

Profit and Penury

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Thursday Evening, August 8, 1844

"In all labour there is profit; but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury," Prov. 14:23

In the day that Adam disobeyed the commandment given him, and fell from that righteousness and innocency in which he was created, the Lord said to him, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake." It was no longer to yield its fruits as it would have yielded them, had man continued in a state of innocency, without toil and labour on his part. But, as a fallen sinner, he was doomed to eat his bread in sorrow, and in the sweat of his face, until he returned to the dust out of which he was taken. Thorns only and thistles would the earth now bring forth, instead of those fruits which otherwise it would spontaneously have borne. But this very curse, in the providence of God, has proved to be a blessing. There could be no greater ruin of man, viewed naturally, than to remove from his shoulders labour and toil, and to give him a life of sloth and inaction. The very labour to which he is doomed to earn his daily bread is a spur to all the faculties of his nature; and thus every natural comfort that we possess, and all the progress of arts and civilization, spring from this very curse which God has imposed. Man, having to earn his bread by his daily labour, has been stimulated by his very wants to produce and carry out those inventions which have removed us from a level with the brutes. For of all the human inhabitants of the earth, none are more debased, none more deeply sunk in barbarism, licentiousness, and crime than those in the warmer parts of the world, where, with little toil and labour, the earth brings forth produce enough to maintain man just above starvation.

Solomon, doubtless, had some reference to this natural fact, when he wrote the words of the text; for his Proverbs are not merely most inestimable lessons of divine truth, but also contain admirable instruction in natural things. Being the wisest of men, he saw the profit arising from the daily and incessant labour that man's hands have to perform; and, in the text, contrasts the profit which springs out of this labour with the penury or poverty that ever attends the idle talk of the lips.

This, then, is the meaning of the text, taken in a moral and literal point of view; and I have explained it as such, in order to lay a solid foundation on which to build up a spiritual superstructure; for it must be ever borne in mind that, in the allegorical parts of Scripture, the spiritual interpretation always rests upon, and coincides with, the literal interpretation. If we let this rule go, we shall fall into a thousand absurdities, and totally err from the mind of the Holy Ghost.

Solomon, then, views two persons; the one, a hard working industrious man, who from his labour derived profit, God blessing the work of his hands, whereby to support himself and his family. And then, standing by his side, he observes a lazy, slothful fellow, who can do nothing but talk; who is always boasting of the wonderful exploits he means to perform; but never takes the spade or hoe in his hand to cultivate the ground, according to his original doom, but looks on and prates, whilst the other works. With a glimpse of his penetrating eye, the wisest of men saw the end of each—that whilst the one found profit in his labour, the other was justly doomed to a life of penury.

This is the literal interpretation, the natural connection of the two clauses of the text. But we may be sure that the Holy

Ghost meant something deeper than this—something more than a lesson in political economy. As then, there is a natural connection between the two clauses, so, if God enable me to bring it out, we shall find a spiritual connection too; and see that it is a truth in grace, as well as in providence, that "in all labour there is profit, but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury."

Let us, then, with God's blessing, this evening look a little at what spiritual labour is, and what profit there is in it; and at the same time shew that empty talk without this labour only tends to beggary and starvation.

When the Lord begins a work of grace in a man's heart, then labour commences in his soul; his life of ease is at an end, and spiritual toil begins, to continue all his days.

1. What, then, is the first labour, for the most part, that God sets a quickened soul to do? or rather, what is the first labour that such an one is engaged in? *It is to labour under the law*; and in this labour there is profit; for the Holy Ghost, by Solomon, declares, that "in all labour there is profit." Now, what is it to labour under the law? Before a man can be exercised with this labour, he must know something, by a divine discovery to his conscience, of the purity and spirituality of that holy law which God has given as the ministration of condemnation and death. And no sooner does the soul begin to see and feel the purity and spirituality of the commandment, than labour to fulfil it begins. But to fulfil the law is an impossible task for a fallen sinner, whose whole nature is depraved, enmity against God, and alienation from him; so that the more the purity and spirituality of the law are seen and felt in the light and life of the Spirit, the more impossible does the soul find it to perform that which God has commanded. This, however, is not soon nor easily learnt;

