without the additional strength of having the course of the apostles and of the church at Jerusalem to countenance it.

After much discussion at Jerusalem, full liberty for which was given, Peter, taking the lead, relates the case of Cornelius. Afterwards Paul and Barnabas declare the wonderful manifestation of God through the power of the Holy Ghost which had taken place among the Gentiles. James then sums up the judgment of the assembly, which is assented to by all, that the Gentiles shall not be obliged to be circumcised, or to obey the law; but only to abstain from blood, from things strangled, from fornication, and from meat offered to idols. We shall do well to consider the nature and stipulations of this decree.

It is a direction which teaches, not that which is abstractedly good or evil, but that which was suitable to the case presented. It was "necessary," not "righteous before God," to avoid certain things. The things might be really evil, but they are not here looked at in that way. There were certain things to which the Gentiles were accustomed, which it was proper they should renounce, in order that the assembly might walk as it ought before God in peace. To the other ordinances of the law they were not to be subjected. Moses had those who preached him. That sufficed, without compelling the

Gentiles to submit to his laws, when they joined themselves, not to the Jews, but to the Lord.

This decree therefore does not pronounce upon the nature of the things forbidden, but upon the opportuneness — the Gentiles having in fact been in the habit of doing all these things. We must observe that they were not things forbidden by the law only. It was that which was contrary to the order established by God as Creator, or to a prohibition given to Noah when he was told to eat flesh. Woman was only to be connected with man in the sanctity of marriage, and this is a very great blessing. Life belonged to God. All fellowship with idols was an outrage against the authority of the true God. Let Moses teach his own laws; these things were contrary to the intelligent knowledge of the true God. It is not therefore a new law imposed by Christianity, nor an accommodation to the prejudices of the Jews. It has not the same kind of validity as a moral ordinance that is obligatory in itself. It is the expression to christian intelligence of the terms of man's true relations with God in the things of nature, given by the goodness of God, through the leaders at Jerusalem, to ignorant Christians, setting them free from the law, and enlightening them with regard to the relations between God and man, and to that which was proper to man — things of which, as idolatrous Gentiles, they had been ignorant. I have said, addressed to christian intelligence: accordingly there is nothing inconsistent in eating anything that is sold at the shambles; for I acknowledge God who gave it, and not an idol. But if the act implies communion with the idol, even to the conscience of another, it would be provoking God to jealousy; I sin against Him or against my neighbor. I do not know whether an animal is strangled or not, but if people act so as to imply that it is indifferent whether life belongs to God or not, I sin again; I am not defiled by the thing, but I fail in christian intelligence with regard to the rights of God as Creator. With regard to fornication, this enters into the category of christian purity, besides being contrary to the order of the Creator; so that it is a direct question of good and evil, and not only of the rights of God revealed to our intelligence. This was important as a general principle, more than in the detail of the things themselves.

In sum the principles established are these: purity by marriage according to God's original institution; that life belongs to God; and the unity of God as one only true God — Godhead, life, and God's original ordinance for man.

The same thing is true of the foundations laid by the assembly at the basis of their decree, "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us."

The Holy Ghost had manifested Himself in the case of Cornelius and of the conversion of the Gentiles, of which Peter and Paul and Barnabas had given the account. On the other hand the apostles were the depositaries of the authority of Christ, those to whom the government of the assembly as founded in connection with the true Jewish faith had been committed. They represented the authority of Christ ascended on high, even as the power and will of the Holy Ghost had been shown in the cases I have just mentioned. The authority was exercised in connection with that which, in a certain sense, was the continuation of a Judaism enlarged by fresh revelations, and which had its center at Jerusalem, acknowledging as Messiah the ascended Jesus rejected by the people. Christ had committed to them the authority necessary to govern the assembly. They had also been sealed on the day of Pentecost in order to perform it.

The spirit of grace and wisdom is truly seen in their way of acting. They give their full sanction to Paul and Barnabas, and they send with them persons of note in the assembly at Jerusalem, who could not be suspected of bringing an answer in support of their own pretensions, as might have been supposed in the case of Paul and Barnabas.

The apostles and elders assemble for deliberation; but the whole flock acts in concert with them.

Thus Jerusalem has decided that the law was not binding on the Gentiles. These, sincere in their desire of walking with Christ, rejoice greatly at their freedom from this yoke. Judas and Silas, being prophets, exhort and confirm them, and afterwards are dismissed in peace. But Silas thinks it good to remain on his own account, influenced by the Spirit. He prefers the work among the Gentiles to Jerusalem. Judas returns from it to Jerusalem.

The work continues at Antioch by means of Paul and Barnabas and others. At Antioch we again see the full liberty of the Holy Ghost.

Paul proposes to Barnabas that they should go and visit the assemblies already formed by their means in Asia Minor. Barnabas consents, but he determines to take John who had formerly forsaken them. Paul wishes for

some one who had not drawn back from the work, nor abandoned for his own home the place of a stranger for the work's sake. Barnabas insists; and these two precious servants of God separate. Barnabas takes Mark and goes to Cyprus. Now Mark was his kinsman, and Cyprus his own country. Paul takes Silas, who had preferred the work to Jerusalem instead of Jerusalem to the work and departs. From his name we may believe that Silas was a Hellenist.

It is happy to find that, after this, Paul speaks of Barnabas with entire affection, and desires that Mark should come to him, having found him profitable for the ministry.

Moreover Paul is commended by the brethren to the grace of God in his work. The title given to Paul and Barnabas by the apostles shows the difference between the apostolic authority, established by Christ in person, and that which was constituted such by the power of the Holy Ghost — sent by Christ Himself, no doubt, but in point of fact going forth by the direction of the Holy Ghost, and their mission warranted by His power. With the apostles, Paul and Barnabas have no title except their work — "men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." They are that which the Holy Ghost has made them. The apostles are the twelve.

The liberty and the power of the Spirit characterise Paul. He is that which the Spirit makes him. If Jesus had appeared to him, although Ananias can testify it, he must in reality prove it by the power of his ministry. The effects of this ministry are related as well as its character in chapters 16-20. The action and the liberty of the Holy Ghost are there displayed in a remarkable manner.

There is perhaps no example of this more remarkable than that which Paul does with regard to Timothy. He uses circumcision in all liberty to set aside Jewish prejudice. It is very doubtful whether, according to the law, he ought to have been circumcised. Ezra and Nehemiah show us the strange wives sent away; but here, the mother being a Jewess, Paul causes the child of this mixed marriage to follow the rule of the Jews and submit to that rite. Liberty fully recognises the law in its place, although itself exempt from it, and distinctly states, for the assurance of the Gentiles, the absence of all pretension, on the part of the Judæan Christians, to impose

the law upon Gentiles. Paul circumcises Timothy, and does not give subjection for an hour to those who would have compelled Titus to be circumcised. He would become a Jew to the Jews from love; but the Jews themselves must renounce all pretension to impose the law on others. The decrees given at Jerusalem are left with the churches — a plain answer to every Jew who desired to subject the Gentiles to Judaism. The decrees, we may remark, were those of the apostles and the elders.

It is the Holy Ghost alone who directs the apostle. He forbids him to preach in Asia (the province), and will not suffer him to go into Bithynia. By a vision in the night they are called to go into Macedonia. Here the historian meets them. It is the Lord who calls them into Macedonia. It is well to note here that, while the gospel is sent under Paul's ministry to the whole creation under heaven, yet there is specific direction as to where we are to go.

Here the apostle goes first to the Jews, even when it was only a few women who came together by the river side — a place, as it appears, usually chosen where there was no synagogue. A Greek woman, who worshipped the God of Israel, is converted by grace. Thus the door is opened, and others also believe (v. 40). Here Satan tries to tamper with the work by bearing a testimony to the ministers of the word. Not that this spirit acknowledged Jesus — he would not then have been an evil spirit, he would not have thus possessed the damsel. He speaks of the agents, in order to have a share of the glory, and of the most high God — compelled perhaps by the presence of the Spirit to speak, as had been the case with others by the presence of Jesus, when His power was before their eyes. The testimony of Satan could not go so far as to own Him Lord; and if Paul had not been faithful, it would have mixed up the work of the enemy with that of the Lord. But it was not a testimony to Paul that Paul sought, nor a testimony rendered by an evil spirit, whatever might be the appearance of its testimony. The proof which the evil spirit had to give that the power of God was present, was to submit to it by being driven away. It could not be a support to the work of God. We see in this circumstance the disinterestedness of the apostle, his spiritual discernment, the power of God with him, and the faith which will have no other support than that of God. It would have been useful to have a testimony rendered to his ministry: the reasonings of the flesh might have

said, 'I did not seek it.' Persecution would have been avoided. But God will have no other testimony than that which He bears to Himself. No other can be a testimony from Him, for He reveals Himself where He is not known; faith waits only on Him to render it. Paul went on without troubling himself about this malicious attempt of the enemy's, and possibly in wisdom avoiding conflict where there was no fruit for the Lord, until by its persistency the apostle was forced to attend to it. The Spirit of God does not tolerate the presence of an evil spirit when it makes itself actively manifest before Him. He does not lend Himself to its devices by giving it importance through a voluntary interposition; for He has His own work, and He does not turn away from it to occupy Himself about the enemy. He is occupied, in love, about souls. But if Satan comes in His way, so as to perplex these souls, the Spirit reveals Himself in His energy, and the enemy flees before Him.

But Satan is not without resources. The power which he cannot exercise in a direct way, he employs in exciting the passions and lusts of men in opposition to that power against which he cannot himself stand, and which will neither unite itself to him nor recognise him. Even as the Gadarenes desired Jesus to depart, when He had healed Legion, so the Philippians rise up tumultuously against Paul and his companions at the instigation of the men who had lost their dishonest gains. But God makes use of all this to direct the progress of His own work, and give it the form He pleases. There is the gaoler to be converted, and the magistrates themselves are to confess their wrong with respect to the messengers of God. The assembly is gathered out, a flock (as the epistle addressed to them bears witness) full of love and affection. The apostle goes to labor elsewhere. We see a more active, a more energetic, testimony here than in the similar case that happened to Peter. The intervention of God is more striking in Peter's case. It is the old Jerusalem, worn out in everything except hatred, and God faithful to the one who trusted in Him. The hatred is disappointed. Paul and Silas sing, instead of quietly sleeping; the doors burst suddenly open; and the gaoler himself is converted, and his family. The magistrates are obliged to come as supplicants to Paul. Such is the result of the tumult. The enemy was mistaken here. If he stopped their work at Philippi, he sent the apostles to preach elsewhere according to the will of God.

