

AN IMMUTABLE GOD AND A STRONG CONSOLATION

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"That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil." Heb 6:18,19

We live in a mutable world. The revolutions of the seasons; the vicissitudes of day and night; the alternations of weather from heat to cold and from dry to wet; the growth of our own bodies from childhood up to youth and manhood, and in some cases on to advancing old age; the alterations which take place in our own minds, in our thoughts, in our views, in our feelings, and in our varied exercises, both natural and spiritual, all stamp change and mutability upon everything here below. The departure of friends one after the other—how many well-known faces of attached hearers do I miss from the congregation now before me!—tells us also how change is stamped upon the life of men. Family bereavements, vicissitudes in business, change of friends into enemies, separation by distance or local habitation from those with whom we have walked in sweet fellowship, with the forming of new acquaintances and the rising up of fresh friends, these all manifest mutability as a part of the life we live in the flesh, as regards our connection with others.

As regards ourselves, and more especially our inward feelings, the movements of our spirit God-ward, and all that we hope and believe is a part of, or closely connected with, the life of God in our soul; how subject that is to change also.

If blessed one day with the sight of God's countenance, we have to walk in another in thick sensible darkness; if brought out for a time into sweet liberty, then are we again shut up, it may be for a long space, in cruel bondage; if relieved for a little while from the weight of afflictions and trials, then again we have to put our neck under the yoke and be exercised as much by them as before; if favoured sometimes with sweet access to a throne of grace, and blessed with holy liberty to pour out our heart before God, then again are we shut up in miserable dryness, deadness, coldness, sloth and indifference, so as scarcely to feel a movement of real prayer within.

Thus, whether we look at the world without or the world within, whether we fix our eyes upon men and circumstances as they pass before us, or regard the movements of divine life in our own breast, change and mutability we see stamped upon all. But there is a greater change to come than any which we have yet experienced, when the eyelids will droop in death, when the pallor of our last sleep will overspread the face, when life itself will have fled and the warm body be reduced to a heap of cold clay, to be consigned to the silent tomb, there to await the last and greatest change of all in the resurrection morn, when the Lord will 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. (Php. 3:21)

But what an unspeakable mercy it is amidst all these changes to have to do with One who is unchanging and unchangeable; One who says, "I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed;" One "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning;" One who is "the same yesterday, today and for ever;" One who rests in His love and whose purposes, like Himself, stand fast for

evermore. This is that foundation both of faith and hope, which the apostle brings before our eyes and heart in the words of our text, encouraging us to hold fast our profession upon the ground of God's immutability. "That by two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."

In opening up these words, I shall, as the Lord may enable, direct your attention,

I.—First, to the characters spoken of: They are those "who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them."

II.—Secondly, the strong consolation, which God has provided for them.

III.—Thirdly, the pillars, the two pillars on which this strong consolation rests; the two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie.

IV.—And, lastly, the nature of the hope which they have laid hold of: That it is "an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and entereth into that within the veil."

I.—The main object of the apostle in this chapter, as very much generally all through the epistle, is to strengthen and confirm the faith and hope of those whom he calls the "heirs of promise." And I may observe here, by the way, that one special feature of the epistles of the New Testament is to comfort and encourage the living family of God. They are not addressed to the world, nor was it the primary intention of the inspired apostle in writing them to call sinners out of

darkness into God's marvellous light. It should be fully and clearly understood that they were written to those already called: members of the church of Christ by spiritual regeneration, and members of visible churches by profession. But being in many points imperfectly instructed, they needed to be built up on their most holy faith. They had also to endure what the apostle calls in this epistle "a great fight of afflictions." They had to be made a gazing stock or public spectacle in the reproaches and indignities cast upon them, and even to take joyfully the spoiling of their goods, as knowing in themselves that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance. They therefore needed in every way to be strengthened and encouraged, that they might not cast away their confidence, which had great recompense of reward.

Now there was no ground of strength and encouragement more suitable for those thus situated than the faithfulness of God. It is for this reason, therefore, that the apostle is continually bringing before the church the promises made to Abraham, and God's faithfulness in fulfilling them. Thus he speaks of "Abraham being the father of all them that believe, whether Jew or Gentile," and of our "walking in the steps of his faith, to the end that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all." (Rom. 4:16) Now what was the peculiar character of Abraham's faith? It was this, that "he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able to perform." (Rom. 4:20, 21) He would therefore encourage the heirs of promise to rest upon the security and stability of God's everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, and thus manifest that they

were blessed with all the blessings which were given to Abraham.