and the Lord sees fit, for the most part, that his people should toil, and that sometimes very hard, under the law, that solid profit may come out of that labour wherewith they are exercised. But, it may be asked, what profit is there in this labour? Much, we answer, every way; but chiefly two-fold; *first*, that by this labour is gained a knowledge of the purity, spirituality, justice, and holiness of God's character; and *secondly*, a knowledge of ourselves, as fallen sinners before him. But the profit, generally speaking, bears a proportion to the labour; the more labour the greater the profit; the less labour the less profit. Thus, the more the soul labours under the law in order to fulfil its demands, the more it feels of the burden and bondage of the law; and the more it seeks to bring forth a righteousness to satisfy its requirements, the more profit there is in it; because a deeper knowledge is thereby gained of the holy character of God, and of the spirituality of that commandment, which can only curse and condemn the soul under it. And is not this a most profitable and indispensable lesson to learn—the purity and unbending justice of God's character, his unspeakable holiness, his indignation and anger against sin? Unless these lessons are written more or less powerfully on a man's conscience, there is no depth of hypocrisy into which he may not sink, no height of presumption into which he may not rise. But if this schoolmaster has brought the disciple low under the rod, it will do much to keep under and subdue that cursed hypocrisy of which the heart is full, and lay an effectual blow at the root of that presumption which Satan is always endeavouring to breathe into the soul.

But in that labour, as I have hinted, we get another branch of profit. The soul thus learns *its complete helplessness and thorough impotency toward every thing spiritually good*. For until a man learns something of the purity and spirituality of God's character, as revealed in the holy law, he will never

know his own sinfulness, ruin, and helplessness. How do we learn our own helplessness naturally? By having a task set us which we cannot perform. How many a man boasts of his abilities to do this and that! Put him to it; let him try his power; his failure will convince him of his inability better than argument. Was it not so with the children of Israel all through their history? Did they not learn their helplessness by their burdens and oppressions? So when the Lord says, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself," (Luke 10:27,) he sets us an impossible task; but we learn our helplessness by the very attempts made to fulfil it. Being, however, beat in all its attempts to bring forth that righteousness, and being defeated in all its exertions; trying to climb up this hill of sand, and perpetually slipping back, the soul learns, as it can learn in no other way, its total helplessness toward anything spiritually good. There is profit in *that*; for who wants help from without till he has no help from within? who wants the strength of God till he knows the weakness of the creature?

In this labour too, the soul learns *its thorough depravity*, complete ruin, and utter wreck. Is there no profit here? Let unwounded professors talk as they please, not to know our own corruption is to know nothing. This is the grand, the indispensable preparation of heart to receive mercy and truth; this lies at the threshold of the strait gate. To cast this aside is to put ourselves out of the pale of all the promises, and to proclaim with a loud voice, "The gospel is not for me; for Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and I do not yet know that I am one." For want of this ballast, how many gallant ships have made shipwreck, and been tossed upon the shoals of presumption or despair! For without a deep experience, by the Spirit's inward teaching, of the depravity and corruption of their fallen nature, how many

have drunk into every error and heresy of the day, despised the Spirit's work upon the heart, and were at last landed in open profanity! So that, in this labour, though painful, there is profit; and the profit is this—that the soul becomes thereby established in the knowledge of its own complete ruin, guilt, and depravity. And this is an effectual cure to all self-righteous notions, presumptuous confidence, and all letter religion, however high or however low, and opens up a way for the soul to receive all the consolations of the gospel.

"The talk of the lips," in this, as in other instances, "tendeth only to penury." A man may talk of his own corruption and depravity from a natural acquaintance with it, and be convinced of his being a sinner by falling headlong time after time into sin. But there is no labour here, no groans and sighs, no guilt of conscience, no distress of mind, no crying to the Lord for deliverance. It is but mere talk; and emptiness and starvation will be the result of such idle chatter. Unless a man has passed through the labour of guilt in his soul, and learnt he is a sinner by the Spirit's work upon his conscience, all the notions he may lay hold of in his judgment, and the talk he may get upon his tongue, will leave him at last destitute of those riches that are communicated to the poor and needy out of Christ's fulness.