We must not pass over in silence this energy which embraced whole houses, and subdued them to the christian faith. We only see it, however, when it is a question of bringing in the Gentiles.\* But Cornelius, Lydia, the gaoler of Philippi, are all witnesses to this power.

[\* We see however, in the case of Lydda and Saron, what is more analogous to the introduction of a people. They heard of the miracle done to Aeneas; and the town and neighborhood turned to the Lord. Saron is a district along the coast.]

In the last case it was the power exercised by the enemy over the passions of the Gentiles that caused the persecution of the apostles: at Thessalonica we again find the old and universal enmity of the Jews. Nevertheless many Jews and proselytes received the gospel. After a tumult there also, the apostles go away to Berea. There the Jews are more noble; what they hear, they examine by the word of God. Through this a great number among them believed. Nevertheless the Jews of Thessalonica, jealous of the progress the gospel made, go over to Berea. Paul leaves the city and passes on to Athens. Silas and Timothy remain for the moment at Berea, Paul being the special object of the Jews' pursuit. At Athens, although he resorted to the synagogue, yet, his spirit stirred at the sight of the universal idolatry in that idle city, he disputes daily in public with their philosophers; consequent on these interviews, he proclaims the true God to the chief men of that intellectual capital. He had sent word to Silas and Timothy to join him there.

With a people like the Athenians — such is the effect of intellectual cultivation without God — he has to come down to the lowest step in the ladder of truth. He sets forth the oneness of God, the Creator, and the relationship of man to Him, declaring also that Jesus will judge the world, of which God had given proof by raising Him up from the dead. With the exception of the judgment of this world being put in place of the promises respecting the return of Jesus, we might think it was Peter addressing the Jews. We must not imagine that the historian relates everything that Paul said. What is given is his defence, not his preaching. The Holy Ghost gives us that which characterised the manner in which the apostle met the circumstances of those he addressed. That which remained on the minds of his first hearers was that he preached Jesus and the resurrection. It appears even that some took the resurrection, as well as Jesus, to be a God. It is,

indeed, the basis of Christianity, which is founded on Jesus personally, and the fact of His resurrection; but it is only the basis.

I have said that we are reminded here of Peter's preaching. I mean as to the degree of height in his doctrine with regard to Christ. We shall observe, at the same time, the appropriateness of the application of facts in either case to the persons addressed. Peter set forth the rejected Christ ascended on high, ready to return on the repentance of the Jews, and who would establish at His coming all things of which the prophets had spoken. Here the judgment of the world — sanction of the truth to the natural conscience — is presented to the learned men, and to the inquisitive people; nothing that could interest their philosophic minds, but a plain and convincing testimony to the folly of their idolatry, according even to that which the natural conscience of their own poets had acknowledged.

The dishonest gain, to which Satan ministered opportunity, met the gospel at Philippi; the hardness and moral indifference of knowledge that flattered human vanity, at Athens; at Thessalonica, the efforts of Jewish jealousy. The gospel goes on its way, victorious over the one, yielding to the effect of another, and, after laying bare to the learned Athenians all that their condition tolerated, leaving them, and finding, amid the luxury and the depraved manners of the wealthy city of Corinth, a numerous people to bring into the assembly. Such are the ways of God, and the exercises of His devoted servant led by the Holy Ghost.

We may notice, that this energy, which seeks the Gentiles, never loses sight of the favor of God towards His elect people — a favor that sought them until they rejected it.

At Thessalonica Paul twice received succor from Philippi; at Corinth, where money and commerce abounded, he does not take it, but quietly works with two of his countrymen of the same trade as himself. He again begins with the Jews, who oppose his doctrine and blaspheme. The apostle takes his course with the boldness and decision of a man truly led of God, calmly and wittingly, so as not to be turned aside. He shakes his garments in token of being pure of their blood, and declares that now he turns to the Gentiles according to Isaiah 49, taking that prophecy as a command from God.



In Corinth God has “much people.” He therefore uses the unbelieving indifference of Gallio to defeat the projects and malice of the Jews, jealous as ever of a religion that eclipsed their importance, whatever might be its grace towards them. Paul, after laboring there a long time, goes away in peace. His Jewish friends, Priscilla and Aquila, go with him. He was going himself to Jerusalem. He was also under a vow. The opposition of the Jews does not take away his attachment to his nation — his faithfulness in preaching the gospel to them first — in recognising everything that belonged to them in grace before God. He even submits to Jewish ordinances. Possibly habit had some influence over him, which was not of the Spirit; but according to the Spirit he had no thought of disallowing that which the patient grace of God granted to the people. He addresses himself to the Jews at Ephesus. They are inclined to hear him, but he desires to keep the feast at Jerusalem. Here he is still a Jew with his feasts and vows. The Spirit has evidently introduced these circumstances to give us a true and complete picture of the relationship that existed between the two systems — the degree of freedom from the influence of the one, as well as the energy that established the other. The first remains often to a certain degree, where energy to do the other is in a very high degree. The liberty that condescends to prejudices and habits is not the same thing as subjection to these prejudices in one’s own person. In our feebleness the two mingle together; but they are in fact opposed to each other. To respect that which God respects, even when the system has lost all real force and value, if called to act in connection with this system when it is really nothing more than a superstition and a weakness, is a very different thing from putting oneself under the yoke of superstition and weakness. The first is the effect of the Spirit; the last, of the flesh. In us, alas! the one is often confounded with the other. Charity becomes weakness, giving uncertainty to the testimony.

Paul takes his journey; goes up to Jerusalem, and salutes the assembly; goes down to Antioch, and visits again all the first assemblies he had formed, thus binding all his work together — Antioch and Jerusalem. How far his old habits influenced him in his ways of acting, I leave the reader to judge. He was a Jew. The Holy Ghost would have us see that he was as far as possible from any contempt for the ancient people of God, for whom divine favor will never change. This feeling was surely right. It appears

elsewhere that he went beyond the limits of the Spirit and of spirituality. Here we have only the facts. He may have had some private reason that was valid in consequence of the position in which he stood. One may be in circumstances which contradict the liberty of the Spirit, and which, nevertheless, when we are in them, have a certain right over us, or exercise an influence which necessarily weakens in the soul the energy of that liberty. We may have done wrong in putting ourselves into those circumstances, but, being in them, the influence is exercised, the rights assert their claim. A man called to serve God, driven out from his father's house, walks in the liberty of the Spirit. Without any change in his father, he goes into the paternal house: the rights of his father revive — where is his liberty? Or a man possessed of much clearer spiritual intelligence places himself in the midst of friends who are spiritually altogether below him: it is almost impossible for him to retain a spiritual judgment. However it may have been here, the link is now formed voluntarily on the part of him who stood in the place of liberty and grace, and the Christians in Jerusalem remain at the level of their former prejudices, and claim patience and indulgence from him who was the vessel and the witness of the liberty of the Spirit of God.

This, with the supplement of his work at Ephesus, forms the circle of the active labors of the apostle in the gospel, to show us in him the ways of the Spirit with men.

From verse 24 of chapter 18 to verse 7 of chapter 19 we have a kind of summary of the progress made by the doctrine of Christ, and of the power that accompanied it. Apollos knew only of the teaching of John; but, upright in heart, he publicly confessed and preached that which he knew. It was the faith of a regenerate soul. Aquila and Priscilla enlighten him fully with regard to the facts of the gospel, and the doctrine of a dead and glorified Christ. At Corinth he becomes a powerful teacher of the gospel, of the Lord among the Jews, thus confirming the faith of the disciples. The energy of the Holy Ghost manifests itself in him without any intervention of the apostle or of the twelve. He acts independently; that is, the Spirit acts independently in him. People could say, "I am of Apollos." It is interesting to see these different manifestations of the power and liberty of the Spirit, and to remember that the Lord is above all, and that, if He acts greatly by a Paul, He acts also in whom He will.

In that which follows we find, on another side, the progress of the divine revelation in union with Paul's apostolic power made very prominent by the capability of communicating the Holy Ghost. Twelve persons had believed, but with no other instruction than that of John: their baptism had been in reference to it. It was a Christ to come, and a Holy Ghost whom He would communicate, that they looked for. Now John's baptism required repentance, but in no way came out of the Jewish pale; although it opened a perspective of something different, according to the sovereignty of God, and as the effect of Christ's coming. But it was a baptism unto repentance for man on the earth, and not Christ's death and resurrection. Grace acted in a remnant, but of whom Jesus was a companion on earth. Now Christianity (for man's sin has been fully manifested) is founded on death and resurrection; first, that of Christ, thus accomplishing redemption, and then on our death and resurrection with Him so as to place us in Him and as Him before God in sinless life, life of His life, and washed in His blood from all our sins. But John's baptism, in fact, only taught repentance here below in order to receive Christ; Christianity taught the efficacy of the death and resurrection of a rejected Christ, in virtue of which the Holy Ghost, the Paraclete come down from heaven, should be received.

These twelve men (although John had announced that the baptism of the Holy Ghost should be the result of Christ's intervention) did not know whether there was yet any Holy Ghost\* a plain proof that they had not come into the house of God in which He dwelt. Paul explains this to them, and they are baptised in the name of Jesus. Paul, in his apostolic capacity, lays his hands on them; and they receive the Holy Ghost. They speak with tongues, and they prophesy.

[\* Literally whether the Holy Ghost was. The expression, which is the same as in John 7, is a very striking testimony to the distinctness and importance of the Holy Ghost's presence down here on earth. It is called "the Holy Ghost," though we all know He had ever been. But what is called the Holy Ghost, that is, His presence down here — this had never been.]