But in order to guard the subject well, to preserve the professing church of Christ from the shoal of presumption, as well as the quicksand of despair; while he would on the one hand strengthen faith and hope, and yet not encourage arrogance, boasting and vain-confidence, he takes care to point out very clearly who the characters are to whom the blessings of the gospel belong. It is this peculiar feature of describing characters, and not restricting promises to persons, which establishes a connection with us and them, and I may add, between us and the Scriptures of truth; for if we find and feel in our own bosom the characters, as I may term them, of spiritual and eternal life stamped there by the hand of God, we may take courage to believe that all the blessings of the gospel are ours, that we are true children of Abraham, and, as such, heirs of promise, and as being heirs of promise, are blessed with all the blessings of our father Abraham.

The character, then, here specially pointed out in our text, as if by the finger of God is of one who has **fled for refuge** to lay hold upon the hope set before him. Let us seek, as the Lord may enable, to open and elucidate this character, for it is very descriptive as well as very comprehensive. It commences with the very beginning of the work of grace upon the soul, and follows it up almost to its completion. And admire with me the wisdom of the apostle in not setting up a high standard of experience and divine teaching, but with great condescension coming down so low as to embrace all in whom the good work is begun, and who are taught and led by the blessed Spirit out of sin and self to embrace the Lord of life and glory as set forth and revealed in the gospel.

But there are two points in the characters, which will demand our special notice:

1. their fleeing;

2. their laying hold.

I. The first point is that they **have fled for refuge**. What is it thus to have fled? and how is it a description of those in whom the Lord the Spirit has begun a gracious work? The expression is evidently metaphorical and figurative. We cannot then do better than to adopt the same mode of explaining it, and by using simple figures and illustrations, which often cast a clear and broad light upon Scriptural subjects, to explain and elucidate what we may understand by the expression, that you who have fled for refuge may find light from the sanctuary streaming upon your path, raising up a sweet confidence in your own bosom that you are amongst these blessed heirs of promise.

1. The first illustration which I shall adopt is taken from **the walled or fortified cities** of which we read so much in the Old Testament. You will recollect how the spies sent by Moses to explore the land brought back word that "the cities in it were great and walled up to heaven." To understand the reason for these fortified cities, we should know a little of the peculiarities of the holy land at all periods of its history.

Now Palestine had this peculiar character, that it was not all mountain nor all plain, nor were the mountains very high, or the plains, with one or two exceptions, very wide. This mixture of hill and plain made it available for a vast population, the plains and valleys affording pasture for large flocks of sheep and cattle as well as arable soil for crops of corn, and the hills, which were cultivated to the very top,

yielding terraces which in that warm climate produced abundance of oil and wine from the olive trees and vines which occupied every inch of ground.

But the feature to which I wish to call your attention, as illustrating our text is this. The whole land, except a narrow strip on the sea-coast, was surrounded on almost every side by wandering tribes of predatory habits, known to us under the Scripture names of Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, etc., with whom we find the children of Israel continually at war, besides the more settled and inveterate Philistines. Now it was the habit of these predatory tribes, as is the case at the present time with the Bedouin Arabs, to make sudden raids or incursions into this cultivated territory, sweep away flocks and herds and trample down or carry off the corn, besides slaughtering all the defenceless people, with the women and children, on whom they could lay their violent hands. To guard their persons, then, where they could not secure their property against these wandering tribes, who might burst in at any moment, the people built upon the hills and mountains fortified cities, so that when an alarm was sounded that the land was threatened to be swept over by any of these predatory incursions, they might flee for refuge to these fortified towns, where they with their wives and children were safe for a time until their enemies had dispersed and gone back to the desert. A knowledge of this circumstance will explain many allusions in the Word of truth to hills and fortified places, strong towers and the like. Thus we find David frequently saying, "The Lord is my rock and my fortress;" and again, "Thou hast been a strong tower to me from the enemy." So Isaiah speaks, "There shall be upon every high mountain, and upon every high hill, rivers and streams of water in the day of the great slaughter when the towers fall." (Isai. 30:25.) Solomon declares that "the name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it

and is safe." This custom, therefore, of fleeing to these hills, forts and strong towers which were built upon the mountainous parts of Palestine may serve as an elucidation of the meaning of the expression in our text—fleeing for refuge to the hope set before us.

We spiritually are much like the children of Israel naturally. On every side are hosts of enemies ever invading our souls, trampling down every good thing in our hearts, accompanied by a flying troop of temptations, doubts, fears, guilt and bondage sweeping over the plain of our soul like those wandering tribes over the plains of Palestine, carrying off, burning and destroying everything on which they can lay their hands; and we, as regards our own strength, as helpless against them as the children of Israel were at many points of their history against the Philistines, the Ammonites and Moabites, and other such surrounding enemies. But there is a refuge set before us in the gospel of the grace of God. The Lord Jesus Christ, as King in Zion, is there held up before our eyes as the Rock of our Refuge, our strong Tower, our impregnable Fortress; and we are encouraged by every precious promise and every gospel invitation when we are overrun and distressed by these wandering, ravaging, plundering tribes to flee unto and find a safe refuge in Him.

