

A Confidence that is not to be Cast Away

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"Cast not away therefore your confidence which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." Hebrews 10:35, 36, 37

When Jonathan, in the strength of the Lord, attended only by his armour-bearer, went up against the embodied host of the Philistine army, we read that "between the passages by which he sought to go over unto the Philistines' garrison, there was a sharp rock on the one side, and a sharp rock on the other side: and the name of the one was Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh." (1 Sam. 14:4.) I have thought sometimes that this narrow passage between the two rocks, Bozez and Seneh, may be viewed as descriptive of the path of a Christian between the two rocks, presumption and despair. I wish you, however, to observe that I do not offer this view as an interpretation of the passage. I am not one of those "eagle-eyed divines," as John Newton calls them, who see deep mysteries in every text of Scripture: as, for instance, the two covenants, Law and Gospel, in the two pence given to the host by the good Samaritan, or the burial of the Law under the cross in the burying of Deborah under the oak at Allon-bachuth. (Gen. 35:8.) I am not opposed to the spiritual and experimental, but to the mystical and fanciful interpretation of Scripture, which are two things widely different, though often strangely confounded together. Thus, what some consider great depths of spiritual interpretation, I view as great shallows: and explanations of Scripture which some imagine to be wonderful soarings of a

spiritual mind into the lofty heights of heavenly mysteries, I look upon as often little else but the unchecked flights of a presumptuous imagination, and a vain attempt to be great at the expense of exposing to ridicule the experimental interpretation of the word of truth. I hope I am an experimental preacher of God's truth, but I must say, as such, that few things have cast more contempt upon the spiritual interpretation of the word of God, than the foolish explanations of deep passages such as we often hear. But interpretation is one thing and illustration is another. I use, therefore, the description given of Jonathan's passage between Bozez and Seneh, not as if the Holy Ghost meant to represent by those two rocks presumption and despair, but as an illustration of the narrow path of a Christian between those two precipices, from one or the other of which tens of thousands have fallen to rise no more. O, could we, as the prophet speaks, "go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against the Lord" by these two evils (Isa. 66:24), we should see lying at the foot of one or other of these rocks from which they have fallen, more corpses than covered the ensanguined plains of Waterloo. But the family of God, for the most part, are not tempted to presume: that steep rock they dare not attempt to climb. Rashly to presume upon the mercy of God is rather a sin of the ungodly, of the self-righteous, of the hypocritical, and more especially of the professor of the letter of truth. The temptation of the Lord's people is much more to despond. Every pang of conviction, every ray of the majesty and holiness of God, every accusation of their own guilty conscience, would urge them to despair. By these they are, however, in good measure preserved from vain confidence and daring presumption; and thus the Lord the Spirit, by convincing them of sin, and laying guilt upon their conscience, may be said very much to have cut the roots of presumptuous confidence in their soul. But the very

circumstance of his laying guilt upon their conscience gives sometimes a great handle to Satan to work upon their desponding feelings. Thus, though it is true that the narrow path of the Christian lies between the rocks of presumption and despair, yet we may say, viewing the generality of cases, that he is much more tempted to despair than to presume.

The apostle seems to be of this mind in writing to the Hebrews, for though he strongly and repeatedly warns them against unbelief and apostacy, yet he seeks all through the Epistle much to encourage them to believe, and in our text specially bids them not to cast away their confidence, which, he tells them, "hath great recompense of reward." But if there were no temptation to relinquish their hope, to yield to the suggestions of the tempter, and abandon themselves to the despondency of their own miserable feelings, where would be the pith or pregnancy, force, or indeed meaning of the exhortation? Knowing, therefore, that this confidence, if it were of God, would be deeply tried, he affectionately warns them that they would need patience, that after doing the will of God, they might receive the promise. Yet to encourage them still to wait for the fulfilment of the promise, he reminds them of what was proclaimed in the word of truth, and which had already received a large measure of fulfilment in the coming of the Son of God. "For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." Taking with us this general sketch of the mind and meaning of the inspired apostle, let us, with God's help and blessing, now approach our text and see whether we may gather some instruction or encouragement from it. But in so doing, I shall, as the Lord may enable,

I.—*First, point out the force of the exhortation, "Cast not away your confidence."*

II.—*Secondly, the reason why this confidence should not be cast away: it "hath great recompense of reward."*

III.—*Thirdly, that though this confidence is not to be cast away, seeing there is such great recompense of reward attending it, it will be tried, and therefore there is a need of patience, that, after "they had done the will of God, they might receive the promise."*

IV.—*But fourthly and lastly, that they will not wait in vain; for "yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry."*