This power, and he who was its instrument, were now to be brought out into distinct relief. The capital city of Asia (that is, of the Roman province so named) is the theatre in which this was to be effected. We shall see a power displayed in this locality, which acts independently of all traditional forms, and which governs all that surrounds it, whether man,

conscience, or the enemy — an organising power, which forms of itself and for itself the institutions and the body that suit it, and which governs the whole position. The power of active grace has been displayed in the work of Paul, beginning with Antioch; and had shown itself in different ways. Here we have some details of its formal establishment in a great center.

During three months of patience he preaches Christ in the synagogue, and reasons with the Jews, conscious of divine strength and of the truth. He grants precedence, as the sphere of testimony, to that which had been the instrument and the people of God: “To the Jews first.” It is no longer said, “Salvation is of the Jews,” but it is preached to them first.

But this work having had its development, and many taking the place of adversaries, Paul acts as the founder of that which was according to God and on the part of God. He separates the disciples, and discourses upon Christianity in the hall of a Greek who had a public class. This went on for two years: so that the doctrine was spread through all the country among both the Jews and the Greeks. God did not fail to bear testimony to the word of His grace, and His power was displayed in a remarkable manner in connection with the person of the apostle who bore the testimony. The manifestations of the enemy’s power disappear before the action of this liberative power of the Lord, and the name of Jesus was glorified. Now the reality of this action was demonstrated in a striking way, that is, its source in the personal, positive, and real action of the Lord on the one side, and on the other, the mission of Paul, and faith as the instrument by which this supernatural power wrought. Certain Jews desired to avail themselves of it for their own self-interest; and devoid of faith, they use the name of “Jesus whom Paul preached” as though it had been a kind of charm. But the evil spirit, whose power was as true and real in its way as that of the Lord which he was forced to acknowledge when it was in exercise, knew very well that here it was not so, that there was neither faith nor power. “Jesus I know,” said he, “and who Paul is I know; but who are ye?” And the man who was possessed attacked and wounded them. Striking testimony to the action of the enemy, but at the same time to that superior force. to the reality of that intervention of God. which was carried into effect by means of Paul. Now, when God shows Himself, conscience always shows itself; and the power of the enemy over it is manifested and ceases. The Jews and

Greeks are filled with fear, and many who became Christians brought the proofs of their sorceries.

The mighty action of the Spirit showed itself by the decision it produced, by the immediate and unhesitating acting out of the thoughts and resolutions produced in the heart. There were no long inward arguments; the presence and the power of God produced their natural effects.

The enemy's resources were, however, not exhausted. The work of God was done, in the sense of the establishment of the testimony through apostolic labor; and God was sending His servant elsewhere. The enemy, as usual, excites a tumult, stirring up the passions of men against the instruments of the testimony of God. Paul had already intended to go away, but a little later; he had therefore sent Timothy and Erastus before him into Macedonia, purposing to visit Macedonia, Achaia, and Jerusalem, and afterwards to go to Rome; and he still remains some time in Asia. But after the departure of these two brethren, Demetrius excites the people against the Christians. Inveterate against the gospel, which shook the whole system in connection with which he made his fortune, and which was linked with all that gave him importance, this agent of the enemy knew how to act on the passions of the workmen who had the same occupation as himself; for he made little portable shrines to Diana, in silver. His employment was connected with that which all the world admired, with that which had possession of men's minds — a great comfort to man who feels the need of something sure — with that which had long given its hue to their religious habits. A great part of the influence exercised was, not "Great is Diana!" but "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" It was, in short, the power of the enemy among the Gentiles. The Jews apparently sought to avail themselves of this by putting one Alexander forward — the same possibly who had withstood Paul, and who they supposed would therefore be listened to by the people. But it was the evil spirit of idolatry that agitated them; and the Jews were foiled in their hope. Paul was prevented, both by the brethren and by some of the Asiarchs,\* from showing himself in the theatre. The assembly was dissolved by the town authorities; and Paul, when he had seen the disciples, went away in peace.\*\*

[\* Honorary magistrates from among the notables, who presided over the celebration of religious festivals.]

[\*\* It may perhaps interest the reader and help him to understand this part of the New Testament history, if I point out the time at which Paul wrote some of his epistles. He wrote the First to the Corinthians from Ephesus, and sent it by Titus. Timothy he sent by way of Macedonia. The latter might perhaps go into Greece; "If he come," the apostle says to the Corinthians. Then came the tumult, and just at this moment, or about the same time, his life was endangered; he did not even suppose that he should save it. He had purposed going by Greece into Macedonia, and then returning to Greece; but the state Corinth was in prevented it, and he went first into Macedonia. On his way he goes to Troas, but does not stay there; in Macedonia he is much exercised in mind, and has no rest, because Titus had not brought him tidings of the Corinthians. There, however, Titus found him, and the apostle was comforted in his trouble by the good news of the return of the Corinthians to a right mind. Upon this he writes the second letter to them, and, after having visited the assemblies, he pursues his journey to Corinth, whence he wrote his epistle to the Romans. I only speak here of that which relates to thus part of the apostle's history, and throws light upon his labors.]

His work there was finished, and the gospel planted in the capital of the province of Asia, and even in the whole province: Greece and Macedonia had already received it.

There was yet Rome. In what manner should he go thither? This is now the remaining question. His free and active life ended with the events which now occupy us, as far as it is given us by the Holy Ghost. A life blessed with an almost unequalled faith, with an energy that surpassed anything that has been seen in men, and which, through the divine power that wrought in it, produced its effects in spite of obstacles apparently insurmountable, in spite of every kind of opposition, in contempt and destitution, and which stamped its character on the assembly by giving it, instrumentally, its existence; and that, not only in spite of two hostile religions which divided the civilised world between them, but in spite of a religious system which possessed the truth, but which ever sought to confine it within the boundary of traditions that granted some place to the flesh — a system that had the plea of priority, and was sanctioned by the habits of those apostles who were nominated by the Lord Himself.

The assembly indeed, as Paul foresaw, soon returned to its Judaic ways, when the energy of the apostle was absent. It requires the power of the Holy Ghost to rise above the religiousness of the flesh. Piety does not necessarily do this; and power is never a tradition — it is itself, and thereby independent of men and of their traditions, even when bearing

with them in love. The flesh therefore always returns to the path of traditions and forms; because it is never power in the things of God, although it can recognise duty. It does not therefore rise to heaven; it does not understand grace; it can see what man ought to be for God (without however perceiving the consequences of this, if God is revealed), but it cannot see what God in His sovereign grace is for man. It will perhaps retain it as orthodoxy, where the Spirit has wrought; but it will never bring the soul into it. This it was, more than the violence of the pagans or the hatred of the Jews, which wrung the heart and caused the anguish of the faithful and blessed apostle, who by grace had a character, or rather a position, more like that of Christ than any other on earth.

These conflicts will be unfolded to us in the Epistles, as well as that ardent heart which — while embracing in its thoughts all the revealed counsels of God, and putting each part in its place, and embracing in its affections the whole of the work and of the assembly of God — could equally concentrate its whole energy of thought on a single important point, and of affection on a poor slave whom grace had given to him in his chains. The vessel of the Spirit, Paul shines with a heavenly light throughout the whole work of the gospel. He condescends at Jerusalem, thunders in Galatia when souls were being perverted, leads the apostles to decide for the liberty of the Gentiles, and uses all liberty himself to be as a Jew to the Jews, and as without law to those that had no law, as not under law, but always subject to Christ. Yet how difficult to maintain the height of life and of spiritual revelation, in the midst of so many opposing tendencies! He was also “void of offense.” Nothing within hindered his communion with God, whence he drew his strength to be faithful among men. He could say, and none but he, “Be ye imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” Thus also he could say, “I endure all things for the elect’s sake, that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory,” words which would not be improper in the Lord’s mouth — in a more exalted sense doubtless, because He endured for Paul himself the wrath that would have been his eternal condemnation — yet words which bring out the remarkable position of this man of God, as the vessel of the Holy Ghost by whom he was used. “I fill up,” said he, “that which is lacking\* of the sufferings of Christ for his body’s sake, which is the assembly; whereof I am made a minister to complete the word of God.

[\* The reader must distinguish between the Lord's sufferings for sin from God in righteousness, and those which He endured from sinful men for righteousness' sake. We partake in the latter, while Christ has saved us from the former, in which there is no question at all of participation, but of His substitution for us when we have deserved the condemnation due to sin.]

John (through his intimate knowledge of the Person of Christ, born on earth and Son of God) was able to maintain this essential and individually vital truth, in the same field in which Paul labored; but it was Paul's part to be the active instrument for propagating the truth which saves the soul, and brings ruined man into connection with God by faith, by communicating all His counsels of grace.

Still Paul was a man, although a man wonderfully blest. The intrinsic power of Judaism in connection with its relationship to the flesh is marvelous. As to the result indeed, if man takes his place below grace, that is, below God, it is better in a certain sense that he should be man under law than man without law. He will be the one or the other; but in taking up the exclusive idea of duty he forgets God as He is — for He is love; and too often forgets also man as he is — for he is sin. If he unites the idea of duty and of sin, it is continual bondage, and this is what Christianity in general is reduced to; with the addition of ordinances to ease the burdened conscience, of forms to create piety where communion is absent; clothing it all with the name of Christ, and with the authority of the church, so named, the very existence of which in its reality is identified with the principle of sovereign grace, and characterised by subjection.\*

[\* See Ephesians 5:24.]

But let us return to the history of Paul.