2. But again; there is a labour to *make our calling and election sure*; and we are exhorted to give all diligence for this purpose; for "if we do these things, we shall never fall." (2 Pet. 1:10.) It is surprising how some people can lay hold of the doctrine of election with the greatest ease imaginable. Some book falls in their way which treats upon it; O, they can see it before they have read it half through. Or perhaps they hear some minister prove it by the Scriptures from the pulpit; before they leave the chapel they are thoroughly satisfied that it is true, and spring up at one leap from the

lowest depths of Arminianism to the loftiest heights of Calvinism. Such abortive births do not produce full grown men; such mushroom growth does not raise an oak or a cedar; such Jehu driving is not the chariots of Amminadib. To learn election right is to have it ratified and sealed by the Spirit of God upon our conscience. For the exhortation is not to make the doctrine sure; that is sure enough; but to make *your own* election sure; that is, to make it sure in your conscience, and to come to a settlement and establishment in your own heart by divine teaching and revelation, not of the truth merely of the doctrine of election (that is supposed to be known) but of the truth of your own election, the blessed reality of your own soul being included in that everlasting covenant of mercy and grace. And the Apostle bids us give "*all* diligence" to it. It is not a thing to be had in a day; to be done lightly, hastily, and smoothly; but we are to give "all diligence," as though it required very much diligence to make this calling and election sure. This, then, is a labour which God has seen fit his people should be exercised with. And if we had not had a good deal of labour to make our calling and election sure, the knowledge and belief of our calling and election stand on a very slippery foundation. First, we have to make our calling sure; and there is often much labour in that. We have to go to the first spot where God began with our souls; to the first feeling Godward that we were exercised with. We have to look at the effects and fruit of God's touching our conscience with his finger; to bring our experience to the Scriptures, and see whether it will stand according to the word of truth; and to cry to a heart-searching God that we may not be deceived in this important matter. We have to be exercised with doubts and fears whether this calling was certain, clear and distinct; whether some corrupt motive did not lie at the root of our profession; whether we were not talked into it by man; and whether we did not begin with God before he began with us.

I believe that many of God's children have to labour (and you know labour is no pleasant work) perhaps for years under doubts and fears, and experience trouble and distress because they cannot make their calling sure, nor be perfectly certain that they have been called by the Lord himself effectually unto life and salvation. We may well be exercised upon this matter, for what a solemn word is that, "Many are called (that is, outwardly) but few chosen!" And who that knows the deceitfulness of the heart has not reason to fear lest it deceive him?

But "in all labour," says our text, "there is profit." And O, what profit there is in being well-exercised about our calling! How satisfied most professors are with theirs! A church has taken them into membership! what else can be wanted? they think. A minister shakes them by the hand, and calls them "brother" or "sister;" what other evidence, think they, can be needed? They have had something or other under a sermon that has left a little impression upon their minds; what else can be wanted? they think, to make their calling sure? They are sound Calvinists, and have their minds sometimes lifted up by hearing a minister cut down doubts and fears and corruption-preaching; and tell the people that nothing is so easy as the full assurance of faith, and that they have all a right to it. Depend upon it if a man can take up with every shallow evidence as to his calling; if he be not at times exercised about the matter, at least, until he is well-established in his soul as to the certainty of it,—depend upon it, his calling, or rather the evidence of it, rests upon a very sandy foundation. The devil has not tried him very sorely, nor a vile heart of unbelief much harassed him, nor the corruptions of his fallen nature much battered down his evidences. To rest upon a shallow foundation for eternal life, and never be exercised about it, clearly proves that the calling was of nature, not of grace; and that such an one is in