2. Take another idea; for I wish to explain things and make them as clear as I can for your instruction and comfort. It is not so scriptural as the last but as vividly true, and may well serve as an illustration of the same truth. We read sometimes of **harbours of refuge**, and attempts have been often made in Parliament to obtain a large grant of public money to construct them; for indeed much needed they are.

For instance, all along our eastern coast there stretches a long line where there is no harbour of refuge for the

innumerable ships, which sail along it, or no haven but what is difficult of access. Now when, as is often the case in spring, strong easterly winds blow across the German Ocean, for want of harbours of refuge on this lee shore great loss of ships and lives occurs. Here is, for instance, a large fleet of coasters, London bound, colliers, fishing boats, and other craft on a calm day setting their sails in every direction, studding the whole horizon for many leagues. On a sudden there gathers in the east a dark cloud; the heavens become black with storm; the gust blows with increasing violence. Now what is the consequence? They cannot stand out to sea through the violence of the wind dead against them. But were there harbours of refuge at various points along the coast they could make for them, and by running into them obtain safety.. But for want of these harbours of refuge many every year are driven upon the lee shore where they are wrecked with great loss of life and property.

Now take this as a figure and apply it spiritually. Here is a soul sailing calmly upon the sea of life, bound upon some voyage of business or pleasure; and whilst the wind is fair and the weather calm little danger is apprehended as to the issue. A dark cloud begins to gather in the sky, at first no bigger than a man's hand; but it gradually increases till it seems to cover the heavens, and out of it bursts an unexpected storm. This storm is some manifestation of the anger of the Almighty in a broken law, which beats upon the soul with irresistible violence, and threatens to drive it upon the lee shore amidst the breakers and the rocks, there to make awful shipwreck. O to find in that awful moment a harbour of refuge to which we may run and obtain shelter from every storm! Kent has a beautiful hymn upon the subject, for he had seen with his own eyes, if I remember right, near seventy ships strewn upon the rocks at Plymouth

for want of a breakwater at the entrance of the Sound. The hymn, you will recollect, begins:

How welcome to the tempest-tossed
Amidst the storm's career,
While horror spreads from coast to coast;
Is some kind haven near!

But now see how the Christian poet applies the figure:

But far more welcome to the soul
Is that secure abode,
(When terrors o'er the conscience roll,)
The Rock prepared of God.

3. But take now a Scriptural figure: **the city of refuge** provided for the manslayer. There was no city of refuge provided under the law of Moses for the wilful murderer. For him even the altar was no protection: "If a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour to slay him with guile, thou shalt take him from mine altar that he may die." (Exod. 21:14.) But if a man were accidentally guilty of what our law calls manslaughter; if for instance, he went into a wood to cut down a tree, and his axe-head came off and struck a man at work with him; or if he shot an arrow at a mark and the wind carried it in a different direction and pierced a bystander, he could not legally be put to death as a wilful murderer.

But there had grown up a custom amongst the people from ancient times which made such casual homicide to carry with it the penalty of death from the nearest relative of the slain man as a species of legitimate revenge, and he was warranted in killing him wherever he could find him. This blood revenge subsists in the east to the present day. This

was not, you will observe the law of God but the law of man. It was a cruel and unjust custom, but had become so inveterate that God chose rather to deal with it as it stood than wholly abrogate it. To mitigate, then, the severity of that rigid law and to make it comparatively harmless, God commanded Moses to set apart six cities of refuge—three on one side Jordan and three on the other—to which the manslayer might flee. But in order to guard against these cities becoming an asylum for wilful murderers, the congregation were to judge the cause between the slayer and the avenger of blood, and if they found that it was a case of manslaughter and not of murder, he was to be rescued out of the hand of the avenger and live in peace in the city of refuge.

Several things are mentioned in connection with these cities by Jewish writers into which I need not enter, such as that they were to be of easy access; that once every year the magistrates were to inspect the roads to see that they were kept in good condition and that there were no impediments in the way; that at every division of the road there was to be a direction post on which was written, "Refuge, Refuge;" that the cities were to be well supplied with water and provisions; and that no warlike weapons were allowed to be made there. All these features might be pressed into the service of the figure, but not being exactly scriptural I shall not enter further into them. One remarkable point I must however mention, that the manslayer was to continue in the city until the death of the high priest. Now our High Priest never dies; and therefore if we have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us in the gospel, we are safe as long as our great High Priest lives.

