

## **God and the Word of His Grace the Church's Only Safeguard**

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, on Tuesday Evening, Oct. 4, 1864

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." Acts 20:32

In the commencement of my discourse this morning, I mentioned the number of years during which I have laboured in this place; and now with the same intention and in the same spirit, not, I hope to exalt myself, but to magnify the goodness and grace of the Lord, I shall name the two texts from which I preached the first time that I opened my mouth in this pulpit. On Lord's day, July 3, 1836, which was the first time that I preached here, my morning text, if I mistake not, was Jeremiah 15, part of the 19th verse: "If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth." In that sermon, if my memory serve, I pointed out that there were precious characters and vile characters, precious doctrines and vile doctrines, precious experience and vile experience, precious practice and vile practice; that the servant of the Lord was to take forth the one from the other, they being so mixed and confused together that if he did not separate them, and show clearly and experimentally the eternal distinction between them, he could not and would not be God's mouth. Was not that a discriminating ministry? In the afternoon, if I remember right, I spoke from John 1:13: "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." In that sermon I endeavoured to show the distinction between the heavenly birth and its earthly counterfeits, pointing out the grand distinction between being born of God and being born of

blood, of the will of the flesh, and of the will of man.

Was not that a discriminating ministry? And as I began with a discriminating ministry, so I desire to end with a discriminating ministry; for I never wish to preach any other but a searching, separating, discriminating gospel. How far the Lord may have led me more deeply into his blessed truth; how far he may have taken the veil more off my heart and shown me more of myself; how far I may have dropped some sharp and cutting expressions which I used in those days, and which might not have savoured altogether of the spirit of the gospel, I must leave others to judge who in these matters can discern more clearly than myself both what I have been and what I am. But it is a mercy, for which I desire to be thankful, to have been preserved during so many years, as I hope the Lord has preserved me, from any other ministry or from preaching any other gospel than that which I began with in the fear and grace of God.

But to turn from myself to a much worthier subject. When I compare myself with the great apostle of the Gentiles, I seem scarcely worthy of the name of a minister at all. When I see his ardent zeal for the glory of God, his burning love for the souls of God's people, his godly, self-denying, and holy life, the power which rested upon, and the blessing which attended his ministry, I seem, in comparing myself with this eminent saint and servant of the Most High, to shrink into nothing, either as a saint or as a servant of God.

But as we can only minister according to the ability which God giveth, I shall this afternoon, with his help and blessing, take up for our consideration a portion of the farewell address which this man of God uttered to the elders of the Church at Ephesus, whom he had requested to meet him at Miletus, from which it was distant about forty or fifty miles,

that he might give them a parting word of warning, instruction, and admonition.

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."

Let us then without further preface, as we are also about to part, seek, as the Lord may enable, to penetrate into the mind and meaning of the Holy Ghost as speaking here by the mouth of Paul: and in so doing I shall endeavour,

I.—*First*, to show what seems to be intended by the expression, "*I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace.*"

II.—*Secondly*, what this word of God's grace is *able to do, to build up the saints of God, and to give them an inheritance.*

III.—*Thirdly*, the *character and description* of that favoured people for whom this inheritance is reserved, and amongst whom we must be found if we are to enter into the joy of the Lord, "*them which are sanctified.*"

I.—Nothing can exceed the affectionate, tender, and paternal spirit which breathes forth in the words of the apostle, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God."

i. There were indeed deep and important reasons why he should entrust them to his gracious care and charge. His discerning, prophetic eye saw that great perils from without and from within awaited the Church at Ephesus. Observe how clearly he penetrated into the dark veil of futurity as regards perils from without: "I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the