the ranks of that band of traitors, of whom it is said, that "a deceived heart has turned them aside." But when we feel the workings of a vile heart of unbelief that calls everything in question, are plagued with a thousand doubts and fears, are harassed with a thousand suspicions, tormented with a thousand fiery darts of blasphemy and obscenity, and find infidelity doubting every thing, from the being of God down to his testimony in our conscience; to have all that the Lord has done sifted backwards and forwards in the heart, and all that has been going on from first to last to be tried as by fire, I warrant you, there will be some labour here. But "in all labour there is profit." And shall this be without? How it cuts up false evidences! How it throws down rotten props! How it winnows away the chaff and dust of natural religion. And O, when the Lord does reveal himself, when he does apply his atoning blood, and does speak home to the conscience, what a profit is there in the labour that the soul has gone through, in order to make its calling and election sure! Where do we find, generally speaking, most life in the soul? Who are the best hearers in a congregation? Who are the most humble, God-fearing, and consistent members in a church? Is it not those who are exercised in their souls, labouring under and burdened with a vile heart of unbelief to make their calling and election sure? And who can sleep under a heart searching sermon, and parry, with a smile of contempt, every arrow aimed at graceless professors? Who are first to swim in the troubled sea of politics, are most a prey to pride and covetousness, and sooner or later bring a reproach on the cause of truth? Is it not those who have never doubted their religion, have had no labour nor soul trouble, and have never been exercised in their conscience whether God the Spirit has been at work in their hearts or not? "In all labour," (and therefore in this labour) "there is profit." And the soul that has passed through this labour, and has reaped the profit, would not, when the profit comes, have been without

the labour for any consideration. How often has the poor labourer in the field had to toil among the heavy clods! What work has he had to plough, sow, and harrow the land; and how, at this season of the year especially, when he has had to ply the sickle, and gather in the harvest, has the sweat run down his face! But how sweet is the bread when it is put upon the table, and he can sit down and eat the fruit of his toils! And so spiritually; when a man by exercise has laboured hard in his soul to make his calling and election sure; and when the Lord drops some precious testimony into his conscience, how sweet is the bread that comes out of this previous labour, how precious the comfort that comes out of this foregoing toil!

But "the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury." What praters, what gossips, what idle chatterers there are in the visible church of God, who are always talking, talking, talking about religion, and know nothing secretly of groaning and crying unto the Lord! Bunyan has drawn their character with a masterly hand under the name of "Talkative" in his Pilgrim's Progress. Who so forward as these to discuss the most knotty point of doctrine; and who so backward to call upon the Lord in secret? Who so forward with their tongue; and who so backward with their heart and hand? Who so much for the mere talk of the lip; and who so ignorant of the hard labour and severe exercises of a troubled and tried soul? Who so ready to condemn others? who so slow to condemn themselves? Who so nimble with the letter of Scripture; who so ignorant of the power? With them it is all talk, talk, that tends only to penury! They will never profit your souls, children of God. Talkative associates will never be your help and comfort, if you are labouring under heavy loads. It is the meek, quiet, humble, broken-hearted, exercised family of God, who have not often a word to say, and can only speak as they feel some little power moving in

their heart, that will be your choice associates. Take Solomon's advice, ye that fear God, "Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge." (Prov. 14:7.)

3. Again. There is *labouring under temptation*. If it is true that in all labour there is profit, then there will be profit in this labour also. The inspired word of truth says, by the Apostle, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience." (James 1:2, 3.) The Lord sees fit that his children should be exercised with temptation. God himself does not tempt them, for, "he cannot tempt any man" (James 1:13); but he suffers them to be tempted. He deals with them as with Job of old. Satan, we read, said to the Lord, "Hast thou not made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side." (Job 1:10.) God had set a hedge around his servant, and Satan could not shoot through it. But God could, without being the author of sin, remove the hedge. He might and could withdraw his restraining power over the prince of darkness; and when he withdrew this restraining power, then Satan could tempt him, but only by the permission of God. So the Lord sees fit that his people should have to labour under temptation. And O, what severe temptations many of God's children have to conflict with! Sometimes they have to labour under the temptation, that there is no God; at other times, all kinds of infidel thoughts and suspicions as to the truth and inspiration of the Scriptures, fill and distress their mind. The most subtle arguments, and the most daring reasonings work up in their hearts, to which they can give no satisfactory answer; such as, "What is the soul? How can we be certain that it is immortal, or subsists at all after death? How can we be sure that Christ is God as well as man? What if all religion be a delusion, and the Bible itself the invention of men?" A

thousand other suspicions rush through the mind at times and seasons, which I need not infuse into yours who know them not. "O," cry some, "you ought not to have such wicked thoughts. You to call yourself a believer, and ever to have such doubts as those!" Can you keep them out of your mind? I cannot out of mine. They rush in at the door and window, and fly about in one's soul without asking leave to come or go. Many of God's people, I believe, have to labour under these sharp and powerful temptations, till they sometimes think they are little better than infidels.