But let us now seek to apply this figure. The true, the only refuge of the soul is the Lord Jesus Christ, who receives into

His bosom sinners with a load of guilt upon their **conscience**, as the city of refuge received with open arms the manslayer flying from his avenging foe. And O how suitably does this feature describe the soul that flees for refuge to Jesus. Look at the unhappy manslayer. What danger dogged every step. What fear, alarm and terror would haunt him like his shadow when the axe-head struck with death his fellow workman, or his ill-shot arrow had killed a bystander. Two things would be present in his mind; fear and hope—fear of the avenger, hope of escape to the city of refuge.

But these things must meet in the same person to constitute him one who has fled for refuge. And is not the same remark applicable also to my other figures? Do not two ideas meet in them all? There might be a storm and no harbour of refuge; or there might be a harbour of refuge and you not need it. Without the first there would be no felt danger; without the second no fleeing for safety. The weather is fair, the wind calm, you go boldly along your voyage; were there twenty harbours of refuge along the coast you would not need one of them, but would go sailing on. Or take my first figure. Your crops are not spoiled by wandering tribes; you lose neither ox nor sheep; you are in no peril of your own life or of those near and dear to you; you therefore want no hill-fort to shelter you from the incursions of these predatory bands, who, after robbing and spoiling you of all you had, would next turn their sword against your bosom. So with my third figure, if you have no guilt upon your conscience; if no avenger of blood is pursuing your steps, you need no city of refuge. Thus, to make a complete whole you must put two features together: first, alarm, fear, terror, urging and prompting speedy flight for security; then a refuge already provided, seen by the eye far or near, but in either case fully suitable to the case, resorted unto with all the strength

given, reached before perishing, entered into as a last hope, and then full safety found and enjoyed.

But to make these two points a little more clear as well as a little more personal, cast a retrospective glance upon the dealings of God with your soul, and without dwelling upon needless minutiae, see if you can find these two features in any way impressed upon them. If ever there was in your experience a season never to be forgotten of alarm, of fear, of terror, of guilt, of apprehension; and then when you scarcely knew what to do, think, or say, there was a view opened up to you of a refuge in the Person and work, blood and righteousness of the Lord the Lamb; if as driven or drawn you fled to it, were kindly received, and found safe harbourage from guilt and doubt and fear, then you surely know what it is to have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before you. It is these, and these only, who are heirs of promise; and therefore how important it is to have had some personal experience of these things.

How are we to know whether we possess the life of God in our soul, the grace of God in our heart, unless there has been some such fleeing and some such laying hold? Do see, then, if you can trace these two things in your breast: first, if there ever was a season with you when you feared and trembled at the wrath to come, and were compelled to flee for refuge from it. But, secondly, finding no refuge in self, and that all your own righteousness was a bed too short and a covering too narrow, you fled to Jesus as your only hope; and as there was a sweet opening up to the eye of your faith of a refuge provided in the Lord the Lamb, you were enabled to take hold of Him in His covenant characters and blessed relationships, and found in Him rest and peace. If, then, you can find these two features of divine life in your soul, you are one of the characters of whom our text speaks: you have fled

for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before you; which leads me to show you what **laying hold** is.

II. I much admire the wisdom and condescension of the apostle, or, to speak more correctly, the wisdom and condescension of the Holy Ghost by him, in not taking very high ground in describing the features of the heirs of promise. There were indeed special reasons for His thus dealing with them. It is very evident from the internal evidence of this epistle that the Hebrew converts, to whom it was written, were not very far advanced in the faith of God's elect. Their old Jewish views and inveterate prejudices, imbibed from their former Rabbinical teachers, stuck very closely to them; and these were sad hindrances both to their spiritual knowledge of, and their experimental profession in the truth of the gospel. They were also exposed to great and grievous persecutions, arising chiefly from their brethren after the flesh, who then, as now, loathed with the deepest abhorrence all who renounced Judaism for Christianity; and, viewing them as the worst and vilest of apostates, did not spare any degree of violence or insult.

Being, then, very weak in faith, they were much borne down by the violence of the storm, and were almost ready to turn their backs upon the gospel. The apostle, therefore, though he deals with them very earnestly and faithfully, yet mixes with his powerful warnings and urgent exhortations much tenderness and affection, however much their wavering, vacillating ways might try and grieve his spirit. They were also very weak and childish as regards an inward knowledge and experience of the blessed truths of the gospel. He therefore gently chides them that, "when for the time they ought to be teachers, they had need that one should teach them again the first principles of the oracles of God, and

were become such as had need of milk and not of strong meat."

I have named these things to explain why the apostle so deals with them as with children in understanding and experience, and why he takes, speaking comparatively, such low ground—ground so different from the way in which he addresses the Ephesians, Colossians, Thessalonians and other members of the New Testament churches. Thus, in the words before us to suit their case, he comes down to a hope; but keeping strictly upon Scriptural ground, such a hope only as is set before us in the everlasting gospel. Well he knew that all other hope was delusive and vain, and would prove in the day of trial a broken reed and a spider's web.