flock." It is as though his prophetic ear could hear the howling of the wolves already around the fold. Whilst he was there, as through the grace of God their guard and shepherd, the wolves kept a respectful distance. They were afraid of meeting a blow from the shepherd's crook; they therefore howled round the fold waiting for an opportunity when the shepherd was gone to burst in. These were external perils. But he saw something looming in the dim future which much more alarmed his prophetic spirit and much more painfully grieved his tender mind. There were perils within as well as perils without. "*Also of your own selves*"—that was the cutting stroke—"also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." No doubt, as well knowing from a personal intercourse of three years all the members of the Ephesian Church, he already foresaw who they were amongst them who would be the first to arise to speak these perverse things. His discerning eye already read their hearts teeming with all that pride and self-exaltation, that stubborn, obstinate spirit, which though repressed had never been really subdued; and he clearly foresaw that the secret plans and schemes which were already working in their minds would soon burst out into words and actions. Seeing, therefore, the perils without and within which beleaguered and threatened the Church of God at Ephesus, he warns the elders in this parting address, giving them the tenderest instruction, and laying before them what he had been to them, and what he desired them to be to the Church of God over which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers.

But well knowing that after all he had said or could say perils and dangers would arise which no wisdom could foresee, and no contrivance or skill in him or them could defeat, he then took the Church up, as it were, in the arms of his faith, and laid it in the lap of God in the tender, affectionate words of

the text, "I commend you to God." Perhaps a simple figure or two may help us to explain and illustrate the meaning of the apostle in using such language. A father is about to send his son, an inexperienced youth, to a foreign land where he will be surrounded with every temptation fraught with peril to body and soul. Knowing then beforehand the dangers which await his beloved son on every side, and having resident in that country a friend whom he has long known, one of tried integrity and attached to the family with strong affection, he writes to him, and informing him of all the circumstances of the case, he puts his son under his charge, commending him to his care and trust. This gives his mind some relief, for he feels that having secured for his son a second father in whom he can fully trust, he has done all that he can do to secure the young man's benefit and protection. Now, the more he can rely upon the kindness and care of his friend to be his son's protector and guardian, the more he can part from him with a good hope for his future welfare. This is "commending," or, as we now say, recommending. But take another simple figure to illustrate the expression of the apostle, "I commend you to God." View a father upon his death-bed, surrounded by his weeping wife and children, and picture to yourself some friend, some bosom friend, one of long and tried integrity, standing also by the bed-side, witnessing the afflicting scene and sympathising deeply with it. Now may we not represent to ourselves the dying man lifting himself up in his bed and thus speaking, "Dear friend, I am about to leave you and those who are still more near and dear to me; we have always been knit together in the bonds of strong affection: do think of my dear wife and children when I am gone; I put them into your care. I have made you my executor and the dear children's guardian and trustee. Fulfil that office to them with the same affection and integrity which you have ever shown to me, and I shall feel to die more comfortably in the firm conviction that they will be

under your watchful eye." These are simple figures, but they may help to illustrate the meaning of the apostle, "I commend you to God." Is it not as if he would put them under the immediate eye of God, entrust them to his unceasing, ever-watchful care; and, as far as his prayers and desires could accomplish it, lay them in the very bosom of the Almighty?

ii. But in thus committing them to God, he had doubtless a gracious, believing, and comprehensive view in his soul of the character and perfections of this great and glorious God to whose care he thus warmly and prayerfully commended them. Let us seek then with our weak and imperfect views, as compared with his, to realise in some measure the character of God as exercising such a watchful care over his people.

1. He would have a view, for instance, of his *Almighty power*—that he held the winds in his fists; that all things were under his sovereign control; that not a circumstance could transpire which was not under his divine management, and that all things in heaven and earth were subject to his eternal will. Whatever foes then from without or from within were arrayed against his Church at Ephesus, not a hair of their head could fall to the ground except by his sovereign permission. He would see then how futile all the efforts of men or devils would be to overthrow the church there so long as it was the purpose of the Almighty to hold it up. With what confidence, therefore, could he put them into the arms of so Almighty a Friend and such a Sovereign Disposer of all events and circumstances!

2. He would also look up to this great and glorious God as *everywhere present*. He would feel how "the eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth" (Zech. 4:10); how

they "are in every place" (Prov. 15:3); and how especially "his eyes are ever upon the righteous and his ears open to their cry." (Psalm 34:15.) In this confidence he could, so to speak, place them under the eyes of him who "keepeth Israel, and who shall neither slumber nor sleep." (Psalm 121:4.)