"And can there be profit in this hard labour?" says the soul. Yes, great profit. How so? Because when the Lord does convince us (as he does at times) of his own being, of his own presence, of the truth of his own word, by bringing home that truth with power to the conscience, then we become established in the knowledge of, and faith in, the being of God, and the truth of his word, as we get established in no other way.

There are two seasons when we cannot doubt the being of God, and the truth and inspiration of his word; and I will tell you when they are. *One* is, when we have sinned, and guilt falls upon the conscience—then we know painfully there is a God, that his holy eye has seen the sin which we have committed, and that his word, which condemns us, is inspired by the Holy Ghost. The sighs, groans, and cries that come out of a guilty conscience carry with them their own attestation, not only that there is a God, but also of this, "Thou God seest me!" *Another* season when we cannot doubt either the being of God, or the truth and inspiration of his word, is when the Lord makes his truth precious to our souls; when his word drops like dew into our heart, and it becomes to us "sweeter than honey and the honeycomb." Then we become as certain, as we are of our own existence, not only

that there is a God, but, that he has revealed his grace, mercy, and truth in the Scriptures; for our souls have felt the sweetness, power, and comfort stored up in them. Now we should not have got this profit unless we had passed through the previous labour. There are many who believe because they never doubted. But what a sorry faith is this! The best way to believe is, *after* we have doubted, by the power of God removing those doubts through the communication of a living faith. O how strong faith is when it comes after doubt! But to believe *before* you doubt, and because you never doubt, O what a sorry faith is that! And how one gust of temptation will blow that faith into a thousand shivers! There are some who say, "they have never had a doubt these twenty years." Is the devil dead? Is an unbelieving heart no longer in their body? Are they soldiers of Jesus Christ, and never had during twenty years campaign a fiery dart from hell? Twenty years without the furnace and fiery trial! Neither God nor Satan leave the elect alone so long.

So other temptations that work up in the heart, as the rebellion, blasphemy, and enmity of the carnal mind against a holy God,—what hard labour is this! "O," says one, "you should never touch upon these subjects; you should exalt a glorious Christ, and leave all these corruptions alone." But how can we know anything of the power and presence of God in the soul, unless we know something of these corruptions, and of the Lord's mercifully subduing them? Can we know the reality and power of God's grace in our hearts, unless we feel there is that which grace subdues, as well as pardons? A minister of Christ, I grant, is not to preach corruption—what I may perhaps be allowed to call "naked corruption"—corruption apart from the grace that fights against and subdues it. He will not, if rightly taught, so describe all the various workings of corruption as to infuse temptation into the mind of others, or speak of sin in a light trifling spirit and

presumptuous manner. But I will tell you what he will do, if God has sent him—he will describe the struggles of grace against corruption, and of corruption against grace; he will shew the strength of besetting sin, when the enemy comes in like a flood, and the power of God in keeping the soul from falling; he will dissect and anatomize the human heart, and trace out its subtleties and deceits; and he will speak a word in season to the weary by declaring how he himself has been tempted and delivered. If he never do this, he will not fulfil his commission, "to take forth the precious from the vile."

But what profit do we get from feeling the enmity and rebellion of our fallen nature? We become satisfied of this truth, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God;" we see and feel into what an awful depth of corruption we are sunk; we learn to abhor ourselves in dust and ashes; and we rejoice that grace superabounds over all the aboundings of sin. Thus in this "labour there is profit;" but "the talk of the lips only tendeth to penury." How many ministers are always as they say, exalting Christ, and preaching the offices of Christ? But it is to be feared that, with most of them, it is but the talk of the lips that tendeth only to penury. They preach Christ out of the Bible, as the Mahometans preach Mahomet out of the Koran. They have no spiritual faith in him, nor experimental knowledge of him. There are certain truths in the Bible, and these they set forth with skill and eloquence; but they have never had them sealed upon their conscience by the Holy Ghost. They cannot describe the operations of the Spirit on the soul; nor trace out, from their own experience, a work of grace; nor enter into the various exercises that God's people are tried with. This talk of the lips about "the offices of Christ" that does not spring from a heartfelt experience, and is not accompanied by the power of the Spirit, tendeth only to penury, and is nothing but starvation to the souls of God's people. There is no solid food

brought forth, no spiritual profit communicated, no dew and savour. Their pulpit eloquence is but rant and empty noise; and God's poor and needy children who have had all this talk of the lips sounding in their ears, come away without one crumb of the bread of life.