I.—When the apostle bids them not to cast away their confidence, of course he means that it is a good, that is, a spiritual confidence; because there is a confidence which is not worth keeping, and, as such, the sooner it is parted with the better. He tells us, as a case in point, in one of his Epistles, of a confidence which he himself once had, and on what that confidence rested: that it was *in the flesh*. The occasion which induced him to describe this vain confidence was the characteristic mark which he had given of the true circumcision, of whom he says that "they worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have *no confidence in the flesh*." "Though I," he says, "might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more." He then goes on to enumerate a great variety of religious privileges which in his days were very highly valued, and which lay at the foundation of the confidence of the professors of strict Judaism, of which he was one; such as being "circumcised on the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the Church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." He

enumerates those privileges in order to show that he had every ground of confidence if it could be based upon the flesh, or in any way be built on those privileges which he possessed in so ample a measure. But when mercy reached his heart, and the Person and work, beauty and blessedness, grace and glory of the Son of God were revealed to his soul, those privileges, which once were gain to him, as securing to him, as he imagined, the favour of God, now became in his eyes loss for Christ. He was therefore made willing to part with them; and not only so, but to count all things but dung that he might win Christ, and be found in him. (Phil. 3:4-9.) Thus we see that this man of God, who bids us in our text not cast away our confidence, himself once had a confidence of which he was ashamed, and which he was willing to part with and count but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. We need, then, go no further than the example of the apostle himself to see that there is such a thing as a vain, a fleshly confidence, and as such one of the greatest hindrances to the enjoyment of that spiritual confidence which hath great recompense of reward.

i. Let us, then, in order to open up the subject a little more closely as well as a little more clearly, first show what is the confidence *which we are to cast away*, that we may have a clearer and better view of the confidence which we are not to cast away.

1. A confidence that *stands upon our own righteousness* is certainly one that will not avail us in the day of judgment. John speaks of a confidence which, when he shall appear, we may not be ashamed of before him at his coming. (1 John 1:28.) But a confidence based upon our own righteousness we shall certainly be ashamed of in the great day, for it never can stand the scrutiny of unerring justice, never can appear before the majesty of God, "when the Lord Jesus shall

be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." Now can those be said "to know God" who know him not as the God of all grace, or "to obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" who are looking for salvation to the works of the law? Will not all such "be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints and to be admired in all them that believe?" (2 Thess. 1:7-10.) If Jesus is to be glorified in his saints and to be admired in all them that believe, surely all confidence that is built upon our own righteousness must utterly fail us in that day, for what are more opposed than justification by our own works and sanctification by the Spirit of God, or creature obedience and a living faith? All such confidence, therefore, must be utterly cast away even to its last shred, for it must encumber our course in running with patience the race set before us.

2. But there is a confidence *based upon religious privileges*. I have already shown the nature of the confidence once entertained by the apostle, and that it was founded upon those peculiar privileges which he enjoyed according to the view taken of them by a Jewish eye. No one who is called a Christian would build for a moment now upon such privileges as those; but he may have an equally vain confidence as resting upon Christian privileges. These are indeed very suitable to our wants, and, when blessed of God, are precious means of grace; but they are not to be built upon as a foundation for a spiritual confidence. Thus, to meet together in the house of prayer; to have a mercy-seat before which we may present ourselves; to hold the Scriptures in our hands; to have our lot cast among the people of God; to enjoy the favour of hearing the Gospel preached in our ears, and the truth as it is in Jesus faithfully and experimentally

set forth; to share in the ordinances of God's house; to be a member of a Church founded upon apostolic precept and practice: or, if not so favoured, yet to have a name and a place among the sons and daughters of Zion,—these are great and precious privileges, but they are not grace, though they may be made in God's hand conduits of grace. The two golden pipes through which the oil flowed out of the two olive branches (Zech. 4:12) were in themselves, though golden, of no value except as channels through which the golden oil flowed. So privileges are only precious as the oil of God's grace flows through them into the heart. They will not do to build upon, for other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ; and thus if we build upon our Christian privileges, we shall one day find that that confidence is as delusive as the apostle's, when his confidence was built upon being circumcised the eighth day, being a Hebrew of the Hebrews, or, as touching the law, a Pharisee.

3. But there is a confidence *based upon the mere letter of God's word*, without any application of that word with power to the heart; and I must say there is scarcely any kind of vain confidence more rife and common in our day than this. But to trust to certain truths contained in the word without any personal interest in them, or spiritual experience of them, is certainly a confidence that is only fit to be cast away, for it is not based upon the teaching or testimony of God in the heart, or on the work of faith with power in the soul.