**CHAPTER 20.** After the uproar has ceased he sends for the disciples, embraces them, and departs for Macedonia; he visits that whole country, and comes into Greece. The beginning of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians gives the details of this part of his history. In Greece he remains three months; and when the Jews lay wait for him, he goes round by Macedonia, instead of sailing straight to Syria. At Troas (where a door had been opened to him on his way into Greece, but where his affection for the Corinthians had not allowed him to remain) he spends his Sunday, and even the whole week, in order to see the brethren. We perceive the usual object of their assembly: they “came together to break bread”; and



the ordinary occasion of holding it — "the first day of the week." Paul avails himself of this to speak to them all night; but it was an extraordinary occasion. The presence and the exhortations of an apostle failed in keeping them all awake. It was not however an assembly held in secret or in the dark. There were many lamps to light the upper chamber in which they met. By the place in which they came together we see that the assemblies were not composed of very many persons. The upper room in Jerusalem received, perhaps, one hundred and twenty. It appears by different salutations, that they met in private houses — probably in several, if the number of believers required it; but there was only one assembly.

Eutychus pays the penalty of his inattention; but God bears testimony to His own goodness, and to the power with which He had endued the apostle, by raising him from a state of death. Paul says that his soul was yet in him: he had only to renew the connection between it and his physical organism. In other cases the soul had been recalled.

Paul chose to go alone from Troas to Assos. We see all through the history, that he arranged, by the power that the Spirit gave him over them, the willing services of his companions — not, doubtless, as their master, yet more absolutely than if he had been so. He is (under Christ) the center of the system in which he labors, the center of energy. Christ alone can be by right the center of salvation and of faith. It was only as filled with the Spirit of God that Paul was the center even of that energy; and it was, as we have seen, by not grieving Him, and by exercising himself to have a conscience void of offense both towards God and towards men.

Paul does not stop at Ephesus, because in so central a place he must have stayed some time. It is necessary to avoid that which has a certain moral claim upon us, if we would not and ought not to be detained by the obligation it imposes upon us.

It was no want of affection for the beloved Ephesians, nor any thought of neglecting them. He sends for the elders, and addresses a discourse to them, which we must examine a little, as setting before us the position of the assembly at that time, and the work of the gospel among the nations.

The assemblies were consolidated over a pretty large extent of country, and in divers places at least had taken the form of a regularly ordered

institution. Elders were established and recognised. The apostle could send for them to come to him. His authority also was acknowledged on their part. He speaks of his ministry as a past thing — solemn thought! but he takes them to witness not only that he had preached the truth to them, but a truth that spoke to their conscience; setting them before God on the one hand, and on the other presenting to them Him in whom God made Himself known, and in whom He communicated all the fullness of grace on their behalf — Jesus, the object of their faith, the Savior of their souls. He had done this through trouble and through difficulty, in face of the unprincipled opposition of the Jews who had rejected the Anointed One, but in accordance with the grace that rose above all this evil and declared salvation to the Jews, and going beyond these limits (because it was grace) addressed itself to the Gentiles, to all men, as sinners and responsible to God. Paul had done this, not with the pride of a teacher, but with the humility and the perseverance of love. He desired also to finish his ministry, and to fail in nothing that Jesus had committed to him. And now he was going to Jerusalem, feeling bound in spirit to do so, not knowing what would befall him, but warned by the Holy Ghost that bonds and afflictions awaited him. With regard to themselves, he knew his ministry was ended, and that he should see their face no more. Henceforth responsibility would specially rest upon them.

Thus what the Holy Ghost here sets before us is, that now, when the detail of his work among the Gentiles to plant the gospel is related as one entire scene among Jews and Gentiles, he bids adieu to the work; in order to leave those whom he had gathered together in a new position, and in a certain sense to themselves.\* It is a discourse which marks the cessation of one phase of the assembly — that of apostolic labors — and the entrance into another — its responsibility to stand fast now that those labors had ceased, the service of the elders whom “the Holy Ghost had made overseers,” and at the same time the dangers and difficulties that would attend the cessation of apostolic labor, and complicate the work of the elders on whom the responsibility would now more especially devolve.

[\* If Paul was ever set free and returned to these parts (not necessarily to Ephesus) as Philippians and Philemon and perhaps 2 Timothy would lead us to suppose, we have no scriptural account of it.]

The first remark that flows from the consideration of this discourse is, that apostolic succession is entirely denied by it. Owing to the absence of the apostle various difficulties would arise, and there would be no one in his place to meet or to prevent these difficulties. Successor therefore he had none. In the second place the fact appears that, this energy which bridled the spirit of evil, once away, devouring wolves from without, and teachers of perverse things from within, would lift up their heads and attack the simplicity and the happiness of the assembly, which would be harassed by the efforts of Satan without possessing apostolic energy to withstand them.

This testimony of Paul's is of the highest importance with regard to the whole ecclesiastical system. The attention of the elders who are left in charge is directed elsewhere than to present apostolical care (as having no longer this resource, or anything that officially replaced it), in order that the assembly might be kept in peace and sheltered from evil. It was their part to care for the assembly in these circumstances. In the next place, that which was principally to be done for the hindrance of evil was to shepherd the flock, and to watch, whether over themselves or over the flock, for that purpose. He reminds them how he had himself exhorted them night and day with tears. Let them therefore watch. He then commends them, neither to Timothy, nor to a bishop, but — in a way that sets aside all official resource — to God, and to the word of His grace which was able to build them up and assure them of the inheritance. This was where he left the assembly; that which it did afterwards is not my subject here. If John came later to work in these parts, it was a great favor from God, but it changed nothing in the position officially. His labors (with the exception of the warnings to the seven assemblies in the Apocalypse, where judgment is in question) regarded the individual life, its character, and that which sustained it.

With deep and touching affection Paul parts from the assembly at Ephesus. Who filled the gap? At the same time he appealed to their consciences for the uprightness of his walk. The free labors of the apostle of the Gentiles were ended. Solemn and affecting thought! He had been the instrument chosen of God to communicate to the world His counsels respecting the assembly, and to establish in the midst of the world this

precious object of His affections united to Christ at His right hand. What would become of it down here?

After this time the apostle has to give account of himself, and to accomplish in a striking manner the predictions of the Lord. Brought before tribunals by the malice of the Jews, given up through their hatred into the hands of the Gentiles, it was all to turn to a testimony. Kings and rulers shall hear the gospel, but the love of many will grown cold. This in general is his position; but there were details personal to himself.

We may remark here a leading feature in this book which has been little noticed; that is, the development of the enmity of the Jews, bringing on their final rejection, such as they were. The Acts ends with the last case presented; the work in the midst of that people is left in oblivion, and that of Paul occupies the whole scene in the historical narrative given by the Spirit. The antagonism of the Jews to the manifestation of the assembly, which took their place and blotted out the distinction between them and the Gentiles, by bringing in heaven and full sovereign grace in contrast with law, which while universal in its direction was given to a distinct people (grace of which the sinner availed himself by faith) this antagonism, presenting itself at every step in the career of the apostle, although he acted with all possible circumspection, is aroused in its full intensity at Jerusalem, its natural center, and manifests itself by violence and by efforts made with the Gentiles for the purpose of cutting off Paul from the earth. This rendered the apostle's position very serious with regard to the Gentiles at Jerusalem — a city the more jealous of its religious importance from having in fact under Roman bondage lost the reality of it, through its being transformed into a spirit of rebellion against the authority which crippled it.

After the history of Christianity, viewed as connected with Judaism (in reference to the promises and their fulfillment in the Messiah), we find Paul in three different positions. First, condescending, for the purpose of conciliation, to take account of that which still existed at Jerusalem, and even addressing the Jews everywhere in their synagogues, as having administratively the first right to hear the gospel (“To the Jew first and then to the Greek”) for Jesus was the minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to fulfill the promises made to the fathers. In this respect he

never failed, and he establishes these principles clearly and dogmatically in the Epistle to the Romans. We next find him, in all the liberty of the full truth of grace and of the purposes of God, in his own especial work from which he condescended in grace. This is recorded in the Epistle to the Ephesians. In both these cases he acts under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, fulfilling the Lord's will. Afterwards, in the third place, we see him in conflict with the hostility of legal Judaism, the emissaries of which he met continually, and into the very focus of which he at length threw himself by going to Jerusalem, in that part of his history which we are now considering. How much was of God — how much was the consequence of his own steps — is matter for consideration in this narrative. That the hand of God was in it for the good of the assembly, and in conducting His beloved servant for his own good in the end, is beyond all doubt. We have only to search out how far the will and the mind of Paul came in, as means which God used to bring about the result He intended, whether for the assembly or for His servant, or for the Jews. These thoughts are of the deepest interest, and require humble examination of that which God has set before us to instruct us on this point in the history which the Spirit Himself has given us of these things.

The first thing which strikes us at the beginning of this history is that the Holy Ghost tells him not to go to Jerusalem (chap. 21:4). This word has evident importance. Paul felt himself bound: there was something in his own mind which impelled him thither, a feeling that forced him in that direction; but the Spirit, in His positive and outward testimony forbade his going.

The apostle's intention had been to go to Rome. The apostle of the Gentiles sent forth to preach the gospel to every creature, there was nothing of self in this project that was not according to grace (Romans 1:13-15). Nevertheless God had not allowed him to go thither. He was obliged to write his Epistle to them without seeing them. Heaven is the metropolis of Christianity. Rome and Jerusalem must have no place with Paul, except as to bearing with the one in affection, and being ready, when he might, to evangelise the other. Acts 19:21, which is translated "in the spirit," only means the spirit of Paul. He purposed, in his own mind, saying, "When I have been there, I must also see Rome." Afterwards he charge himself with the offerings of the saints in Achaia and Macedonia.

He wished to prove his affection for the poor of his own people (Galatians 2:10). This was all well. I do not know if it was a function suited to an apostle. It was an evidently Jewish feeling, which set peculiar value on the poor of Jerusalem, and so far on Jerusalem itself. A Jew would rather be poor at Jerusalem than rich among the Gentiles. Poor Christians were there no doubt from the time of their conversion, but that was the origin of this system (compare Nehemiah 11:2 and Acts 24:17). All this belonged to relationship with Judaism (Romans 15:25-28). Paul loved the nation to which he belonged after the flesh, and which had been the people beloved of God and was still His people although rejected for a time, the remnant having now to enter the kingdom of God through Christianity. This attachment of Paul to them (which had its right and deeply affecting side, but which on another side had to do with the flesh) led him into the center of Judaism. He was the messenger of the heavenly glory, which brought out the doctrine of the assembly composed of Jews and Gentiles, united without distinction in the one body of Christ, thus blotting out Judaism; but his love for his nation carried him, I repeat, into the very center of hostile Judaism — Judaism enraged against this spiritual equality. His testimony, the Lord had told him, they would not receive.