4. *To labour, too, under a vile heart of unbelief;* to feel how impossible it is to bring forth a single act of faith; to find, that do what we will, there is an evil heart of unbelief counteracting all we do—in this labour there is profit. How am I to know what faith is? I will tell you, at least if I know anything about it in my own experience. We learn it *first*, by knowing our own unbelief, by feeling the workings of a doubting, fearing, distrusting heart. This effectually beats to pieces false faith; it dashes to shivers vain-confidence and daring presumption. But we learn what faith is, *secondly*, by the enjoyment of it. Shall I use a familiar figure to explain my meaning? for sometimes these illustrations throw a light upon the subject. Picture to yourself a starving beggar standing at the window of an eating-house; he sees and smells the savoury, smoking meet on the counter. How does he know it is so good and savoury? A man in a fever would not think it so. Do not his fainting body and sinking stomach, do not the feelings of starvation that he experiences, all tell him, by the longings and hungerings of his keen appetite, what good food it is? But should some kind passerby purchase and give him an ample slice from the smoking joint, he would know then how savoury it was by the enjoyment of it, as he knew it before by the want of it. And is it not so with most other things?—with sickness and health, toil and rest, pain and ease, cold and warmth, misery and happiness? Are not all learnt from their opposites as well as from themselves? So spiritually; we know what faith is by the want of it, being exercised with an unbelieving heart, and not being able, in our feelings, to muster up one grain or find a

single particle of it. But when faith comes, and the Lord draws it forth into blessed exercise, to embrace the Person and work of Christ, and lay hold of God's promises—*then* we know what faith is by the enjoyment of it, as we knew it before by the absence and want of it. In this labour, then, there is profit.

5. So with *the temptation to throw away all our religion*, and profess the truth no more. I dare say some here have been tempted to give it all up, and not go on a single day longer with it, thinking themselves hypocrites, altogether destitute of the root of the matter, deceiving themselves and deceiving others. In this labour (and what labour sometimes this is!) there is profit. For how honest it makes a man! how eager such an one is to have a minister trace out the real work of God upon the heart! how he wants all his evidences brought to light! how he opens his bosom to every arrow that may be shot from the pulpit! how he groans and secretly cries to the Lord that he would speak to his soul, and give him some evidence of sonship. In all this labour what profit there is, when the soul gets the blessing that comes from it! The heaving of an anxious bosom, the various exercises of the mind, how sweet they make the blessing when the blessing comes!

Neither body nor soul can do without exercise. Thus, we find the Apostle speaking to Timothy, "*Exercise thyself rather unto godliness.*" (1 Tim. 4:7.) And of himself he said, "Herein do I *exercise* myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." (Acts 24:16.) He was not for letting Timothy take things for granted, and sleep satisfied in a profession of truth, without a real work on the conscience. Speaking of affliction, he says, in another place, "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable

fruit of righteousness *unto them which are exercised thereby.*" (Heb. 12:11.) You see it is the exercise, the toil, the labour, the tossing up and down that does the good; and out of these the spiritual profit springs. It is not to fold one's arms, like the fool of whom Solomon speaks (Eccles. 4:5), and says, "I am satisfied with my religion; I want no more of these exercises; I have got beyond all experience; and now live above the reach of doubt, guilt, and fear." This smooth road to heaven is no more than what Lord Chesterfield said, when he retired from public life, that "he should sleep in his carriage the rest of the way," not knowing that way would end in a precipice. The end of the profane nobleman, and of the professing Calvinist, may be more similar than many dream of.

6. The Apostle, writing to the Thessalonians, (1 Thess. 1:3,) speaks of their "work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope." This is a short summary of spiritual labour. For these are the three chief Christian graces,—*faith, hope, and love.* But are these slothful, indolent, inactive graces? Are they not all connected by the Apostle with some labour to be done or endured? Has not faith "a work?" And what is work but labour? Is there not "the patience of hope?" And what is patience but endurance? And is not endurance labour? And has not love "a labour?" *That* is said too expressly to be denied.