4. A confidence that *hangs upon the breath of the creature*, which stands only in the good opinion of men, even of the best of men, in the approbation of a minister, or even of some who truly fear God, is certainly a confidence not worth retaining. Have not the worst of men deceived the best? Was

not David deceived in Ahithophel, the disciples in Judas, and Paul in Demas? If, then, we have no better grounds for our confidence than the mere approval of man, who may be deceived in us and by us, it will prove a confidence that will never avail us in the day of judgment; for O how easily may we be deceived ourselves, and still more easily deceive each other. To rest, then, upon the mere testimony of a man, frail and fallible, and to venture into eternity, depending upon the breath of a worm, is indeed to trust to a broken reed, which will run into our hand and pierce us. In fact, a confidence based upon anything but what now I am going to bring forward will prove to be a confidence in the flesh, one of which we may well be ashamed, and the end of which can only be destruction from the presence of the Lord.

ii. I pass on, then, to show what is *the confidence not to be cast away*; for there is a blessed confidence possessed by the Lord's people, by the experience of which they utterly differ from those who have a name to live while they are dead. But though they do possess this confidence, and though the Lord would have them hold fast that which they have received that no man take their crown, yet, through the weakness of their faith and the strength of their unbelief, they are very apt to let it go. In this point they widely differ from those who are wrapped up in a false confidence; for it is with them, as Job speaks of his own righteousness; "My righteousness I hold fast and will not let it go" (Job 27:6); nor can you beat it out of their hands. Whilst, then, those who have no real ground for their confidence will not part with it, though their trust is as a spider's web; the children of God, on the other hand, trembling almost at a falling leaf, are apt to give up that good hope through grace which the Lord himself has wrought in their hearts. Thus, while professors are striking in the midst of fair weather upon the rocks of presumption and going down like ships in the deep sea, the children of grace

have a tendency through the storms of temptation to fall upon the lee shore of despair. To keep them therefore, from concerning faith, making shipwreck, the Lord encourages them in his word and by the secret whispers of his grace in their soul, not to cast away any confidence that he himself has wrought with divine power in their breast. I must therefore be very cautious here to lay a good foundation. If I tell you in the name of the Lord not to cast away your confidence, I must speak with all holy wisdom and in the strictest accordance with the word of truth, and the teachings of the blessed Spirit in the heart, that I may not, on the one hand, err in bidding you retain a confidence which God has not given you, or, on the other, reject a confidence which he himself has wrought in your bosom.

1. A confidence, then, which is *based upon God's Word, the power of which has been felt in the heart*, is a confidence not to be cast away. We have this confidence spoken of by the apostle in this very epistle, where he speaks of those who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them in the Gospel; which hope, he tells us, is "an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast." But this hope is based upon two immutable things—God's oath and God's promise, in which it was impossible for God to lie. (Heb. 6:17, 19.) We see there the broad foundation which he has laid for a Christian's hope, and if a Christian's hope, for a believer's confidence, for hope and confidence are twin sisters. But of course this confidence is meant by him to be founded not merely upon the letter of the word of oath and promise, but on them both as applied with power to the soul. In order to show this, let us look at Abraham's case, to which he has especial regard; for the promise and oath which the apostle speaks of as "the two immutable things," were the promise and oath made to Abraham that "in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed." (Gen. 22:18.) Abraham's faith

hung upon God's oath and promise; but was it not upon them as spoken by the mouth of God to Abraham? When, then, "against hope he believed in hope;" "when he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform," his faith did not stand on the mere letter of the word, but on a promise and an oath given by the mouth of God to his heart. So when I lay the truth of God's word as a sure foundation for the Christian's confidence, I of course mean that there must be a spiritual application of it, an experimental knowledge of it, a living faith in it; otherwise, it stands upon the same basis as the false confidence that I have been describing, which rests merely upon the letter of truth, without any application of the word of life to the heart. In fact, the whole difference between the two kinds of confidence may be summed up in one sentence—that the one is a dead faith in the mere letter of truth; the other, a living faith in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, as made spirit and life to the soul.

2. But again, a confidence which is *based upon any discovery by the blessed Spirit of the suitability*, the blood, the obedience, the blessedness of the Lord Jesus Christ to the soul, is a confidence not to be cast away. There are many children of God who have not attained unto any large measure, if indeed any measure at all, of the assurance of faith. They cannot say with unwavering confidence, that the Lord is their God; and yet there has been discovered to them, and that by the power of the blessed Spirit, the suitability of Christ. They have had a view by faith of his being able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. They have seen and felt that his atoning blood is able to cleanse from all sin. They have had a discovery of his righteousness as the only justifying robe in which the sinner can be accepted before God. But that atoning blood not being

applied to their heart with all the power they want; and that righteousness not being manifested to them with such overwhelming assurance as to cast out all fear, their life is passed in doubt and uncertainty, and they cannot rise up to that sweet certainty of interest in the blood of the Lamb which they long to enjoy. Still, they have a confidence of this kind, that Jesus is suitable to their lost, miserable condition; that he has but to speak to make them perfectly whole; that all their expectation is from him. Thus, in the strength of this confidence, though it does not altogether bring a thorough sense of pardon and peace, they look to him, trust in him, hope in him, cleave to him, and that with purpose of heart. It is, I fully grant, but a small measure of confidence, and yet it is real as far as it goes. It does not rise to any great height, nor does it embrace the Lord with all that certainty of his love whereby with the bride, "it sits under his shadow with great delight," nor is it "brought into the banqueting house whilst the banner over it is love," but is waiting for further discoveries of the love and mercy of God unto eternal life. Such a faith as this we see much of in the New Testament. It was that of the woman with the issue of blood; of the man who cried out with tears, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief;" of the Syro-Phoenician woman whose "daughter was grievously vexed with a devil;" of the leper who said, "Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean;" of the centurion of whom the Lord said, "he had not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." The faith of none of these rose to a full assurance, but was engaged upon the suitability of the Lord Jesus to their various wants and woes, and a dependence upon his power to bless and heal them.