3. He could also look up and view him as a God of *infinite wisdom*; not only possessed of Almighty power to guard and guide, shield and protect the Church at Ephesus with an outstretched arm and an ever-watchful eye, but as "the only wise God," containing in the depths of his eternal mind that boundless store of unspeakable wisdom whereby he could not only foresee every event, but could make all things work together for their spiritual good; who could pull the teeth out of the wolves already howling round the fold, and turn to nought the counsels of the false professors among them, who of their own selves would arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

4. He would also view him not only in his abstract perfections as possessed of omnipotent power, universal presence, and infinite wisdom, but more especially as *the God of all grace*. This he would be encouraged to do by recalling to memory the great things which the God of all grace had done for his soul in calling him by his grace when a bloodthirsty persecutor, in revealing his dear Son in him, in shedding abroad his love in his heart, in bestowing upon him the spirit of adoption to cry Abba, Father, and in sending him to preach the gospel to poor, lost, perishing sinners. In the confidence, therefore, that the God of all grace would or could be all to them that he had been personally and experimentally to himself, he could lay them at the footstool of mercy, and deposit them in the arms of that most merciful and gracious Lord who had given him testimony upon testimony that he

was his heavenly Father and eternal friend.

5. But in the same confidence he could commend the Ephesian elders to God as the *God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ*. This is what we may call his peculiar New Testament or new Covenant title. Under the old dispensation he was "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," "the Lord God of Israel;" but under the new dispensation he comes nearer to us as "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ;" and because he is the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ he is Father also of those who believe in Christ; as our gracious Lord said to his disciples before his ascension: "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." This made the apostle Peter say, "Blessed be the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1 Peter 1:3.) And this it was which brought from Paul's pen the words, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." (Ephesians 1:3.) As then "the God of all grace" is "the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ," all his grace and glorious perfections shine forth in the Person of his dear Son. His love, his mercy, his goodness, and every perfection of the divine nature we see revealed and brought to light in the person of the God-Man. Thus having a view of God, not in abstract Deity, not as manifesting himself in a broken law, not as revealing himself on Sinai's blazing top as a consuming fire; but in the mild beams of gospel grace, in the love and blood of his dear Son, we may wonder, admire, and adore. Blessed and favoured with a view of these things far beyond our dim conceptions, the apostle could commend his beloved friends at Ephesus to this God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and feel that whether he were present with them or absent from them



they were equally safe and secure in the hands of his and their God and Father.

iii. But he commends them also to *the word of his grace*.

1. God works by his word of truth upon the hearts and consciences of his people, and this word the apostle calls here "the word of his grace," because it is only *in and by his word* that the grace of God is either revealed or communicated to the soul. It is desirable to be clear upon this point, that we know nothing of God out of and apart from his word. Sometimes we seem as if we would almost try to realise in our mind thoughts of God and to represent him to our imagination in his abstract Being as filling all time and all space, seeking in fact to accomplish an impossibility to the finite mind of man, as Zophar well declares: "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea." (Job 11:7, 8, 9.) But all these vain thoughts, for "vain man would be wise though man be born like a wild ass's colt" (Job 11:12)—all these vain thoughts fall back upon ourselves, and we find that immediately we get out of the domain of God's word, directly we seek to realise the existence of an internal, infinite, incomprehensible Being by the efforts of our own reasoning mind we are lost in confusion. We are like Noah's dove, when first let loose from the ark. Wherever she looked she could see nothing behind or before her but a wide waste of waters on which she could not rest the sole of her foot. She therefore flew back to the ark, and in that alone she found rest when Noah pulled her in. So we, when we have taken our wild, wandering imaginations into these excursions of thought, and feel ourselves utterly lost in the incomprehensibility of the divine Essence, are glad to come