But as what he said to them may also suit us, I will now endeavour to show you what this hope is, that each may see for himself how far he has **laid hold** of it.

Now a little difficulty meets us here at the very outset; for it is not at first sight very clear whether he means the **object** of hope, or the grace of hope. It would seem, however, that his words comprehend both these significations, but that the primary meaning is the **object** of hope, and the secondary meaning the **grace** of hope, the two being so closely connected that what he says first of the one he transfers to the other—the former being true in doctrine, the latter true in experience. Let me explain this, and, first, as to the **object** of hope.

1. Every grace of the Spirit must have an **object**, that is, something to which it may look and with which it may deal. Christ Himself in His Person and work is the object of every grace, but more especially of faith, hope and love. He is therefore called "the hope of Israel" (Jer. 17:13); and "our hope." (1 Tim. 1:1.) But as faith and love deal more specially

with the Person of Christ, hope deals more particularly with the word of Christ. "My soul fainteth for thy salvation; but I hope in Thy word." "Remember Thy word unto Thy servant, upon which Thou hast caused me to hope." The hope, then, here spoken of is the **word of promise**; for this is that unto which the soul flees, and on which it hangs.

But this hope, in order to be firm, must have a foundation; and this is nothing less than the faithfulness of God in the fulfilment of His promises. "Sarah judged Him faithful that had promised." (Heb. 11:11.) This sustained her hope; and when she held in her arms the new-born Isaac, her hope made her not ashamed. When then the apostle would encourage us to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, he adds, "For He is faithful that promised." (Heb. 10:23.)

Now where are these promises but in the gospel of Jesus Christ? All of them are made sure in Him; for "all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us." (2 Cor. 1:20.) The word of promise then in Christ is "the hope set before us;" for when we flee for refuge from the wrath to come, we flee to the promises as opening their arms to receive us. They are thus like the elders of the city of refuge, who take us within its walls all trembling at the avenger of blood, loaded with guilt, and soiled with dust, and give us safe harbourage, so that he cannot slay us.

2. But having shown you that the hope is as **an object**, I shall now show you what hope lays hold of as **a grace**.

The main thing embraced by hope is **eternal life**, according to those words of the apostle: "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began." (Tit.

1:2.) But as Christ is "the life," and as He alone gives eternal life, He, as held forth in the word of promise, is the chief object of hope, and, therefore, when experimentally made known to the soul, is said to be formed in us "the hope of glory." As long, therefore, as guilt, doubt and fear press upon the conscience, our hope must be very faint, if it exist at all. But when we flee for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us in the gospel, which is the promise of eternal life in Christ, there is a springing up of spiritual and therefore eternal life in the heart. The Lord says, "I give unto them" (that is, "My sheep") "eternal life" (John 10:28); not "I will give them in the life to come;" but I will give it unto them now. We therefore read, "He that believeth on the Son **hath** everlasting life"—has it now, as a present, felt and enjoyed possession. This life is given manifestly when Christ reveals Himself to the soul; for eternal life is then received out of His fulness as an enjoyed possession.

All, then, who have truly fled for refuge, to lay hold of the hope set before them, embrace in so doing eternal life. They live, as being manifestly in Christ, for He is "our life;" and as they embrace it in Him they feel its sweet movements in their breast, in the joy it communicates, in the peace it imparts, in the prospects it opens, in the doubts it removes, in the fears it disperses.

Thus, in real religion, there is something, if I may so speak, tangible—something to be laid hold of; and this distinguishes a good hope through grace from every other hope which is delusive, enthusiastic, or visionary. Depend upon it, there is a reality in vital godliness—a possession for eternity, which, therefore, kills and deadens the living child of God to a perishing world, and the fading things of time and sense. Whenever we get a view of Christ, there is a view of eternal life in Him; for He is the eternal Son of God, and when He

makes Himself known to the soul as such, He shows us that all our life is in Him. The work that He accomplished is for eternity; He lives Himself for ever and ever; and those whom He has redeemed by His blood, justified by His righteousness and sanctified by His grace, will live for ever and ever in His glorious presence. It is the eternity of His love which stamps it with its main value and blessedness; for this life being eternal, secures not only perpetuity, but immutability—prevents it from any change in time as well as from any change in eternity, and secures it firm and stable to all the heirs of promise. As then they lay hold of eternal life in laying hold of Him who is the life, and as the sweet movements of hope spring up in their breast, it opens before their eyes a vista of immortal joy.

II.—But to pass on to our next point, "**strong consolation**" which God has provided for these heirs of promise, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them.