3. But now I come to a confidence which stands upon firmer grounds; one, I mean, that is based upon a gracious and blessed *revelation of Christ to the soul*: a manifestation of the Person and work of the Son of God, so that he is

embraced by the arms of faith and affection, made near, dear, and precious, and is received into the believing heart under the work and by the witness of the Holy Ghost. This personal and experimental revelation of Christ to the soul raises up a sweet confidence in him. It goes beyond that faith in his suitability which I have been just describing. The Holy Ghost bears in it a stronger witness; the eyes of the understanding are more spiritually enlightened; a larger measure of faith is communicated; a stronger degree of hope given, and more of the presence and power of the Lord himself is felt in it. This is that "Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ," of which the apostle speaks (Eph. 1:17), and of which he says, "But when it pleased God who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace to *reveal his Son* in me, that I might preach him among the heathen." (Gal. 1:15, 16.) It was this revelation of Christ in him which enabled him to say, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20.)

4. With this comes the highest degree of confidence, which springs out of the *shedding abroad in the heart of the pardoning love of God*, attended with a blessed application of atoning blood to purge the conscience from guilt, filth, and dead works to serve the living God. Where this is given there is the witness of the Spirit to our spirit that we are the children of God, and a blessed assurance that when death comes, it will be a happy messenger to deliver the soul from the miseries of this present world, and bear it aloft to the mansions of the blessed.

II.—But I pass on to show that this true and spiritual confidence is *not to be cast away* whatever measure may be possessed of it; and the reason is, *because it has "great recompense of reward."*

i. There are many temptations to cast it away, which made the apostle bid the believing Hebrews hold it fast. I will name a few of them.

1. *Persecution*, to which the Hebrews were at that time peculiarly exposed, would be one inducement. This was a "fiery trial," which tried the faith of the early Christians, and whereby many were proved to be but reprobate silver.

2 *Losses, crosses, and afflictions* for Christ's sake, entailing, it may be, the ruin of all our earthly prospects, may, in some cases, be a strong temptation to renounce the gospel.

But as these outward trials do not, in our day at least, touch so closely the core of the complaint. I shall now dwell chiefly on *inward* and *spiritual* temptations to cast away our confidence.

3. The Lord, as one instance, after he has revealed mercy to the soul, often *hides his face*; and what is the consequence? You fall at once into great darkness of soul. All your evidences are buried in confusion, and immediately there arises a temptation to cast your confidence away; for you reason thus, "The Lord would never have left me to my present state of darkness and death, if it had been a real manifestation of his love and mercy. Surely, if he really had shone into my soul and blessed me with pardon and peace, should I be where I now am; so dark, so ignorant, so unbelieving; so unable to realize anything of his presence and power? Can it be possible that the Lord should ever have blessed my soul with any sense of his love and mercy, and I be what I now am?" Under these desponding feelings there springs up a temptation to cast away the confidence which the soul once enjoyed.

4. But it may be that *Satan has laid a snare for your feet*, entangled you in some sin, and thus got you down and put his foot upon your neck, until it seems almost as if he would crush you into his own eternal misery. Nothing so opens the way for despondency and despair as the commission of sin or the being entangled in any course of backsliding. If anything can damp or destroy your confidence, it is being entangled in the power of the enemy, who first tempts and then assails; first spreads the snare and then glories over his fallen captive. Any breach thus made in conscience so opens the door for a whole army of doubts and fears to ravage and desolate the soul; it gives Satan such strength as an accuser before God; it so encourages the power of unbelief, and adds such poignancy to the desponding sensations of a despairing mind, that there is nothing which a child of God needs so much dread, as to be overcome by the power of sin and fall into the hands of Satan as an accusing foe. O the blessedness of being kept from all evil and all error!

5. But again a *deep sense of the corruptions of our heart*, as influenced by the power of Satan, is another form of temptation prompting us to cast away our confidence. Satan is a most subtle and unwearied adversary. He knows exactly where to thrust in his fiery darts; how to work upon the unbelief, the infidelity, and the corruptions of our depraved nature, and how to raise such a smoke from setting on fire the evils of our heart, almost like that of the bottomless pit, as to hide from view every sign and mark of God's favour towards us. Thus as we are led into deeper discoveries of the sins of our heart, and the corruptions of our nature become more laid bare to our discerning eye, we look back upon the past dealings of God with our soul, and say, "How could the Lord ever have been gracious to me? Should I be as I now am, and feel as I now feel, if ever his grace had visited my

breast, or his fear were deeply planted in my heart?" Thus, there is an investigation made; an examination entered into of the matter; a holding of the weighty concerns of the soul in the balance of the sanctuary; and very often the scale in which sin and corruption are cast seems to sink and the scale of grace to kick the beam. As thus weighed in the balance and proved as it were to be lighter than vanity, despondency makes great head in the soul, and Satan urges it to cast away not only its confidence but its very hope.