back and lodge our wearied, puzzled mind upon God's word, and especially upon "the word of his grace;" for in that and in that alone can we find all the satisfaction we ever can have, not only as regards the very Being of God and the perfections of the Almighty, but what is beyond the reach of sense, reason, or imagination, what he is as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Again, sometimes we are exercised not so much about the Being and perfections of God as we are on account of *our sins and transgressions* against and before him. We have views in our soul of his purity, holiness, and terrible majesty. We see him as a consuming fire, and our hearts sink at the very thought, crying out, "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" (Isai. 33:14.) We are lost, as it were, in the blaze of Mount Sinai, or else are wrapped up in clouds of confusion through the smoke which ever darkens that fiery mount. Here then we need the word of God's grace to give us some relief from all this fear, bondage, darkness, and confusion. When, therefore, we come in faith to the word of his grace, or, to speak more correctly, when the word of his grace begins to open itself up by the teaching and testimony of the blessed Spirit to our understanding, to our conscience, to our heart, and to our affections, and we can feelingly and experimentally believe what God has spoken there of himself as the God of all grace, the very God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, as abundant in goodness and truth, then and only then do we find some satisfaction of soul, and then and only then some rest for our wandering feet. Never seek to be wise above what is written. Never seek to know more than God has revealed in the word of his grace; for in that he has lodged all that instruction, all that heavenly wisdom, and all that revelation of his mind and will, and of his mercy and love in the face of his dear Son, which can be known or

enjoyed in this life. But rather seek for the word of his grace to be opened to your understanding, to be revealed to your heart, to be applied to your conscience, and to come with warmth, life, and feeling into your affections; and then indeed you will find it is the word of his grace from the grace it manifests, unfolds, and communicates to your soul.

3. Again, in the word of his grace are *exceedingly great and precious promises* which seem to shine like so many stars in the midnight sky, studding chapter after chapter with their bright effulgence. It is upon these promises that the covenant of grace is established, as the apostle speaks: "But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also is he the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises." (Heb. 8:6.) All these promises are in "Christ Jesus," as we read, "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.) By the belief of these promises and by receiving their rich contents into the soul we become, as Peter speaks, "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4), that is, through the grace communicated by them there is a being renewed in the spirit of our mind, and a putting on of the new man which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness. In commending, then, the Ephesian elders to the word of God's grace, the apostle would commend them to a realisation by faith of the promises contained in that word. These promises are all based upon the faithfulness of God. And what firmer support can there be than the faithfulness of him who cannot lie, and who has said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee?"

4. Nor does the word of his grace shine forth less conspicuously in the innumerable *invitations* which are addressed to the poor and the needy, the weary and the heavy laden, the hungry and the thirsty, and to God's

afflicted and exercised family generally. How suitable are these invitations to the characters to whom they are addressed; and as they believe and receive them, grace is communicated by them. Thus into whatever trouble or difficulty the Ephesian elders might fall, they still might find some invitation in the word of God's grace suitable to their case, which the Lord might bless to their souls.

5. The word of his grace contains also *admonitions and warnings* to hold us back when we would otherwise stumble into some error or fall into some trap of the devil. These admonitions and solemn warnings are as necessary to our guidance in the strait and narrow path as the promises or invitations. Does not the apostle say in this very chapter, "Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears?" (Acts 20:31.) Thus we find this man of God could warn and admonish as well as instruct and comfort.

6. The word of his grace also contains what I might almost call a standing code of *holy precepts* intended to regulate our conduct in our families, in the world, and in the Church of God. And not only so, but to reprove and rebuke us when we go astray, and, as applied by the blessed Spirit, to bring penitence, grief, and sorrow into our heart when we have departed from them, and to lead us to honest confession of our sin and shame. In this way, therefore, the precepts of the gospel are often made use of for severe rebukes as well as godly instruction.

Thus in whatever light we view "the word of God's grace" we shall find it holding forth precious truths, sweet promises, kind invitations, solemn warnings, holy precepts, and keen rebukes, and all in infinite wisdom adapted to our state and condition, as surrounded by a host of perils and temptations,

and yet upheld by the mighty power of God.

7. But when the apostle speaks of commending them to the word of his grace, it is not, if I may use the expression, to the dead word but to *the living word*, not to the letter but to the spirit, for it is this which especially makes it the word of God's grace. It was therefore in the prayerful hope and expectation that they might feel the power of that word upon their hearts—sometimes in the public ministry, as not forsaking the assembling of themselves together, but to come at every opportunity under the sound of a preached gospel, that the word of his grace in the mouth of his servants might be made a blessing to their soul. In private also he would recommend a frequent and diligent reading and studying of the oracles of God, that the word of his grace through secret meditation might open up to them continual sources of strength and consolation.