"If then, we have faith, there will be a work for faith to do. If we have hope, there will be a patience for hope to endure. If we have love, there will be a labour for love to perform. For instance,

There is, "*the work of faith.*" Wherever there is faith in the soul, there will be many conflicts and trials, as well as sharp and severe exercises attending it, in order to try it; we

therefore read, "That *the trial of your faith* being much more precious than of gold which perisheth, though it be tried with fire." (1 Pet. 1:7.) So the Lord said to the Laodicean church, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich." (Rev. 3:18.) And the Apostle says, "After that ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." (1 Pet. 5:10.) A dead faith has no trials, labours, exercises, temptations, or conflicts. But where there is a living faith in the conscience, it will have to labour; as Hart says,

"It lives and labours under load;
Though damped it never dies."

This labour of faith is a very different thing from the legal workings of a self-righteous heart, trying to please God by internal or external acts of natural obedience. The work of faith with power is begun and carried on by God himself, and is altogether spiritual and supernatural. This is its main work—to believe on the Son of God, and receive, embrace, and submit to the truth as it is in Jesus. As the Lord said to the Jews when they asked him, "What shall we do that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." (John 6:28, 29.) But O, what opposition there is to this work of faith! How unbelief will work up against every act of faith in the soul! What difficulties, impediments, obstacles, and afflictions lie in a man's path when he sets out in faith! There is sin perpetually working, there is the devil tempting or harassing him: sometimes the world snaring or persecuting him; and often his own heart deceiving and entangling him. If faith be a living grace brought forth by the operation of God the Spirit in the conscience, it will not lie dead, like a stone upon the road. No; faith has to labour under these exercises and in these conflicts, that it may

embrace the truth of God in spite of them. But our text still holds good. In this "work of faith" there is profit; because the more faith is exercised, the stronger it becomes. If I may use a familiar figure, it is like the blacksmith's arm. What brings up the muscles so strongly, and give his arm the vigour it possesses? The labour of the sledge-hammer. And what the labour of the sledge-hammer is to the arm of the smith, so is spiritual labour to faith. It becomes stronger by its exercises. If I were to tie up my arm or my leg, as we read is sometimes done by the Hindoo Pilgrims, it would soon shrink and wither, and I should become a cripple. So were faith to have no conflicts, labours, or exercises, it would become weak and flaccid, its sinews would shrink, and it would fade away out of the heart. Not that faith can strengthen itself. I mean not that. But the Lord mercifully strengthening it, and supplying it out of Christ's fulness to fight; the more difficulties, exercises and trials it has to conflict with, the more it becomes invigorated instead of weakened. So that the very things that seemed as if they would destroy it, are overruled to strengthen it. You that fear the Lord, have you not found it so? You have had illness perhaps to bear, or depths of poverty to wade in, heavy afflictions in your family, and much darkness and distress of soul. You thought that these weights and burdens would crush your faith. Did you find it so? Was not your faith stronger then under these trials than it is now? Was it not strengthened in proportion to the loads it had to carry? Like the children of Israel, the more they were afflicted, the more they multiplied and grew. But if you are at ease in Zion, with no difficulties, no personal or family troubles, no spiritual exercises, no tempting world, no plaguing devil, you may fancy how wonderfully strong your faith is, yet it is but as the dream of some invalid lying on his bed, and in his sleep fancying he is hard at work, when, awake, the poor creature could scarcely rise without fainting. You are in a dream, my friend, when you think how strong

your faith is, and what feats it can accomplish. Were it brought into actual labour, it could not stand a single hour.

So with *hope*. Some may say, "What a good hope I have! How strong it stands! What a blessed anchorage I enjoy! Neither wind nor wave can remove it!" A trim wherry is very well suited to row up and down the Thames; but it will not do to go to sea with. To cross the Atlantic Ocean would make sad work even with some of the pretty river-built yachts. So an unexercised professor may say, "How strong my hope is! I lie at anchor waiting my dismissal; my soul is established in the doctrines of grace and I am confident of going to heaven." Let some storm come to try the cable; it will be a mercy if it do not go down at once into the deep waters. Hope has "patience" for its labour. But what can we know of patience before the trial comes? As Berridge says,—

"I fancied patience would be brought
Before my trouble rose."