6. Many, too, of the Lord's people, without any peculiar or positive guilt upon their consciences, are subject to *great natural depression of spirits*; and this often tempts them to cast away their confidence.

7. A sense also of their miserable *unprofitableness and unfruitfulness* tempts them to cast away their confidence, as fearing they are unfruitful branches in the vine. There are others, but I have named the chief temptations to despond.

Still the exhortation rings in the ears of the saints of God, "Cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward." And is not this exhortation very needful for those who are so tempted? For what will become of you if you give up your hope? Where are you if your confidence is wholly gone? Upon a sea of doubt and fear, having utterly lost sight of the Lord, a prey to every gloomy feeling, and lying open to every thrust of Satan. If, therefore, the Lord has ever blessed your soul with any manifestation of his mercy, goodness, and love, ever given you any well-grounded confidence, hold by it, for it is your life; do not give it up, for it hath great recompense of reward.

ii. But what is this recompense of reward which ever attends the maintaining of a gracious confidence? I consider that this

recompense has a two-fold aspect; one embracing the *present*, and the other looking forward to the *future*. I will endeavour to explain each.

What, then, is the *present* recompense? It is the gracious reward which is poured into our bosom now through the medium of this confidence.

1. For instance, look at it as regards the simple act of *calling upon God*. In proportion as this confidence is held, the more power it gives us in prayer with the Lord. Nothing so cuts the hamstring of prayer as despondency. Nothing so lowers the uplifted hands or so weakens the enfeebled knees as dark and despairing feelings making head against a man's confidence; for is not this then the secret feeling of his heart? "What use is there for me to pray? I am a reprobate, a hypocrite, a deluded professor; God will never hear my prayers. By calling upon his holy name, I am only adding sin to sin." As, then, this unbelief works in the mind, it stops the very breath of prayer, and holds the soul down in that prison-house of guilty fear out of which it can only sigh and groan, and sometimes not even that. But when the confidence is not cast away, but is held, though it may be with a weak hand, a measure of boldness is communicated to come to the throne of grace, and the heart is encouraged still to plead with the Lord upon the ground of past mercies, upon the footing of what he has been pleased to do for it in times past. The promise once applied, the words once spoken, the favour once granted, being held fast, hope is enabled to maintain its ground as the anchor of the soul. It was this made David say, "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope;" and again, "Let I pray thee thy merciful kindness be for my comfort according to thy word unto thy servant." (Psa. 119:49-76.)

2. But again, confidence mightily encourages that *good fight*

of faith which we have to fight if we are to come off more than conquerors. We have a hard battle to fight, a severe race to run, for we have to resist even to blood, striving against sin; we have to wrestle, not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places. Now if we have no armour, how can we wrestle against these "wicked spirits" (as the margin reads) in their high places of towering pride, whence they fight at an overwhelming advantage against us who are, as it were, struggling on the plain? Where is our armour when our confidence is gone? We have lost our shield—the shield of faith—whereby alone we quench the fiery darts of the wicked. We have lost the sword of the Spirit, whereby alone we can return Satan cut for cut and thrust for thrust. We have no breastplate, for our righteousness is gone; and we have no helmet of salvation, for it has rolled off our head, if our hope has perished from the Lord. To cast away, therefore, our confidence is to expose ourselves without our armour to every deadly thrust of Satan, and to go, as it were, naked into battle, without one weapon, offensive or defensive. But if you are enabled, by the strength and power of the Lord, to retain your confidence, it has, even in this instance, great present recompense of reward; for in proportion as your confidence is strengthened, you will be enabled to resist the temptations of Satan and to wrestle with every form of spiritual wickedness without or within.

3. But again, as we retain our confidence, it so *opens up God's word to our soul*: it makes the promises so clear and plain; the truth so sweet and precious; Christ so near and dear; and the whole scheme of salvation so enjoyed and apprehended; and is not this a *present* recompense and one of ample reward for retaining our confidence? But when we get into a place where confidence seems well-nigh lost, and darkness, doubt, and fear take possession of the mind, the

Scriptures are then read in darkness; the veil of unbelief comes over the heart denser and thicker than ever, and the sweetness of God's promises is utterly gone. What are the Scriptures to us if we cannot lay hold of them by faith; or what are the promises if we cannot believe them? We see, therefore, how needful it is that we should not cast away our confidence, because it has such great *present* recompense of reward: the reward in one's own bosom, in still believing in spite of unbelief; in still hoping in spite of despondency; in still pressing forward through the crowd of difficulties, whatever obstacles may intervene or enemies line the way.