8. He would also commend them to the word of God's grace that it might come into their heart at unexpected moments, in dark and trying seasons, under the pressure of heavy weights and burdens, and thus be a word from the Lord, lifting up the standard of the Spirit when the enemy came in like a flood.

And do we need the word of this grace less than the church at Ephesus? Have we no similar perils? Have you as a Church no similar dangers? Are there no wolves howling round this little fold? May not even of your own selves men arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them? And who and what will be your only safeguard but God and the word of his grace, to which, brethren, in the spirit of the apostle I desire now to commend you?

II.—I pass on to show what the word of God's grace *is able*

*to do*; for that was the reason why the apostle commended it to the elders of the Church at Ephesus, and by them the church itself.

There were two things which the apostle speaks of as lying within the power of the word of God's grace. These two things I shall consider separately.

i. First, it was *able to build them up*. The work of grace had been begun upon their soul. They were men of God to whom the apostle spake, and as elders of the Church at Ephesus, we may well suppose that they were the most eminent saints and the best taught members of the church. It may be perhaps somewhat difficult to ascertain exactly what position these elders occupied; but it would certainly seem that they had both power to teach and to rule the Church. They therefore corresponded in some measure to pastors in our day; and yet it would appear that every elder did not necessarily teach; for the apostle says, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine." (1 Tim. 5:17.) We see from this place that all the elders ruled, but that only some of them laboured in the word and doctrine, or, as the word means, teaching. They were men, therefore, for the most part eminent for their faith and their godly life. "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God." (Heb. 13:7.) To them especially Jesus Christ was everything, for "the end of their conversation," the whole subject of their life and walk was "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and to-day and for ever." They were therefore highly favoured, well taught men of God, empowered by their office not only to rule the Church as overseers or bishops, the word being the same, but to instruct it from the word of God's grace. But they, as well as we, needed to be built up. The foundation had been well and

deeply laid in their heart, for, as I have quoted, it was "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;" "and other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 3:11.) But there was a superstructure to be reared up on this foundation, and that not of "wood, hay, and stubble," but of "gold, silver, and precious stones." This superstructure the word of God's grace was able to raise up. So it is with some, if not many of you. God, I trust, has begun his work of grace upon your heart; he has laid there the foundation stone, which is Jesus Christ; upon him the superstructure is to be raised; and this superstructure may either be wood, hay, stubble, which will most certainly be burnt up and consumed, for the fire is to try every man's work of what sort it is; or gold, silver, and precious stones, which will stand the conflagration and prove a worthy superstructure for so precious a foundation.

Now nothing but the word of God's grace, in its purity and power, in its application to the soul by the hand of the Spirit, is able to build up this gold, silver, and precious stones on the foundation. I hope that instrumentally I may have been made the means of laying this foundation in some of your hearts. At least I have tried to do so; and I believe I can call you all to witness that I have never laid in this place any other foundation but Christ in his Person and work, blood and righteousness. Now, the mere doctrines of men, the vain imaginations of these erroneous teachers who would arise and speak perverse things to draw away disciples after them, would build upon Christ, the foundation, the wood, the hay, and the stubble of Pharisaic self-righteousness or else of doctrinal error. But the word of his grace, in its purity and power, in its life and influence, in its spirit and truth, would, the apostle knew, build them up by bringing gold and silver and precious stones, and laying them upon Christ the only foundation. So it may be, so let it be with you. I hold up

before you the book of God, and I commend you to this word of his grace as able to build you up on this foundation already laid.