As God does nothing in vain, so He provides nothing in vain. These heirs of promise fully need all the consolation, which God can give, and strong consolation too. The fleeing for refuge is but the first act of their spiritual life. They are not yet safe at home or landed in their eternal rest. Under the violence of their first storm, they have fled to the harbour of refuge. This is however but the beginning, not the end of the voyage. The harbour was provided to give them a temporary shelter; but they have again to put out to sea, to encounter fresh storms, and be exposed to fresh perils. He that fled to the hill fort from the Moabites and Ammonites had to come down again to the plain there to plant and sow, and there to expect fresh attacks from the same robber bands. The manslayer who fled to the city of refuge was again exposed to the fatal stroke of the avenger of blood, if he ever left the city to which he had fled.

Thus, to have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us does not insure to us security against future foes or fears; indeed only prepares us the better to meet them. This is why the heirs of promise need strong consolation. Their afflictions are great, their trials heavy, their temptations numerous, their foes strong, and their fears often stronger than their foes. They have also, for the most part many painful vicissitudes and changes: reverses in providence, bereavements in family, afflictions in circumstances, trials of body, trials in the church and trials in the world. God often hides His face from them; Satan harasses them with his fiery darts; fears of death often bring them into bondage, besides all the guilt, which they bring upon their own consciences through their backslidings, and all the chastening strokes, which they procure for their own backs through their folly.

Thus they need consolation, and strong consolation too, that there may be balm for their wounds, cordials to cheer their fainting spirits, wine to strengthen their heart and oil to make them of a cheerful countenance. God not only knows best what we are, but knows best also what we want, for His wisdom and His goodness are alike infinite. He has, therefore, beforehand provided strong consolation for all who need it, for weak consolation would not do for strong trials, feeble deliverances for powerful temptations, and little drops and sips for sharp exercises. It may do for those who have not to wade through perplexing circumstances, or who in grace have no powerful discoveries of the holiness of God, no clear apprehension of His dread Majesty, no strong sense of the evil of sin, and no deep acquaintance with the strength of human corruption and the weakness of our nature to withstand temptation. But where a man is let into the mysterious secrets of a body of sin and death, the strength of internal corruptions, the overwhelming power of lust, pride

and covetousness, when he is not upheld by the special grace of God; the snares of Satan spread for the unwary feet; and his assaults as the prince of darkness, as well as his temptations as an angel of light; when, I say, a man is led into these internal mysteries whereby he learns the depth of the fall, he will find his need not only of consolation, from the mouth of God, but strong consolation too.

When, too, he comes, as we all must come, to the closing scene, and has to look back, it may be, upon many things in his past life which may sadly grieve his spirit, if not painfully wound his conscience in the bitter recollection, and if in that trying hour the Lord should suspend the light of His countenance and withdraw His gracious presence—though we hope it may not be so with us, and that He who has borne us up through every trial will bear us up through our last, and He who has never forsaken us will not forsake us then—yet should these things come upon him or come upon us, we shall surely need strong consolation to face the gaunt king of terrors and grapple with our last enemy. Die we must; but who can say when, and who can say how? Every year snatches from us one or another of our dearest friends. As death has come to them, so surely will it come to us; and though we know not how any of us shall die, yet I am sure of this, that if our senses are preserved unto us and we look with open eyes into eternity, we shall then need all the support and consolation which God can give.

Now God has provided, already provided strong consolation for these heirs of promise, for all who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them. I shall now, therefore, endeavour to show you what is the foundation of this strong consolation.

III.—It rests, then, upon two **immutable** pillars, as the apostle beautifully speaks. "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." (Heb. 6:17, 18.)

You will observe that it is the immutability, that is, the unchanging character of His counsel, viz., His eternal purpose, which God was willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise. The counsel or purpose of God is immutable in itself; but God wished to show its immutability to the heirs of promise, that out of it might flow strong consolation to their troubled hearts. He, therefore, gave them two immutable things in which it was impossible for Him to lie. What, then, are these two immutable things, these unremovable pillars on which it rests? God's word in the promise, and God's oath in its confirmation. These are the two immutable things, which I shall now, therefore, more fully open.

1. The **word of God's promise** is essentially immutable. Whatever God promises stands as firm as the very being of God himself. His own eternal throne is not firmer than the word of His mouth, as expressed in the promise. But what the apostle chiefly refers to is the word of promise made to Abraham. Now if you will observe, when God first made a promise to Abraham, there was no oath given with it. God simply said to him, "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 12:2, 3.) I need not enter into all the

promises made to Abraham, but this is the chief one as regards us: "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed," for this promise takes us poor Gentiles in. As the apostle argues, "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." (Gal. 3:8, 9) The promise thus given flowed out of and ratified the everlasting covenant, for when God gave it He said to Abraham, "As for Me, behold My covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations:" that is, their spiritual father, for they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. I need not tell you, that this seed in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed, is Christ. "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ." (Gal. 3:16.)