Nevertheless the hand of God was doubtless in it. Paul individually found his level.

As the instrument of God's revelation, he proclaims in all its extent and all its force the purpose of the sovereign grace of God. The wine is not adulterated; it flows out as pure as he had received it. And he walked in a remarkable way at the height of the revelation committed to him. Still Paul individually is a man; he must be exercised and manifested, and in those exercises to which God has subjected us. Where the flesh has found its pleasure, the sphere in which it has gratified itself, it is there that, when God acts, it finds its sorrow. Yet, if God saw fit to prove His servant and manifest him to himself, He stood by him, and blessed him even through the trial itself — turned it into testimony, and refreshed the heart of His beloved and faithful servant. The manifestation of that in him which is not according to the Spirit, or to the height of his calling, was in love for his blessing and for that of the assembly. Blessed is he who can walk as faithfully and maintain his standing to the same degree through grace in the

path of grace! Nevertheless Christ is the only model. I see no one who (in another career) so much resembled Him in His public life as Paul.

The more we search into the apostle's walk the more we shall see this resemblance. Only that Christ was the model of perfection in obedience; in His precious servant there was the flesh. Paul would have been the first to acknowledge that perfection may be ascribed to Jesus only.

I believe then that the hand of God was in this journey of Paul's; that in His sovereign wisdom He willed that His servant should undertake it, and also have blessing in it; but that the means employed to lead him into it according to that sovereign wisdom, was the apostle's human affection for the people who were his kinsmen after the flesh; and that he was not led into it by the Holy Ghost acting on the part of Christ in the assembly. This attachment to his people, this human affection, met with that among the people which put it in its place. Humanly speaking, it was an amiable feeling; but it was not the power of the Holy Ghost founded on the death and resurrection of Christ. Here there was no longer Jew nor Gentile. In the living Christ it was right. Christ went on in it to the end in order that He might die; for this purpose He came.

Paul's affection was good in itself, but as a spring of action it did not come up to the height of the work of the Spirit, who on Christ's part had sent him afar from Jerusalem to the Gentiles in order to reveal the assembly as His body united to Him in heaven. Thus the Jews hearkened to him till it came to that word, and then they cried out and raised the tumult which caused Paul to be made prisoner.\* He suffered for the truth, but where that truth had no access according to Christ's own testimony: "they will not receive thy testimony concerning me." It was necessary however that the Jews should manifest their hatred to the gospel, and give this final proof of their inveterate opposition to the ways of God in grace.

[\* And this circumstance is worthy of note, that it was Christ's declaration that he should go to the Gentiles; to which we may add that this at the time was accompanied by the declaration, "Get thee quickly out of Jerusalem, for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me." So that what declared his testimony was of no avail in Jerusalem was the occasion of his being seized. On Christ's word and his own showing, his apostolic service was not there but elsewhere.]

At the same time, whatever may have been the subsequent labors of the apostle (if there were any the Holy Ghost does not make mention of them: Paul sees the Jews in his own house, and receives all who come to him; but) the page of the Spirit's history closes here. This history is ended. The apostolic mission to the Gentiles in connection with the founding of the assembly is concluded. Rome is but the prison of the apostle of the truth, to whom the truth had been committed. Jerusalem rejects him, Rome imprisons him and puts him to death as it had done to Jesus, whom the blessed apostle had to resemble in this also according to his desire in Philippians 3; for Christ and conformity to Him was his only object. It was given him to find this conformity in his service, as it was so strongly in his heart and soul, with the necessary difference between a ministry which was not to break the bruised reed nor lift up its voice in the street, and one which in testimony was to bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

The mission of the twelve to the Gentiles, going out from Jerusalem (Matthew 28), never took place, so far as any record of it by the Holy Ghost goes.\* Jerusalem detained them. They did not even go over the cities of Israel. The ministry of the circumcision was given to Peter, that of the Gentiles to Paul in connection with the doctrine of the assembly and of a glorious Christ — a Christ whom he no longer knew after the flesh. Jerusalem, to which the apostle was drawn by his affection, rejected both him and his mission. His ministry to the Gentiles, so far as the free effect of the power of the Spirit, ended likewise. Ecclesiastical history may perhaps tell us more; nevertheless God has taken care to bury it in profound darkness Nothing farther is owned by the Spirit. We hear no more of the apostles at Jerusalem; and Rome, as we have seen, had none, so far as the Holy Ghost informs us, excepting that the apostle of the Gentiles was a prisoner there and finally put to death. Man has failed everywhere on earth. The religious and political centers of the world — centers, according to God, as to the earth — have rejected the testimony, and put the testifier to death; but the result has been that Heaven has maintained its rights inviolate and in their absolute purity. The assembly the true heavenly and eternal metropolis of glory and of the ways of God — the assembly which had its place in the counsels of God before the world was — the assembly which answers to His heart in grace as united to Christ in glory — remains the object of faith. It is revealed according to



the mind of God, and perfectly such as it is in His mind, until, as the heavenly Jerusalem, it shall be manifested in glory, in connection with the accomplishment of the ways of God on the earth, in the re-establishment of Jerusalem as the center of His earthly dealings in grace, His throne, His metropolis in the midst even of the Gentiles, and in the disappearance even of Gentile power, the seat and center of which was Rome.

[\* Mark 16:20 is the only passage which may be supposed to allude to what would fulfill it; and even not so as such, for that and Colossians 1:6 refer to all the world, and are founded on ascension, not a mission to the Gentiles only founded on resurrection.]

Let us now examine the thoughts of the apostle, and that which took place historically. Paul wrote from Corinth to Rome, when he had this journey in view. Christianity had flowed towards that center of the world, without any apostle whatsoever having planted it there. Paul follows it. Rome is, as it were, a part of his apostolic domain which escapes him (Romans 1:13-15). He returns to the subject in chapter IS. If he might not come (for God will not begin with the capital of the world — compare the destruction of Hazor in Canaan, Joshua 11:11), he will at least write to them on the ground of his universal apostleship to the Gentiles. Some Christians were already established there: so God would have it. But they were in some sort, of his province. Many of them had been personally in connection with him. See the number and character of the salutations at the end of the epistle, which have a peculiar stamp, making the Roman Christians in great part the children of Paul.

In Romans 15:14-29 he develops his apostolic position with respect to the Romans and others. He desired also to go into Spain when he had seen the brethren at Rome a little. He wishes to impart spiritual gifts to them, but to be comforted by their mutual faith, to enjoy a little of their company. They are in connection with him; but they have their place as Christians at Rome without his ever having been there. When therefore he had seen them a little, he would go into Spain. But he was disappointed with regard to these projects. All that we are told by the Holy Ghost is that he was a prisoner at Rome. Profound silence as to Spain. Instead of going farther when he had seen them and imparted gifts, he remains two years a prisoner at Rome. It is not known whether he was set free or not. Some say yes, others no; the word says nothing.

It is here, when he had laid open his intentions and the character of his relationships in the Spirit with Rome, and when a large field opens before him in the west, that his old affection for his people and for Jerusalem intervenes — "But now I go unto Jerusalem to carry help to the saints" (Romans 15:25-28). Why not go to Rome according to the energy of the Spirit, his work being finished in Greece? (v. 23). God, no doubt, ordained that those things should happen at Jerusalem, and that Rome and the Romans should have this sad place with respect to the testimony of a glorified Christ and of the assembly, which the apostle rendered before the world. But as to Paul, why put rebellious Jerusalem between his evangelical desire and his work? The affection was good, and the service good — for a deacon, or a messenger of the churches: but for Paul, who had the whole west open before his evangelising thought!

For the moment Jerusalem intercepted his view. Accordingly, as we have seen, the Holy Ghost warned him on his way. He foresaw himself also the danger he was running into (Romans 15:30-32). He was sure (v. 29) of coming in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ; but he was not sure that he should come with joy. The thing for which he asked their prayers turned out quite otherwise than he desired. He was delivered, but as a prisoner. He took courage when he saw the brethren at Appii Forum and the Three Taverns. There was no journey into Spain either.

All this to me is very solemn. The Lord, full of grace and tenderness, was with His poor but beloved servant. In the case of such an one as Paul, it is a most affecting history, and the Lord's ways adorable and perfect in goodness. The reality of faith is there in full; the ways of grace perfect, and perfect in tenderness also, in the Lord. He stands by His servant in the trial in which he finds himself, to encourage and strengthen him. At the same time, with regard to the desire of going to Jerusalem, he is warned by the Spirit, and its consequences are set before him; and, not turning back, he undergoes the needful discipline, which brings his soul into its place, and a full place of blessing before God. His walk finds its level as to spiritual power. He feels the power outwardly of that whereof he had felt the moral power seeking to hinder his ministry; and a chain upon his flesh answers to the liberty he had allowed it. There was justice in God's dealings. His servant was too precious for it to be otherwise. At the same time, as to result and testimony, God ordered everything for His own

glory, and with perfect wisdom as to the future welfare of the assembly. Jerusalem, as we have seen, rejects the testimony to the Gentiles, in a word the ways of God in the assembly (compare 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16); and Rome becomes the prison of that testimony; while according to the Lord's promise the testimony is carried before rulers and kings, and before Caesar himself.

I have said that grace put Paul into the position of Christ given up to the Gentiles by the hatred of the Jews. It was a great favor. The difference — besides the infinite love of the Lord who gave Himself up — was that Jesus was there in His true place before God. He had come to the Jews: that He should be delivered up was the crowning act of His devotedness and His service. It was in fact the offering Himself by the eternal Spirit. It was the sphere of His service as sent of God. Paul re-entered it: the energy of the Holy Ghost had placed him outside — "Delivering thee," said the Lord, "from the people and from the Gentiles, to whom I now send thee to open their eyes," etc. (Acts 26:17). Jesus had taken him out from them both, to exercise a ministry that united the two in one body in Christ in heaven who had thus sent him. In his service Paul knew no one after the flesh; in Christ Jesus there was neither Jew nor Greek.