How patient the husband is when the wife is all smiles! How patient the wife is when the husband is good-tempered, and doing all he can to please! But let some family broil arise; patience is often sadly wanted then. And so spiritually, we may well be patient when we have no trouble; we may well have a good hope when no storm is trying how the anchorage holds. But where is our patience when trouble comes? If we have hope, we shall have "the patience of hope;" and the "patience of hope," will be in proportion to the troubles that beset us. And thus, when hope patiently rides out the storm, the cable proves to be good, and the anchor to hold fast.

And so with the "*labour of love*;" there is profit in that, but "the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury." What is more

disgusting than to hear a dead professor for ever talking about "his dear Jesus, his precious Christ;" and when called upon to make any sacrifice for his "precious Jesus," there is no man so unwilling to take up the cross! How many are canting, "Brother this, and Sister that;" but let the brother or sister get into adversity, is the pocket opened? is the heart enlarged? is any love shewn by action? But the talk of the lips, "my brother, my sister, my God, and my Jesus," only tendeth to penury. Where there is real love, such as God sheds abroad in the heart, there will be the "labour of love;" and it is in this labour of love that there is the profit. If you love the Lord, you will have a thousand risings of enmity against him, a thousand suspicions whether he love you, a thousand blasphemous darts shot through your carnal mind against his glorious Person, atoning blood, and justifying righteousness, and the more you love him, the more your love will be tried. You know that jealousy is always a close attendant upon love. The Scripture connects them closely: "Love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame." (Song Sol. 8:6.) But dead love has no jealousy. He that talks of love and does not feel it, is never jealous whether the Lord love him; never jealous when he sees the smiles and kisses of the Lord given to a more favoured object. Oh no! dead love has no labour, because it has no jealousy. But living love has a labour. The mother that loves her child—what labour attends her love! If the mother do not love her son, he may grow up a thief or a drunkard; the mother does not care what he is. But if there be love in her bosom, then she will have trials and sorrows that loveless mothers feel not at all. If the husband love the wife, or the wife the husband, how jealous each will feel should any mark of affection or tenderness be shewn to another! But dead love, Gallio-like, careth for none of these things. Wherever, then, there is love, there will be labour attending it; and it is

only in this labour that there is profit. Dead love has neither hopes nor fears, neither work nor wages. But living love has an inward labour to obtain some smiles from the Beloved, some glance of his countenance, some token of his dying love making the heart glad.

But "the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury." And if any one thing more beggars the soul than another, it is the mere talk of the lips. Few things bring more barrenness into the soul of a child of God than to hear an empty professor prate out his fulsome chatterings to the Lord; no inward grace, no power, no dew attend it; it only robs and plunders him of all that he most prizes.

The Lord, then, has appointed, that "in all labour there should be profit." And if we are to enjoy the profit we must endure the labour. In the margin of 2 Tim. 2:6, we read, "The husbandman labouring first, must be a partaker of the fruits;" that is, he must labour first, and then sit down to partake of the fruit of his labours. There is nothing valuable without labour. The sermon is worth nothing, if it has not come out of the labour of a minister's heart; if he has not laboured in soul for the things brought forth, it will never profit God's people. And you that pray at the prayer-meetings, your prayers are only empty talk, and brings penury into the souls of God's children, unless your heart has secretly laboured for the petitions which you utter. Without this labour, you will go through your round like a horse in a mill, in an ever recurring circle; so that the friends will know how you will begin, when you are in the middle, and where you will leave off. Such talk of the lips tendeth only to penury. And so in spiritual conversation, so called; the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury, if what is spoken is not brought forth from labour in the heart. All your unravelling of knotty texts, and discussion of doctrines in the mere letter,

only tend to penury; there is no real profit nor food in them to a gracious soul. But "in all labour there is profit." The more the heart is exercised, and the more it labours in the good things that God bestows, the more profit there will be to our own souls, and to the souls of others; and the more praise, glory, and honour there will be to the Lord.

Our religion, then, if it be the religion of the Holy Ghost, will be of this nature. There will be labour in it. And when the Lord out of this labour, out of this ploughing, sowing, harrowing, and reaping, brings forth a blessed harvest, we shall enter into the meaning of those words of the Psalmist, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." (Psa. 126:5, 6.)