But when we look forward beyond the present narrow sphere, and see that besides the present recompense in their own bosom what great recompense of reward there is in *the future* for those who hold their confidence fast, what encouragement is afforded never to let it go. Will not heaven make amends for all? Supposing you could cast it away, I say "supposing," for in fact, through rich mercy, you cannot: the Lord will not suffer you to do so. You may cast away the enjoyment of it, but you cannot cast away the confidence itself. The substance remains, even if you cannot shelter yourself under its shadow. But assume that you could utterly cast away all your hope in the mercy of God, where would you be? Under the wrath of God as a consuming fire; under the curse of a righteous law; in the very hands of sin and Satan, without hope and without help. You see, therefore, we must come to one of these two points: either to retain our confidence and be saved, or give it up and be lost: either to hold fast by Jesus Christ and what Jesus Christ is and has manifested of himself to our soul, or to put ourselves under that wrath which burns to the lowest hell. Thus we are compelled by the very necessity of the case not to give up our confidence in the very worst of times and the darkest and dreariest of all seasons. In this we seem to resemble a

drowning man holding by the bough of a tree. If he relinquish his hold, he will be carried away by the stream. As, therefore, the stream beats against him, he holds firmly on the bough, because he knows that if he leaves go, he will be swept away to destruction. So the Christian still retains his hold of Christ in spite of the workings of sin and Satan: he cannot let go his grasp, for he knows that to let Christ go is to fall into the very abyss of hell.

III.—But to pass on to our next point. The Lord, who has given us the exhortation not to cast away our confidence, knew well it would be sharply tried: he therefore adds, "*Ye have need of patience that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.*" There are several points of divine truth and of living experience here which I will try to open.

i. *First, we must do the will of God:* that is a primary matter laid before us as what the Lord expects at our hands. For it is only *after* we have done the will of God that we receive the promise which is given to those who are found walking in the ways of the Lord.

But what is it to *do* the will of God? It is as needful to open up this part of our subject as the foregoing. I must, therefore, endeavour to explain it to the best of my ability. But I must lay this down as a preliminary point that before we can do the will of God, we must *know* what that will is. Where is that will to be found? In the Scriptures of truth. How are we to know what that will is, by which I mean a spiritual and experimental knowledge, for all other is useless and vain? By the blessed Spirit shining upon those Scriptures in which the will of God is set forth, and giving us grace to understand and apprehend it as there revealed. But besides this, we must be taught and enabled to *do* as well as *know* it,

for knowledge without obedience will only leave us under greater condemnation, or at least heavier chastisement, for "the servant who knew his Lord's will and did it not, was to be beaten with many stripes."

But what connection has this knowing and doing the will of God with not casting away our confidence? I will show you in a variety of particulars.

1. First, then it is God's will that his people should *believe in Jesus*. When the Jews asked our blessed Lord what they should do "that they might work the works of God," his answer was, "This is the work of God that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." (John 6:28, 29.). God has sent his dear, his only begotten Son, that his people might believe on him; he has given the clearest attestation to the glorious dignity of his Person, the efficacy of his precious blood, and perfection of his finished work, that we might have confidence in him as having saved us from our sins. Now when we believe on him as God has revealed him in the Scripture, and as the Holy Ghost reveals him to the soul, we are doing the will of God; the will of God being that we should believe on him unto eternal life.

2. Again, the will of God is, that we should not *cast away our confidence*; that we should believe him to be a faithful God; that we should rest upon his oath and promise; that we should not dishonour him by unbelief; that we should not give heed to the insinuations of the tempter, should not listen to every lie of Satan, but should believe in God as the God of all mercy and truth to those who fear his name, in spite of any suggestion to the contrary. He would have us walk by faith and not by sight, and to hang upon his testimony both in his word, and in our conscience, even when he hides himself from us. If this be not plain to you, let

us ask ourselves the question, "What have we ever got by unbelief? Has *that* been our friend or our foe? Have we not got all we have ever gained by believing and not by doubting?" But can we be worse than Jonah when he was in the very belly of hell? Yet even there he says, though cast out of God's sight, "Yet I will look again towards thy holy temple." That look brought him out, for his prayer of faith "came in unto God, into his holy temple;" and when deliverance came he could boldly say "Salvation is of the Lord." (Jonah 2:4, 7, 9.) When, therefore, we will not cast away our confidence, though Satan bids us do so, but hang upon the Lord, cleave to him, and rest upon his faithful promise, we are doing the will of God. Look at the case of Abraham; what was the will of God in his case? That he should believe the promise that he should have a son by Sarah. Not that he should doubt, or fear, or despond, on account of the infirmities of nature, give heed to the suggestions of sense and reason or to take carnal means to accomplish God's promise; but that he should believe it would be fulfilled in spite of every difficulty. When, then, he was believing, he was doing the will of God. When he was doubting, fearing, and desponding, when he was listening to Sarah's carnal advice and raising a servant into the position of a wife, he was not doing the will of God; he was doing the will of the flesh. But when he was eyeing the promise and nothing but the promise, "being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able to perform," he was doing the will of God. Is not this plain enough? And is not this set before us as a pattern to all believers, for the promise is made "to that which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all." (Rom. 4:16.) So it is now. When you are believing in Jesus, and resting the whole weight of your salvation upon his finished work, you are doing the will of God; but when you are doubting, fearing, and desponding in spite of all the testimonies which God has given you, you are not doing the

will of God—that is, the manifested will, but the will of Satan and the flesh.