Let us resume his history. He is warned by the Holy Ghost not to go up (chap. 21:4). Nevertheless he continues his journey to Caesarea. A prophet named Agabus comes down from Judea, and announces that Paul shall be bound and given up to the Gentiles. It might be said that this did not forbid his going. It is true; yet, coming after the other, it strengthened the warning already given. When he walked in the liberty of the Spirit, warned of danger, he fled from it, while braving every peril if the testimony required it. At Ephesus he allowed himself to be persuaded not to go into the theatre.

The Holy Ghost does not usually warn of danger. He leads in the path of the Lord, and if persecution comes, He gives strength to endure it. Here Paul was continually warned. His friends entreat him not to go up. He will not be persuaded. They hold their peace, little satisfied, saying, "The will of the Lord be done." And, I doubt not, it was His will, but for the accomplishment of purposes that Paul knew not by the intelligence given

of the Holy Ghost. Only he felt pressed in spirit to go, and ready to suffer all things for the Lord.

He departs therefore to Jerusalem; and when there, he goes to the house of James, and all the elders assemble. Paul relates to them the work of God among the Gentiles. They turn to their Judaism, of which the multitude were full, and, while rejoicing in the good that was wrought of God by the Spirit, they wish Paul to show himself obedient to the law. The believers in Jerusalem must needs come together on the arrival of Paul, and their prejudices with regard to the law must be satisfied. Paul has brought himself into the presence of man's exigencies: to refuse compliance with them would be to say that their thoughts about him were true; to act according to their desire was to make a rule, not of the guidance of the Spirit in all liberty of love, but of the ignorant and prejudiced condition of these Jewish believers. It is that Paul was there, not according to the Spirit as an apostle, but according to his attachment to these former things. One must be above the prejudices of others, and free from their influence, to be able to condescend to them in love.

Being there, Paul can hardly do other than satisfy their demands. But the hand of God is in it. This act throws him into the power of his enemies. Seeking to please the believing Jews, he finds himself in the lion's mouth, in the hands of the Jews who were adversaries to the gospel. It may be added that we hear nothing more of the Christians of Jerusalem. They had done their work. I have no doubt that they accepted the alms of the Gentiles.

The whole city being moved and the temple shut, the commander of the band comes to rescue Paul from the Jews who wished to kill him, taking him however into custody himself, for the Romans were used to these tumults, and heartily despised this nation beloved of God, but proud and degraded in their own condition. Nevertheless Paul commands the respect of the captain of the band by his manner of addressing him, and he permits him to speak to the people. To the chief captain Paul had spoken in Greek; but, always ready to win by the attentions of love, and especially when the loved though rebellious people were in question, he speaks to them in Hebrew; that is, in their ordinary language called Hebrew. He does not enlarge upon what the Lord said revealing Himself to him, but he gives

them a particular account of his subsequent interview with Ananias, a faithful Jew and esteemed of all. He then enters on the point which necessarily characterised his position and his defence. Christ had appeared to him, saying, "They will not receive thy testimony at Jerusalem. I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles." Blessed be God! it is the truth; but why tell it to those very persons who, according to his own words, would not receive his testimony? The only thing which gave authority to such a mission was the Person of Jesus, and they did not believe in it.

In his testimony to the people the apostle laid stress in vain upon the Jewish piety of Ananias: genuine as it might be, it was but a broken reed. Nevertheless it was all, except his own. His discourse had but one effect — to bring out the violent and incorrigible hatred of this unhappy nation to every thought of grace in God, and the unbounded pride which indeed went before the fall that crushed them. The chief captain, seeing the violence of the people, and not at all understanding what was going on, with the haughty contempt of a Roman, orders Paul to be bound and scourged to make him confess what it meant. Now Paul was himself a Roman citizen, and born such, while the chief captain had purchased that freedom. Paul quietly makes this fact known, and they who were about to scourge him withdraw. The chief captain was afraid because he had bound him; but, as his authority was concerned in it, he leaves him bound. The next day he looses him and brings him before the council, or Sanhedrim, of the Jews. The people, not merely their rulers, had rejected grace.

Paul addresses the council with the gravity and dignity of an upright man accustomed to walk with God. It is not a testimony born to them for their good; but the appeal of a good conscience to their consciences, if they had any. The immediate answer is an outrage on the part of the judge or chief of the council. Paul, roused by this procedure, denounces judgment on him from God; but, warned that he was the high priest (who was not so clothed as to be recognised), he excuses himself by his ignorance of the fact, quoting the formal prohibition of the law to speak evil of the ruler of the people. All this was right and in place with regard to men; but the Holy Ghost could not say, "I wist not." It is not the activity of the Spirit performing the work of grace and of testimony. But it is the means of the final judgment of God upon the people. It is in this character, as regards the Jews, that Paul appears here. Paul makes a much better appearance

than his judges, who thoroughly disgrace themselves and manifest their dreadful condition; but he does not appear for God before them. Afterwards he avails himself of the different parties of which the council were composed to throw complete disorder into it, by declaring himself to be a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, and called in question for a dogma of that sect. This was true; but it was below the height of his own word, “that which was gain I counted loss for Christ’s sake.” The Jews however fully manifest themselves. That which Paul said raises a tumult, and the chief captain takes him from among them. God has all things at His disposal. A nephew of Paul’s, never mentioned elsewhere, hears of an ambush laid for him and warns him of it. Paul sends him to the chief captain, who expedites the departure of Paul under a guard to Caesarea. God watched over him, but all is on the level of human and providential ways. There is not the angel as in Peter’s case, nor the earthquake as at Philippi. We are sensibly on different ground.

Paul appears before the governors in succession — the Sanhedrim, Felix, Festus, Agrippa, and afterwards Caesar. And here, when occasion offers, we have striking appeals to conscience; when his defence is in question, the manly and honest declarations of a good conscience, that rose above the passions and interests that surrounded him. I pass over in silence the worldly egotism which betrays itself in Lysias and Festus, by their assumption of all sorts of good qualities and good conduct; the mixture of awakened conscience and absence of principle in the governors; the desire to please the Jews for their own importance, or to facilitate their government of a rebellious people; and the contempt felt by those who were not as responsible as Lysias for the public tranquillity. The position of Agrippa and all the details of the history have a remarkable stamp of truth, and present the various characters in so living a style that we seem to be in the scenes described. We see the persons moving in it. This moreover strikingly characterises the writings of Luke.

Other circumstances claim our attention. Festus, in order to please the Jews, proposed to take Paul to Jerusalem. But Rome was to have its share in the rejection of the gospel of grace, of the testimony to the assembly; and Paul appeals to Caesar. Festus must therefore send him thither, although embarrassed to know what crime he is to charge him with in sending him. Sad picture of man’s injustice! But everything accomplishes

the purposes of God. In the use of the means Paul succeed no better than in his attempt to satisfy the Jews. It was perhaps to the eye of man his only resource under the circumstances; but the Holy Ghost is careful to inform us that he might have been set at liberty if he had not appealed to Caesar.

In Agrippa there was, I believe, more curiosity than conscience, though there may have been some desire to profit by the occasion to know what the doctrine was which had so stirred up people's minds, a disposition to inquire which was more than curiosity. In general his words are taken as if he was not far from being convinced that Christianity was true: perhaps he would have been so if his passions had not stood in the way. But it may be questioned whether this is the force of the Greek, as generally supposed, and not, rather, 'In a little you are going to make a Christian of me,' covering his uneasiness at the appeal to his professed Judaism before Festus, by an affected and slighting remark. And such I believe to be the case. The notion of an "almost christian" is quite a mistake, though a man's mind may be under influences which ought to lead him to it, and yet reject it. He would have been glad for Paul to be set free. He expressed his conviction that it might have been done if he had not appealed to Caesar. He gives his opinion to Festus as a wise and reasonable man; but his words were in reality dictated by his conscience — words that he could venture to utter when Festus and all the rest were agreed that Paul had done nothing worthy of death or of bonds.

God would have the innocence of his beloved servant proved in the face of the world. His discourse tends to this. He goes farther, but his object is to give account of his conduct. His miraculous conversion is related in order to justify his subsequent career; but it is so related as to act upon the conscience of Agrippa, who was acquainted with Jewish things, and evidently desired to hear something of Christianity, which he suspected to be the truth. Accordingly he lays hold with eagerness of the opportunity that presents itself to hear the apostle explain it. But he remains much where he was. His condition of soul opens however the mouth of Paul, and he addresses himself directly and particularly to the king; who moreover, evidently engrossed by the subject, had called on him to speak. To Festus it was all a rhapsody.

The dignity of Paul's manner before all these governors is perfect. He addresses himself to the conscience with a forgetfulness of self that showed a man in whom communion with God, and the sense of his relationship with God, carried the mind above all effect of circumstances. He was acting for God; and, with a perfect deference for the position of those he addressed, we see that which was morally altogether superior to them. The more humiliating his circumstances, the more beauty there is in this superiority. Before the Gentiles he is a missionary from God. He is again (blessed be God!) in his right place. All that he said to the Jews was right and deserved; but why was he, who had been delivered from the people, subjected to their total want of conscience, and their blind passions which gave no place for testimony? Nevertheless, as we have seen, it was to be so in order that the Jews might in every way fill up the measure of their iniquity, and indeed that the blessed apostle might follow the steps of his Master.

Paul's address to king Agrippa furnishes us with the most complete picture of the entire position of the apostle, as he himself looked at it when his long service and the light of the Holy Ghost illuminated his backward glance.