This, then, is the word of promise made to Abraham; and if we by faith in Christ Jesus are children of Abraham, then are we blessed with faithful Abraham, and the word of promise secures us in the possession and enjoyment of every blessing of the new covenant. This made the apostle cry out, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." (Eph. 1:3.) And observe how he adds as the richest and primest blessing: "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." (Eph. 1:7.) Now is not this calculated to give strong consolation to the heirs of promise who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them, that they are blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus?

2. The other immutable thing, is God's **oath** which He gave to Abraham after He had tried his faith by bidding him offer

up his only son Isaac. Then it was that the Angel of the Lord (**Jehovah-Jesus**), "called out of heaven the second time and said, By Myself have I sworn, saith the Lord." (Gen. 22:15, 16.) God, so to speak, was not satisfied with merely speaking to Abraham in the word of promise. That, indeed, would have been enough for Abraham's faith; he did not require the oath: he gave obedience to God's word, without asking anything more when He bade him offer up his son. But to confirm his faith and give ground for the strong consolation which was to be afforded throughout all time to the heirs of promise, He confirmed it by an oath, or, as it is in the margin, "interposed Himself," that is, put Himself between the promise and faith. Now God could swear by no greater, and therefore swore by Himself; and these were the words of the oath: "Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee." The blessing was that in his seed, that is, Christ, all the families of the earth should be blessed, and that his seed, spiritual and natural, should be multiplied as the stars of heaven.

Thus the everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, made fast with our Lord in eternity, and in due time with Abraham, from whose loins the promised seed should come, rests upon these two immutable pillars, the promise of God and the oath of God. These two immutable things, then, in which it was impossible for God to lie, form the foundation of the strong consolation which God pours into the breast of the heirs of promise. Whatever change they may endure, whatever mutability in self or in others, God changeth not; His promise and His oath stand fast for evermore.

But how does this give them strong consolation? In this way. Am I an heir of promise? Do I believe in the Son of God? Do I walk in the steps of the faith of Abraham? Have I the same faith, the same hope? Then I have the same ground for

confidence. On what did his faith rest? Was it not upon God's promise and God's oath? But how shall I know that my faith rests upon these two immutable pillars? I have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before me in the gospel of Jesus Christ; I have embraced the promise of eternal life made in Christ; I have rolled my guilty soul upon the blood of the atonement in the promised Seed; I have found and felt refuge in Him; I have come out of all false hopes, vain confidences and creature expectations, and built all my hope and all my confidence on the finished work of the Son of God. He has more or less made Himself known to my soul by some manifestation of His glorious Person, atoning blood and dying love. This stamps me as one of the characters to whom the promise is made, for have I not "fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before me?" Have I any other refuge, help, or hope? Do I want any other Saviour or any other salvation? It is an experience of these things, which marks me as an heir of promise. Then I am blessed with the faith of Abraham; then the covenant made with Abraham was made with me as a son of Abraham; I, having Abraham's faith, have Abraham's blessing, and Abraham's God is my God, because I believe in the same God that Abraham believed in.

This is the way in which faith is enabled sometimes to argue, yea, to fill its mouth with arguments against the accusations of law, conscience, sin and Satan. And may I not apply these arguments to your case? Have you as a poor, self-condemned, guilty sinner fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before you in the gospel? Have you embraced in the arms of a living faith the Son of God, and felt and found Him precious to your soul? Then you are one of the heirs of promise, and God has secured your inheritance by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for Him to lie. Men may lie, for all are liars from the womb. We carry in our bosom a lying heart and live in a lying world; but it is

impossible for God to lie; and whatever men may say, think, or do, He remains the same, immutable in His glorious perfections; unchanging, unchangeable; for with Him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Here we rest our hope.

IV.—And now let me endeavour to show what this hope is as a **grace of the Spirit**, its nature, and its character, how it works and operates, and the blessings which attend it: "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil."

I intimated that by hope in our text we were to understand two things:

1. the object of hope;
2. the grace of hope.

The first is, as I have explained, the word of promise; the second is that peculiar grace of the Spirit, which acts upon it. And the reason why both are thus comprehended is because they are so closely connected.

When those who flee for refuge embrace the promise of eternal life in Christ Jesus, this raises up a good hope through grace. They may not have very strong consolation or be blessed with a very great deliverance; but they find peace, acceptance and a sweet sense of tranquillity stealing over their breast so far as they are favoured with a living faith in the Son of God, and He makes Himself in any measure precious to their soul.

Now this hope is their anchor, which holds them fast amid every storm. Many are the storms, which beat upon these

vessels of mercy. Storms without and storms within; storms in providence and storms in grace; storms in the world, storms in the church, storms from friends and storms from foes. But they have that which enables them to outride every storm, and that is the good hope through grace which God Himself has dropped into their breast from His own heavenly throne, that it may keep them fast and firm to covenant settlements and hold them up in every trying hour.