3. But again, we do the will of God when we still go on in *the use of the means* of the Lord's own appointing, even though he do not appear to bless us through their medium. Thus we are doing the will of God in continually visiting the throne of grace; in ever calling upon his holy name; in reading his word and meditating upon it; in assembling ourselves with his people; in hearing the Gospel; in attending to the ordinances of God's house; in gathering our family around us to present our supplications at the footstool of mercy. We are not to cast away these means of grace because we have not the present enjoyment of the Lord's presence and love in them. All this is for the trial of our faith, to see whether we will serve the Lord or no. Did not the Lord say to Abraham, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him?" (Gen. 18:19.) By this he was doing the will of God, as walking in his fear and keeping the way of the Lord. When we are enabled to act in the same spirit and do the same things, we are doing the will of God as he did.

4. But again, we do the will of God when we *abstain from all evil*, even the appearance of it, and do everything that is good; when we come out of the world and are separate in heart and spirit from its pollutions; when we hate the garment spotted by the flesh; when our conscience is made tender in God's fear, to obey his precepts, to hearken to the words of his mouth, to seek to be conformed to the image of his dear Son, to act according to his holy example. A holy life, a godly walk, a conduct conformed to the precepts of the gospel are things sadly neglected in our day. The very word

"holiness" seems under a kind of religious ban, and is scarcely ever heard sounding from the Calvinistic pulpit, though God himself tells us that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

5. Again, we are doing the will of God when our *affections are set on heavenly things*; when we are spiritually minded, which is life and peace; when we abstain from everything that damps the Spirit's communications within, and are diligent and earnest in every good word and work.

ii. But we "*have need of patience*"—that is endurance, to continuance in the performance of all this, and in the various ways which I have been pointing out; for the Lord does not often immediately appear. He hears prayer, but he does not evidently answer it at the very moment we want. He puts our tears into his bottle and writes our prayers in his book; but he does not always appear when we want the tear dried up or prayer answered. Therefore we have need of patience. I have frequently explained that the word "patience" in Scripture means rather "endurance" than patience. This is very evident, from a passage in James, "Behold we count them happy which *endure*. Ye have heard of the *patience* of Job." (James 5:11.) Now, the words translated, "endure," and "patience" are the same in the original; and in fact, the example of Job is given as an instance of the happiness of those who endure. The same word is also used by our blessed Lord, where he says, "He that *endureth* to the end shall be saved." (Matt. 10:22.) We have need then of endurance. As he that runs a race needs not so much swiftness as enduring strength to hold out to the end, never to give up, as long as he can drag one limb before another; as the British soldier must never suffer himself to be beaten; so it is in the Christian race: we must never give up; we must never say "die;" we must never allow ourselves to be beaten by sin or Satan. If God himself seem to thrust us

away from his throne, we must still plead and not take "No" for an answer, like the widow with the unjust judge. O what need we have of patience or endurance still to fight, though the battle be against us; still to run, though we may almost fear to lose the race; and still to press forward, in spite of every discouraging circumstance. But if in this way we do the will of God, as he would have us, and patience is given to us of which we have such deep need, let us not fear but that we shall receive the promise. "Let us then not be weary in well doing; for in due season, we shall reap if we faint not." (Gal. 6:9.) We are bidden therefore to be "steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Cor. 15:58.) The promise is certain as to its fulfilment, for it has been given by him who cannot lie; it is in the word of truth; it only waits to be brought to light by the arm of God.

But what is the meaning of the word "promise" here? It does not mean so much the promise itself, as the thing which is promised. It is used in that sense in the passage, "And so after he had patiently endured he obtained the promise" (Heb. 6:15); that is not the promise itself, but the promised seed, Isaac. So again, "these all died in faith, not having received the promises," that is, not the promises themselves, for those they received by faith, but the things promised. (Heb. 11:13.) To receive the promise then is to receive the blessing contained in the promise; and this blessing is eternal life, as the apostle speaks, "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began" (Titus 1:2); and again, "This is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life." (1 John 2:25.) Viewing it, then, in this light, we may say, that there is a receiving of the promise *now* and *hereafter*. Eternal life is spiritual life, as the Lord told the woman of Samaria, "The water that I shall give him, shall be *in him* a well of water springing up into

everlasting life." (John 4:14.) In the same way spiritual life is eternal life. "He that believeth on the Son *hath* everlasting life;" hath it now, even now in his soul.