1. But *how* does it build up? It is "the word of his grace," and therefore every stone which is put upon the foundation is a stone of grace, or else there would be an incompatibility, a discrepancy between the foundation and the superstructure. Thus every word of his grace as applied to the heart by the power of God brings with it a precious stone. Every promise applied to the soul with a divine unction; every truth commended to the enlightened understanding and embraced by faith; every precept discovered to the heart as binding upon the conscience, and as such to be listened to, obeyed, and walked in; every secret admonition, every solemn warning, every painful rebuke, yea, everything connected with grace, which the Holy Spirit is pleased to apply to the heart with his own divine power, may be called a precious stone, a stone of grace. It is in this way that the word of God's grace builds up the Church on her most holy faith by laying on the foundation these stones of grace.

2. But as the foundation is to be laid in grace and the top stone to be crowned with grace, so every part of the structure must also be in grace from first to last, or there would be a sad rent in the building, a sad discrepancy between the foundation and the stones built upon it. The Lord promises to his Church, "I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones." (Isa. 54:11, 12.) There we see how that every part of the building, even the windows, the gates, and the borders are as much made of precious stones as the very foundation which is laid with sapphires. But these precious stones must all be stones of



grace, in order to harmonise with foundation and top stone. A church, therefore, as well as an individual is built up by the word of God's grace, communicating to it, and inlaying upon it, and in it, every sacred truth, every comforting promise, every solemn admonition, every holy precept, and every needful rebuke. And as all these savour of Christ and spring out of his grace, there is a divine and heavenly harmony between the work of Christ upon the cross and the grace of Christ upon the soul; and similarly there is a gracious harmony in the teaching and testimony of the blessed Spirit throughout the whole of his divine operations and influences. This is beautifully unfolded in the words of the apostle, "In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." (Ephes. 2:21, 22.)

But you will observe that the apostle does not say that the word of God's grace will necessarily do this either for a church or an individual, but that *it is able to do it*. He therefore commends them to the word of God's grace as possessing a power, through the application of the Spirit, without positively declaring or prophesying that it would do so in their particular instance.

ii. But what else was the word of God's grace, to which the apostle commended them, able to do? *To give them an inheritance.*

1. The word "inheritance," as doubtless you well know, means two things; 1, the right and title possessed by the heir; and 2, the property or land itself. Thus Abraham had a right and title to the promised land, and his seed possessed it. Now the kingdom of God, both as a kingdom of grace and as a kingdom of glory, is the inheritance of God's people,

both by right and possession. The blessed, therefore, are invited in the great day to inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. (Matt. 25:34.) Of this inheritance Peter speaks as "incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." This then is the inheritance which the word of God's grace is able to give unto the saints in present title and future possession. Not but what this inheritance was given to them in Christ before the foundation of the world. As the apostle intimates, "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." (Ephes. 1:11.) But though this inheritance is given and secured in Christ, yet there is a necessity to be made meet for it, according to these words: "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." (Col. 1:12.) There is, therefore, what the apostle calls a being "sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise which is the earnest of our inheritance." (Ephes. 1:13, 14.) As then the word of God's grace bestows this earnest, and communicates this meetness, it gives the saints of God this inheritance in experimental possession, in divine realisation, in spiritual foretaste. The fullness of the inheritance is above, but its earnest is below. The saints are called by the apostle "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17); for God is to them spiritually and eternally what he was typically and mystically to the tribe of Levi. Levi had no inheritance among the other tribes: God was his inheritance. "But unto the tribe of Levi Moses gave not any inheritance: the Lord God of Israel was their inheritance, as he said unto them." (Joshua 13:33.) And so the true Levites, the spiritual priesthood, have God for their inheritance. All the grace and all the glory, all the perfections, all the love, and all the bliss and blessedness of God; in a word, everything which God is

or has as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, is theirs. As the apostle says "All are yours, for ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." (1 Cor. 3:22, 23.) Thus we may almost say, that as when God could swear by no greater he swore by himself, so because he could give his saints nothing greater, he gave them himself.