He does not speak of the assembly — that was a doctrine for instruction, and not a part of his history. But everything that related to his personal history, in connection with his ministry, he gives in detail. He had been a strict Pharisee; and here he connects the doctrine of Christ with the hopes of the Jews. He was in bonds “for the hope of the promise made unto the fathers.” No doubt resurrection entered into it. Why should the king think resurrection impossible, that God was not able to raise the dead? This brings him to another point. He had verily thought with himself that he ought to do many things against Jesus of Nazareth, and had carried them out with all the energy of his character, and with the bigotry of a devout Jew. His present condition, as a witness among the Gentiles, depended on the change wrought in him by the revelation of the Lord when he was engaged in seeking to destroy His name. Near Damascus a light brighter than the sun struck them all to the earth, and he alone heard the voice of the Righteous One, so that he knew from His own mouth that it was Jesus, and that He looked upon those who believed in Him as Himself. He could not resist such a testimony. But as this was the great grievance to



the Jews, he shows that his own position was formally marked out by the Lord Himself. He was called to give ocular evidence of the glory which he had seen; that is, of Jesus in that glory; and of other things also, for the manifestation of which Jesus would again appear to him. A glorious Christ known (personally) only in heaven was the subject of the testimony committed to him. For this purpose He had set Paul apart from the Jews as much as from the Gentiles, his mission belonging immediately to heaven, having its origin there; and he was sent formally by the Lord of glory to the Gentiles, to change their position with respect to God through faith in this glorious Jesus, opening their eyes, bringing them out of darkness into light, from the power of Satan to God, and giving them an inheritance among the sanctified. This was a definite work. The apostle was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, and he had taught the Gentiles to turn to God, and to act as those who had done so. For this cause the Jews sought to kill him.

Nothing more simple, more truthful, than this history. It put the case of Paul and the conduct of the Jews in the clearest light. When called to order by Festus, who naturally thought it nothing more than irrational enthusiasm, he appeals with perfect dignity and quick discernment to Agrippa's knowledge of the facts upon which all this was based: for the thing had not been done in a corner.

Agrippa was not far from being convinced; but his heart was unchanged. The wish that Paul expresses brings the matter back to its moral reality. The meeting is dissolved. The king resumes his kingly place in courtesy and condescension, and the disciple that of a prisoner; but, whatever might be the apostle's position, we see in him a heart thoroughly happy and filled with the Spirit and love of God. Two years of prison had brought him no depression of heart or faith, but had only set him free from his harassing connection with the Jews, to give him moments spent with God.

Agrippa, surprised and carried away by Paul's clear and straightforward narrative,\* relieves himself from the pressure of Paul's personal address by saying, 'In a little you are going to make a Christian of me.' Charity might have said, "Would to God that thou wert!" But there is a spring in the heart of Paul that does not stop there. "Would to God," says he, "that not only thou, but all those that hear me, were... altogether such as I am,

except these bonds!” What happiness and what love (and in God these two things go together) are expressed in these words! A poor prisoner, aged and rejected, at the end of his career he is rich in God. Blessed years that he had spent in prison! He could give himself as a model of happiness; for it filled his heart. There are conditions of soul which unmistakably declare themselves. And why should he not be happy? His fatigues ended, his work in a certain sense finished, he possessed Christ and in Him all things. The glorious Jesus, who had brought him into the pains and labor of the testimony, was now his possession and his crown. Such is ever the case. The cross in service — by virtue of what Christ Is — is the enjoyment of all that He is, when the service is ended; and in some sort is the measure of that enjoyment. This was the case with Christ Himself, in all its fullness; it is ours, in our measure, according to the sovereign grace of God. Only Paul’s expression supposes the Holy Ghost acting fully in the heart in order that it may be free to enjoy, and that the Spirit is not grieved.

[\* It is hardly to be read “almost.” Relieving himself, Agrippa says, “You’ll soon be making a Christian of me,” covering his feelings, as I have said, by a slighting speech. But I have no doubt his mind was greatly wrought upon.]

A glorious Jesus — a Jesus who loved him, a Jesus who put the seal of His approbation and love upon his service, a Jesus who would take him to Himself in glory, and with whom he was one (and that known according to the abundant power of the Holy Ghost, according to divine righteousness), a Jesus who revealed the Father, and through whom he had the place of adoption — was the infinite source of joy to Paul, the glorious object of his heart and of his faith; and, being known in love, filled his heart with that love overflowing towards all men. What could he wish them better than to be as he was except his bonds? How, filled with this love, could he not wish it, or not be full of this large affection? Jesus was its measure.

His innocence fully established and acknowledged by his judges, the purposes of God must still be accomplished. His appeal to Caesar must carry him to Rome, that he may bear testimony there also. In his position here he again resembles Jesus. But at the same time, if we compare them, the servant, blessed as he is, grows dim, and is eclipsed before Christ, so that we could no longer think of him. Jesus offered Himself up in grace; He

appealed to God only; He answered but to bear testimony to the truth — that truth was the glory of His Person, His own rights, humbled as He was. His Person shines out through all the dark clouds of human violence, which could have had no power over Him had it not been the moment for thus fulfilling the will of God. For that purpose He yields to power given them from above. Paul appeals to Caesar. He is a Roman — a human dignity conferred by man, and available before men; he uses it for himself, God thus accomplishing His purposes. The one is blessed, and his services; the other is perfect, the perfect subject of the testimony itself.

Nevertheless, if there is no longer the free service of the Holy Ghost for Paul, and if he is a prisoner in the hands of the Romans, his soul at least is filled with the Spirit. Between him and God all is liberty and joy. All this shall turn to his salvation, that is, to his definitive victory, in his contest with Satan. How blessed! Through the communications of the Spirit of Jesus Christ the word of God shall not be bound. Others shall gain strength and liberty in view of his bonds, even although, in the low state of the church, some take advantage of them. But Christ will be preached and magnified, and with that Paul is content. Oh how true this is, and the perfect joy of the heart, come what may! We are the subjects of grace (God be praised!), as well as instruments of grace in service. Christ alone is its object, and God secures His glory — nothing more is needed: this itself is our portion and our perfect joy.

It will be remarked in this interesting history, that at the moment when Paul might have been the most troubled, when his course was perhaps the least evidently according to the power of the Spirit, when he brought disorder into the council by using arguments which afterwards he hesitates himself entirely to justify — it is then that the Lord, full of grace, appears to him to encourage and strengthen him. The Lord, who formerly had told him at Jerusalem to go away because they would not receive his testimony, who had sent him warnings not to go thither, but who accomplished His own purposes of grace in the infirmity and through the human affections of His servant, by their means even, exercising at the same time His wholesome discipline in His divine wisdom by these same means — Jesus appears to him to tell him that, as he had testified of Him at Jerusalem, so should he bear witness at Rome also. This is the way that the Lord interprets in grace the whole history, at the moment when His

servant might have felt all that was painful in his position, perhaps have been overwhelmed by it, remembering that the Spirit had forbidden him to go up; for, when in trial, a doubt is torment. The faithful and gracious Savior intervenes therefore to encourage Paul, and to put His own interpretation on the position of His poor servant, and to mark the character of His love for him. If it was necessary to exercise discipline for his good on account of his condition and to perfect him, Jesus was with him in the discipline. Nothing more touching than the tenderness, the opportuneness, of this grace. Moreover, as we have said, it all accomplished the purposes of God with regard to the Jews, to the Gentiles, to the world. For God can unite in one dispensation the most various ends.

And now, restored, reanimated by grace, Paul shows himself in his journey to be master of the position. It is he who counsels, according to the communication he receives from God, he who encourages, he who acts, in every way, on God's part, in the midst of the scene around him. The description, full of life and reality, which Luke his companion, gives of this voyage, needs no comment. It is admirable as a living picture of the whole scene. Our concern is to see what Paul was amid the false confidence, or the distress of the whole company.

At Melita we find him again exercising his accustomed power among that barbarous people. One sees that God is with him. Evangelisation does not, however, appear in the account of his sojourn there, or of his journey.

Landed in Italy, we see him depressed: the love of the brethren encourages and reanimates him; and he goes on to Rome, where he dwells two years in a house that he hires, a soldier being with him as a guard. Probably those who carried him to Rome had been given to understand that it was only a matter of Jewish jealousy, for all through the journey they treated him with all possible respect. Besides he was a Roman.

Arrived at Rome, he sends for the Jews; and here, for the last time, their condition is set before us, and the judgment which had been hanging over their heads ever since the utterance of the prophecy (which was especially connected with the house of David and with Judah) the judgment pronounced by Esaias, which the Lord Jesus declared should come upon them because of His rejection, the execution of which was suspended by

the long-suffering of God, until the testimony of the Holy Ghost was also rejected — this judgment is here brought to mind by Paul at the end of the historical part of the New Testament. It is their definitive condition solemnly declared by the minister of sovereign grace, and which should continue until God interposed in power to give them repentance, and to deliver them, and to glorify Himself in them by grace.

We have already marked this characteristic of the Acts, which comes out here in a clear and striking manner — the setting aside of the Jews. That is to say, they set themselves aside by the rejection of the testimony of God, of the work of God. They put themselves outside that which God was setting up. They will not follow Him in His progress of grace. And thus they are altogether left behind, without God and without present communication with Him. His word abides for ever, and His mercy; but others take the place of positive and present relationship with Him. Individuals from among them enter into another sphere on other grounds; but Israel disappears and is blotted out for a time from the sight of God.