1. Viewed then as spiritual life, there is a *present* receiving of the promise, as the fruit of endurance, in answer to prayer, in gracious revivals of the soul, in the carrying on of the work of faith with power; in a word, in the fulfilment of that promise, "Because I live, ye shall live also."

But there are those although they possess *spiritual* life, have not a clear evidence that they shall enjoy *eternal* life. They must wait then patiently, enduring all their trials and temptations, for there is a doing the will of God by suffering as well as by obeying, and in the end they shall receive even in this life the promise of life eternal. It may be delayed, even to a dying bed; it may not be given in all its full assurance long before the last gasp. In some cases we find that Christians have been held in doubt and fear until almost expiring moments, and then the Lord has broken in upon their soul with the sweetest discoveries of his love and blood.

2. But "the promise," as I have said, is *future* as well as present. We now only receive an earnest, a foretaste, a first fruits; the harvest is to come. This promise then is to be received in all its fulness *hereafter*. Then those who have patiently endured, doing and suffering the will of God even to the end, will inherit the promise of eternal life in its full fruition, when they shall see the Lord as he is without a veil between, be made partakers of his glory, and be eternally ravished with the perfect enjoyment of his love and presence in a land where sin and sorrow are words unknown.

IV.—Now comes the last point, which more particularly points to the conclusion at which we have just arrived, for it is a

declaration that the Lord himself shall come to fulfil all his promises: "*Yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.*"

1. These words are quoted from the prophet Habakkuk, and were, in the mouth of the prophet, spoken in the first instance with respect to the first coming of the Lord Jesus: "Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." (Hab. 2:2, 3.) These words were spoken more than six hundred years before Christ came. So the saints of God had to look through a vista of six hundred years before the vision spoken of was fulfilled; but at the promised time the Lord came; and when fulfilled it was but "a little while." Six hundred years soon rolled away, and then the Lamb of God came to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

2. But take the words as they are applicable, not to the first but to the *second* coming of the Lord, and view this both as spiritual and actual: "He that shall come" was the name specially given to the promised Messiah; "Art thou he that should come," John sent two of his disciples to ask Christ, "or do we look for another?" The reference of John was to "Shiloh," which means "the sent." "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh (that is, "the sent") come." (Gen. 49:10.) This was the "rod which was to come forth out of the stem of Jesse" (Isai. 40:1); the promised one of whom it was said, "Behold he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts." (Mal. 3:1.) As, then, he came *actually* in the flesh, so he now comes *spiritually* in his presence; for the promise is, "Then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the

rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." (Hosea 6:3.) His "going forth," conquering and to conquer every doubt and fear, is as much prepared as the rising of the morning sun; and he will as certainly come unto his people to water their souls with his Spirit and grace as the autumnal and spring rains regularly fell upon the land of Canaan. He will then as surely come into your soul as he came into the world in Bethlehem's stable; but it may be "a little while" first. For a little while, then, what the Lord calls in Isaiah "a small moment," you may have to be doubting and fearing; a little while to be doing the will of God; a little while to have great need of patience; a little while before you receive the promise. You may have to go on praying a little while without answers, begging of the Lord to reveal himself to you, yet receiving no sweet discovery of his love. But "a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." He will not stop one moment beyond his own appointed time, for there is a set time to favour Zion. The very hour, nay the very moment, is fixed in his eternal purpose, and when that set time is come, which is most for your good and for his own glory, he that shall come will come in his love and mercy into your soul. Let unbelief say what it will; let despondency mutter its gloomy suggestions, and Satan harass you with a thousand fears: he that shall come will come, and will not tarry an hour beyond his appointed time; no, not one moment beyond the period fixed for your deliverance and the sweet renewal of your strength and faith and hope. If you have been held many years in doubt, and the Lord come and bless your soul at the last, you will not think you have waited too long, that you have groaned too much, or suffered from Satan's suggestions too severely. This will all be made up when the Lord's presence is felt and his blood and love revealed to your soul by the Holy Ghost.

3. But there is another sense of the words when they will be

more *fully and literally* accomplished; I mean in the second advent of our blessed Lord, when he will come and all his saints with him in the clouds of heaven; when in the twinkling of an eye the sleeping dead will be raised incorruptible, and "he shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." Then the church will see what good reason there was that she should not cast away her confidence; then will she reap the blessed reward of her faith and hope and love in the approving smiles of her God, and in the eternal enjoyment of his presence and his glory.

May it be our happy portion to have this sweet confidence in the Lord, and not cast it away at the suggestions of Satan, but to be ever living a life of faith and prayer, and ever waiting at the Lord's feet for his blessing to enable us to believe, and to rejoice in believing, that "He that shall come will come, and will not tarry."