But you will want to know *how* and what connection there is between the word of God's grace and the kingdom of God's glory. It is because the word of his grace puts them into experimental possession of the kingdom of heaven here and hereafter. Thus we read in the words of our blessed Lord that this is life eternal, that his saints might know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. (John 17:3.) When then the word of God's grace brings into the heart a *knowledge* of the only true God and of Jesus Christ, it brings with it that eternal life which is the saint's inheritance. So, again, when the word of his grace brings into the soul the *love of God*, it puts it into possession of this inheritance, for God is love. In a similar manner, when the word of his grace brings into the soul the *presence* of God, it gives it a foretaste of this inheritance; for what is heaven but the eternal fulness of the glorious presence of God? Yea, what is heaven begun but the presence of God felt in the soul on earth? Nor is a sense of the *goodness* of God, which leads to repentance, which melts the heart under a sense of our base requitals of that goodness, less a part of this inheritance. So that as the word of God's grace comes into the heart, it not only builds up the saint on Christ the foundation, but by communicating a spiritual, experimental knowledge of God, with a sense of his goodness, mercy, and love, power, and presence, it puts him into a present possession of it.

2. But besides this, as I have already hinted, it produces a *meetness* for it. The heir has to be educated for the

inheritance as well as the inheritance to be reserved for the heir. Ploughboys are not noblemen, either by birth or education. A peer's son has an education given him befitting the son of a peer, that he may be qualified to take the place which his rank assigns him; that when his father is removed he may sustain in a becoming manner the honours and dignity of the peerage. So the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, earth's true and only peerage, nay more, princes and princesses of the royal blood, need an education upon earth to fit and qualify them for their eternal inheritance. How can they be presented at court? how can they be "set among princes and made to inherit the throne of glory" (1 Sam. 2:8), unless fitted and qualified for a state of such royal dignity? This training, then, or education is commenced here below by the power of the word of God's grace upon their heart through the teaching of the Spirit and the revelation of Christ.

III.—But this brings me to our last point, the *nature of this meetness* for the inheritance. The happy number, the favoured few, for whom this inheritance is reserved, are described in the text by that most expressive word "the *sanctified*," or, to quote the apostle's language more fully, "an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."

i. As this is the grand point, the distinguishing feature of the partakers of this eternal inheritance, let us seek to enter into the spiritual meaning of the expression. God's people are sanctified in various ways and at various times.

1. First, they were sanctified by the *original purpose and decree of God*, whereby they were separated in his eternal mind from all other men. Of this sanctification Jude speaks, "To them that are sanctified by God the Father." (Jude 1.) This is the foundation and the fountain of all their

sanctification. But we must bear in mind that they were only thus sanctified as they were sanctified in Christ, their Covenant Head, for they were "blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as they were chosen in him before the foundation of the world that they should be holy and without blame before God in love." (Ephesians 1:3, 4.) They were therefore thus set apart from all others that they might be members of Christ's mystical body, a chosen and holy bride for the King's Son.

2. But the bride fell, and foully fell, for she was in the loins of Adam when he sank under the weight of the fall, and so she fell in him. But she did not fall out of the heart or arms of her heavenly Father, but was still the Church of Christ, though in ruins; still Christ's bride, though involved in the guilt and pollution of the Adam fall. This made necessary a second sanctification—one that should take place in time as the other had taken place in eternity. She had to be sanctified *by the blood* of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son: "therefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate." (Heb. 13:12.) The blood of Christ sanctified the Church, for he washed her from all her sins in his own blood. In his precious body as it hung upon the cross there was a fountain opened for all sin and all uncleanness, which will make the Church for ever sing "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood." (Rev. 1:5.) Thus they were sanctified by the blood of the Lamb, washed from all their filth and guilt, and presented spotless before the throne of the Most High.

3. But there is a third sanctification, which is the washing of regeneration, under the sanctifying operation, *power*, and *influence* of God the Holy Ghost, which is a *personal, spiritual, experimental sanctification*. This consists in the communication of a principle of holiness and the possession

of a sinless, spotless nature which cannot sin, because it is born of God. This is lodged in the heart by the almighty power of the divine Quickener of souls, and is the saint's best treasure. It is of this sanctification that the apostle speaks: "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. 6:11.) Thus we see that there is a sanctification by the Father, by the Son, and by the Holy Ghost; and we may say briefly of it that the people of God are sanctified in Christ, by Christ, and for Christ; in Christ by original decree and the will of God (1 Cor. 1:2; Heb. 10:10); by Christ when he sanctified them by his precious blood; and for Christ when the Holy Ghost gives them a meetness for heaven, that Jesus "might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." (Eph. 5:27.)