It is this which is presented in the book of Acts. The patience of God is exercised towards the Jews themselves in the preaching of the gospel and the apostolic mission at the beginning. Their hostility develops itself by degrees and reaches its height in the case of Stephen. Paul is raised up, a witness of grace towards them as an elect remnant, for he was himself of Israel; but introducing, in connection with a heavenly Christ, something entirely new as doctrine — the assembly, the body of Christ in heaven; and the setting aside of all distinction between Jew and Gentile as sinners, and in the oneness of that body. This is linked historically with that which had been established at Jerusalem, in order to maintain unity and the connection of the promises; but in itself, as a doctrine, it was a thing hidden in God in all the ages, having been in His purposes of grace before the world was. The enmity of the Jews to this truth never abated. They used every means to excite the Gentiles against those who taught the doctrine, and to prevent the formation of the assembly itself. God, having acted with perfect patience and grace unto the end, puts the assembly into the place of the Jews, as His house, and the vessel of His promises on earth, by making it His habitation by the Spirit. The Jews were set aside (alas! their spirit soon took possession of the assembly itself); and the assembly, and the clear and positive doctrine of no difference between Jew

and Gentile (by nature alike the children of wrath), and of their common and equal privileges as members of one only body, has been fully declared and made the basis of all relationship between God and every soul possessed of faith. This is the doctrine of the apostle in the Epistles to the Romans and Ephesians\* At the same time the gift of eternal life, as promised before the world was, has been made manifest by being born again\*\* (the commencement of a new existence with a divine character), and partaking of divine righteousness; these two things being united in our resurrection with Christ, by which, our sins being forgiven, we are placed before God as Christ, who is at once our life and our righteousness. This life manifests itself by conformity to the life of Christ on earth, who left us an example that we should follow His steps. It is the divine life manifested in man — in Christ as the object, in us as testimony.

[\* In Romans in their personal position, in Ephesians in the corporate.]

[\*\* The word “regeneration” is not applied in scripture to our being born again; it is a change of position in us connected with our having died with Him and resurrection. It is found twice; once in Matthew 19 it is Christ’s coming kingdom; and in Titus it is the washing of baptism, as typically bringing out of the old Adam state and into the christian, but distinguished from the renewing of the Holy Ghost.]

The cross of Christ is the basis, the fundamental center, of all these truths, the relations between God and man as he was, his responsibility; grace; expiation; the end of life, as to sin, the law, and the world; the putting away of sin through the death of Christ, and its consequences in us. Everything is established there, and gives place to the power of life that was in Christ, who there perfectly glorified God — to that new existence into which He entered as man into the presence of the Father; by whose glory, as well as by His own divine power, and by the energy of the Holy Ghost, He was raised from the dead.

This does not prevent God’s resuming His ways in government with the Jews on earth, when the church is complete and manifested on high; and which He will do according to His promises and the declarations of prophecy. The apostle explains this also in the Epistle to the Romans; but it belongs to the study of that epistle. The ways of God in judgment with regard to the Gentiles also at the same period will be shown us in the Apocalypse, as well as in prophetic passages of the Epistles in connection with the coming of Christ, and even with His government of the world in

general from the beginning to the end; together with the warnings necessary for the assembly when the days of deception begin to dawn and to be developed morally in the ruin of the assembly, viewed as God's witness in the world.

Our apostle, when brought to Rome, declares (upon the manifestation of unbelief among the Jews, which we have pointed out) that the salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles; and he dwells two whole years in the house he had hired, receiving those who came to him (for he had not liberty to go to them) preaching the kingdom of God and those things which concerned the Lord Jesus, with all boldness, no man forbidding him. And here the history is ended of this precious servant of God, beloved and honored by his Master, a prisoner in that Rome which, as head of the fourth empire, was to be the seat of opposition among the Gentiles, as Jerusalem of opposition among the Jews, to the kingdom and to the glory of Christ. The time for the full manifestation of that opposition was not yet come; but the minister of the assembly and of the gospel of glory is a prisoner there. It is thus that Rome begins its history in connection with the gospel that the apostle preached. Nevertheless God was with him.

## THE EPISTLES:

### INTRODUCTION

In the Epistles, we find the exposition of the result of that glorious work of grace, by which man is placed on entirely new ground with God, in reconciliation with Him; as well as the development of the counsels of God in Christ, according to which this new world is established and ordered. In giving this exposition of the ways of God in connection with the work which is their basis, the perfect efficacy of the work itself, and the order of our relations with God, are plainly set forth; so that the whole system, the whole plan of God, and the way in which it was put in execution, are presented. And in doing this, that which man is, that which God is, that which eternal life is, are clearly put before us.

The death and resurrection of Christ, as well as His exaltation to the right hand of God, form the center of all this instruction.

There are three great divisions in this instruction, which are connected in general with the instrument used of God in the communication of each part. 1st. The counsels of God, which are developed by Paul in connection with the revelation of true righteousness before God, the ground on which a man can be truly righteous before God — God's righteousness, man being a sinner. 2nd. The life of God, eternal life manifested and imparted. This is in John's epistle.\* 3rd. Christian life on the earth, in following a risen Christ. This we find in the Epistle of Peter, in connection with God's government of the world as such: the Christian is a pilgrim. There are also James and Jude. The first presents moral life — the life of faith on earth — as the true demonstration to men of our faith, and, in particular, of practical faith in Christ as well as in God, who answers our requests and our wants. On this account, while clearly and distinctly recognising faith in Christ, and our being begotten by the mighty grace of God through His word, this epistle scarcely rises in fact above such life as could have manifested and developed itself at any period whatsoever in a believer; only that it was the Christian, born of God, who now exemplified it, and that thus it was the law of liberty, because the new nature and the will of God ran together, and both were fully revealed in Christ. Thus the Epistle



of James is linked with the synagogue, and with Christians still in connection with Judaism, as we have seen them historically at Jerusalem with James at their head. The Epistle does not go beyond that position. It is the last testimony rendered to Israel looked at as the people of God, while at the same time distinguishing the quickened remnant who had faith in Christ, although they were not yet separated from the nation. Our habits of thought, founded not on imposed law without reason, but upon a much more complete development of Christianity (a development which was the manifestation of counsels much more ancient than the Jewish nation, for they were the eternal counsels of God), make it difficult for us to apprehend this form of the truth — a form in which it is connected with that which, because of the promises made to Israel, was historically its cradle here below.

[\* Paul's writings present man to God in and through Christ. John's Gospel presents God to man in Christ; the Epistles unfold divine life in Christ communicated to the believer; though Paul of course speaks of life, and John of man as in Christ before God. We must add for John's Gospel the coming of the Comforter. The reader will remark also that John's Gospel presents to us the new thing taking the place of Judaism, especially from chapter 4. Election runs all through it, very strongly expressed. The synoptical Gospels present Christ to the Jews, to man, to be received; but the world and the Jews are judged in John 1:10, 11. From that, our grace and the elect remnant, the sheep alone, are recognised, and the Jews treated as reprobate.]

If we have rightly understood the history of the Acts, it will make the position of believers, as we find it in the Epistle of James, much more intelligible to us. The Epistle is a correction of profession without life, and most valuable in this respect.

Jude has a very different character. It is not the cradle of Christianity, or of the assembly on earth: it is its decay and its death here below. It does not keep its first estate. This Epistle resembles a part of the second by Peter; but the latter speaks of the judgment brought in by the general government of God; Jude, of the fall of that which has had its existence since Pentecost under the eye of God, as responsible for the maintenance of the glory of His grace on the earth — a fall which, with regard to the present state of things, brings on the judgment of which Peter speaks, and which he carries on even to the dissolution of the earth and its elements. The evil that had already begun in its earliest germs gave rise to this development in Jude, and to the distinction of the true assembly, or at least of its members, who

would be presented in glory before the presence of the Lord in heaven. The Epistle to the Hebrews views the saint on earth, perfected as to acceptance by the work of Christ, and as having thus boldness to enter into the holiest, but as walking in weakness here on the earth, not united to Christ in heaven; hence it sets forth the priesthood of Christ as obtaining grace to help in time of need, while He appears always in the presence of God for us. It is not intercession in respect of sins (we have no more conscience of sins), but grace and help for us, such as we are. Christ's Person as God and man also is very fully brought out.

A more complete and more precise development will be found in studying the Epistles themselves.

We will begin with the Epistles of Paul. In the historical character of their doctrine James and Peter should precede them; this is to say, in the progress of the manifestations of God's counsels in their whole extent. But as developing the foundations of truth, and laying open its range as a whole, the Epistles of Paul have evidently the first place and throw light on that of the others. The Epistle to the Romans especially establishes the grand foundations of divine truth, and individual relationship with God, in the most plain and complete manner, so that we have no motive for deviating from the order in which we find them habitually placed. There is nothing in that order which, as to its details, is connected with any moral or chronological reason: it differs also in different countries and in different versions; but it is most convenient to take that order which the reader will find in his ordinary Bible. We may notice that which will be interesting in this respect as we study each epistle. It is probable that among the epistles of Paul that to the Thessalonians was the first. The date of the Epistle to the Galatians is less certain, but it was written after several years of labor; the two to the Corinthians, and that to the Romans, at Ephesus, Macedonia, and Corinth, respectively, during his journey round the Archipelago after his long sojourn at Ephesus; those to the Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, during his captivity. I reserve the others, Hebrews included, for the study of those epistles, pointing out only that which it may be useful to know in those of which the date is pretty certain.

The First Epistle of John, we may add, hardly belongs to any particular period, save that (in setting forth the nature and character of the life of God, the touchstone of all profession, and safeguard against all error, against all that does not bear its stamp, and against all the pretensions which, being devoid of it, betray themselves by that very fact) this epistle supposes the entrance of these errors, and thus the latter days of the apostolic age. And this indeed is more or less the case with the epistles called catholic, from not being addressed to any particular assembly, as Paul's, the master-builder's, were. In these we find prophecies of the evil from the very first, and the fact that the mystery of iniquity was at work already. But the catholic epistles take that ground. Jude speaks of corruption entering in, John of apostates going out.

Let us now consider a little the epistles of Paul himself. They have more than one character, whilst all displaying that spirit gifted from on high, which expatiates on the wide range of the thoughts of God, and in its wonderful energy can enter at the same time into every detail, even into those of individual life; that knows how to place itself exactly in the relations of a fugitive slave with his master, in view of grace, and to set forth with divine clearness all the counsels by which the Father glorifies His Son, by making Him the center of all His purposes, of the system which results from the exercises of all His power.

The care of the assemblies, the development of the counsels of God, the exercise of brotherly affection, have each their place in his thoughts and his labors; while he is often forced to develop the truth in striving against errors which rend his heart, whether he thinks of the Christ whom they dishonor, and of the truth — the instrument of salvation — which they undermine; or whether he remembers the dear redeemed ones of Christ who are troubled by these errors, perhaps turned aside from the true path by them.