But of what use is an anchor except against the dangers of a lee shore? Were there no lee shore, no breakers, no rolling surf, no strong wind and no apprehension of shipwreck, the anchor would hang at the bow merely an ornament, if not a dead weight to the ship. But when a lee shore is in sight and the white surf shows the breakers ahead, and as the sounding line is dropped, and fathom after fathom is called out as decreasing in depth, and danger is at hand, the command is given, "Let the anchor go." The word is obeyed. The anchor sinks into the sea; it takes firm hold of the sand; it brings up the ship; and as long as it holds there is no danger of the vessel being driven upon a lee shore, however the surf may roll over the rocks. It is both "sure and steadfast." First it is "sure," that is, it will never break; and, secondly, it is "steadfast," that is, no violence of wind or wave can make it lose its hold. Now these are the very two things required in an anchor. It might break from badness of material, or it might not hold fast the ship through badness of the ground. But this anchor of the soul is so strong that it **cannot** break, and the ground is so good that it must ever hold fast.

For where is this anchor fixed? "Within the veil." Who is there? Jesus at the right hand of God. The anchor of a ship will sometimes what is called "come home;" the sand or gravel does not hold the fluke firm, and the anchor drags

along the ground and thus becomes practically useless. Or the wind might be so strong as to break the cable. The hawser might part, or, if a chain cable, one of the links might break, and all the precautions taken by the most skilful seamen prove ineffectual. But not so with our anchor: that is "sure." The stock can never break, the chain never part. And it is "steadfast," so that it can never move. Why? Because it is within the veil, takes fast hold of heavenly ground, and, I hardly like to use the expression lest I should drop anything derogatory to His divine Person, it takes hold of the Lord Himself, so that He Himself must be dragged from His eternal throne before the anchor can fail to hold the ship.

But this anchor may still be there and yet not always be seen. The anchor of a ship when down in the sea is never seen; even the cable itself is hidden by the waves. But ever and anon the sun breaks forth and shines upon it; and though it be dripping with the brine, yet how the bright ray manifests when it shines upon the links that there the anchor still is and holds the ship firm. So our anchor is in heaven and cannot be seen, and the cable that holds on to the anchor is sometimes so deep in the brine of a storm-tossed heart as to be scarcely visible. But let the Sun of righteousness shine upon it; then how one ray out of His glorious fulness lights up the chain that holds the anchor firm; and then we not only feel the goodness of the ground and the goodness of the anchor, but we see also that which connects the anchor and the ship, even the grace that God shines upon as being His own gift and work. Now this anchor will never fail you in any difficulties. Whatever storms may beat upon your heart or threaten your destruction, if you have this good hope through grace, this anchor of your soul both sure and steadfast, it will certainly hold out to the end.

How careful therefore we should be to see whether we have this anchor; whether it is in the right place; whether it was made by heavenly hands; whether it was let down by the hand of God into our soul, and whether the whole of it, every part of the anchor and every part of the cable were all manufactured in the court of heaven. No earthly anchor will ever stand the storm that will one day blow. Earthly manufacture will not endure divine storms. Cables wrought by human hands will part when the winds blow and the waves rise, and the anchor itself will be sure to come home when we want it most. Ships never go to sea with unproved anchors. They are all proved in the strongest way before the safety of the ship and crew is entrusted to them. How foolish then for any one to embark upon a profession if he has not proved his anchor. What can he expect but shipwreck? But if he has an anchor that God Himself has, so to speak, welded by His divine hand, let down into his soul by His own heavenly power, and fastened at both ends, the ship and the anchorage, he will stand every storm and live at last. Well I am persuaded that no other anchor will ever hold up the vessel as it rides over the sea of life and preserve it safe from every storm, till at last it enters with swelling sail into the haven of endless rest, where storms blow no more.

God grant me this evening to have spoken a word to the heirs of promise, to those here present who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them, and in whose breast there is any divine testimony that God has wrought a work upon their souls. Look to that, dear friends. Cast away, as God enables, all creature hopes; they will never profit you in the day of need. Vain expectations and ill-grounded hopes will be as spiders' webs in the day of trial. Prove your anchor; look at it with both your eyes, and see the true seal of God upon it, marked in heaven's armoury, and given out of God's word into your soul; and if you can

trace anything real, spiritual, gracious, experimental in your heart, bless God for it. It is not the size of the anchor. A boat has not the same anchor as a three-decker. Your anchor may be a small anchor, and yours a little boat, yet still chartered by the great Owner of souls; and your anchor may be as good, if not as large; as efficient, if not as strong, as the anchor of the most experienced believer in this assembly. It is the reality of a thing we want; and if there be reality, though the work be feeble, the hope faint, and the faith small—if the reality be there, there is eternal life.