4. But there is also a sanctification flowing out of this as made manifest in *a man's life and conduct*. For there is a holiness without which no man shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:14), which is to be "followed after" and to be made manifest to others; and this sanctification does not consist only in the communication of holy feelings, spiritual desires, gracious thoughts, and heavenly affections, with that spirituality of mind which is life and peace, in all which the very element of internal holiness consists; but in the production also of the fruits of the Spirit, in a conduct and conversation becoming holiness, and in a godly, self-denying life as weaned and separated from the world, and as manifesting the power of God's grace in daily acts.

These, then, are "the sanctified" for whom the inheritance is reserved,—sanctified by the original decree of God, sanctified by the blood of Christ, sanctified by the work of the holy

Ghost upon their heart, and sanctified by a godly life. For these, then, and for no others is there reserved in heaven an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. You must be a partaker of this sanctification to prove your title to, and give you a meetness for the heavenly inheritance.

Well, then, might the apostle say—and I treading in his steps with feeble feet would re-echo his words—as he took leave of the Church at Ephesus, as I am now taking leave of the Church at Oakham: "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified." O what a mercy it will be for you and me to be ever under the watchful eye and be ever upheld by the omnipotent arms of the Lord God Almighty! O what a blessing it will be if you and I are favoured with the word of his grace, coming into our heart from his own lips with a divine power, and thus to be ever communicating his grace according to our several needs—grace for every burden we may have to carry, grace for every trial we may have to endure, grace for every affliction we may have to suffer, grace for every duty we may have to perform, grace to carry us through life, and grace to be with us in, and carry us safely through death itself!

Now the word of his grace is able to build you up. There is no lack there. There is a sufficiency in the truths of the promises of the gospel to instruct, in the invitations of the gospel to allure, in the promises of the gospel to comfort; in the precepts of the gospel to guide your conduct, in the admonitions of the gospel to check your wandering feet, and in the warnings and rebukes of the gospel to reprove your backslidings. And what but the word of his grace bound close to your heart, felt in your soul, applied to your conscience,

and embraced by your affections, is able to build you up on your most holy faith, and to bring into personal enjoyment and living experience those divine sensations, heavenly feelings, sweet enjoyments, and spiritual consolations which are the earnest of that inheritance which awaits the sanctified beyond the grave? Again, therefore, and again, I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, seeing it is able to communicate these rich and heavenly blessings to all the saints of God. If we live under the eye of God and maintain a sense in our own bosom that that eye is upon us, we shall never want a Benefactor, a Counsellor, a Guide, a Guardian, or a Friend. And if the word of his grace from time to time, either in the public ministry or else in private, comes into our heart, unfolding its precious treasures there, we shall never lack a truth for our instruction, a promise for our comfort, a precept for our direction. I do not then commend you to earthly wisdom, human abilities, your own strength, care, or keeping. I know the inutility and futility of all these things. I desire for myself, I desire for you, to look beyond all these things of earth, in which there is no real or solid profit, and in simplicity and sincerity to commend you to God and to the word of his grace. I hope I may say that I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God as far as I am acquainted with it. And may I be able with the blessed apostle to declare that none of the things that I may have to encounter in body or soul move me, and above all to add, "Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." The grace of God is sufficient for you, for me, and for all that believe in the name of our most blessed Lord; and though we shall have, and may and most certainly must expect, day by day, trials, temptations, and afflictions down to the very grave's mouth, yet we have a most gracious promise—and God of his infinite mercy fulfil it in your



experience and in mine—"My grace is sufficient for thee."

And now, brethren, I bid you farewell. The God of all grace be with you and bless you most abundantly, that every prayer and petition which has been offered up in this place for you as a Church and People, and for myself and others, may be fulfilled richly in your heart's experience. I shall not be able, as I could wish, personally and individually to take my leave of you all; but thanking you for all the kindness, forbearance, affection, and liberality, which you have shown me for many, many years, I now in the name of the Lord bid you farewell.