

The Gospel the Power of God unto Salvation

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, Dec. 9, 1860

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."
Romans 1:16

There is scarcely any one, perhaps, in this congregation arrived at mature age who has not witnessed great external changes and improvements since he was old enough to notice passing events; and those of us who have climbed the topmost hill of middle life, and are now declining into the vale of years, have seen since the days of our boyhood and youth advances in art and science and a general growth and material progress which would make our forefathers, could they rise from their graves, stare with astonishment, and scarcely able to believe it was the same England in which they had lived and died. We have planted colonies at the ends of the earth, we may say under our very feet, which instead of being as in their day, mere hulks for convicts, are now flourishing and populous communities, sending us gold weighed by tons and counted by millions. We are borne from town to town with all the speed and more than the endurance of the racehorse. The electric telegraph conveys messages with the velocity of lightning across continents and under the very waves of the stormy sea; so that an Emperor cannot die at St. Petersburg or a King be driven from his throne at Naples but it is known all over Europe in a few hours. Trade and commerce have been tripled, and population doubled since some of us lay in our mother's lap, and the wealth and power of our native country are proportionally increased. Nor does there seem to be any standing still in this race; for look where we will, almost

everything seems to betoken progress, advance, improvement.

But amidst all these wondrous changes and amidst all this improvement, can we believe or hope that religion, that is, spiritual religion, has made any advance? Has that shared in the universal march of intellect? Have railways and telegraphs and gold ships, all the progress of art and all the discoveries of science, advanced one jot the kingdom of God as a living reality in the land generally, or as a more powerful display of his grace and glory in the heart of individual believers? We are compelled to say "No;" for, looking around us with enlightened eyes, we must say that there are two things which in these days of "March, forward," have made neither improvement nor progress: one is the *Gospel*, that is, the revelation of truth in the word, and the other is the *effect* of the gospel—the kingdom of God set up in the heart by the Holy Ghost. It is true that there is a greater profession of religion; Bibles are sown almost broadcast over the land, and many speak well of Jesus Christ and of salvation by his name. But a flood is not a river. If a stranger were to stand this morning upon Stamford Bridge* and look around him, he might think what a noble river flows by our town. But we who live here know that in a few days this wide sea of waters will shrink into its usual insignificant channel. So a stranger to God and godliness, in its life, experience, and power, looking merely at the wide flood of profession in this country, may think what a noble stream of religion flows down the vales of our native land. But one that knows divine things by divine teaching sees with keen, discerning eye that a shallow winter flood is not a deep, abiding stream; and that muddy waters, however widely spread over low meadows, may breed fever and ague, but are not that pure river of water of life which issues from the throne of God and the Lamb. In fact, so far from improving, man cannot touch God's work without

marring it. Could any skill or power of man improve the sun?—though we should be very glad just now to see a little more of his bright and warm beams. Could they improve the rain?—though we should be pleased if, after so deluging a year, it would now suspend its continued fall. Could they improve light?—though we should gladly hail a little more of it on this dark December day. So no advance in science, no progress in wealth or civilisation, can improve the gospel. And if they cannot effect any improvement in the gospel itself, they certainly cannot produce any in that kingdom of God set up by divine grace in the heart, which, as intimated in our text, is the effect of the gospel as made the power of God unto salvation.

* There was a very great flood at this time.

The apostle assures his brethren that he was "ready to preach the gospel to those who were at Rome also," for though he had not yet seen them in the flesh, yet he loved them in the bowels of Christ, and his heart being full of the spirit and power of the gospel, to preach it far and wide that many might be saved thereby was his dearest employment. He tells them, therefore, in the text that he was not ashamed of this gospel; and gives a very valid and blessed reason why he felt no shame or disgrace in proclaiming it; "For," says he, "it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Approach these words then with me, and let us see whether we cannot find in them four leading points which may, with God's blessing, profitably occupy our thoughts this morning.

I.—*First, what is the gospel of Christ?*

II.—*Secondly, how it is the power of God unto salvation.*

III.—*Thirdly, the persons to whom it is made this power: "every one that believeth."*

IV.—*Lastly, that this being the case, we should not and must not be ashamed of it.*

I.—But first what is the meaning of the word "*gospel*?" It is a good old English term, and means literally "good news," "glad tidings." But what are these good news, these glad tidings, and what is it that makes them such? They are so as being a message of pure mercy from heaven; a revelation of the free, sovereign, distinguishing grace of God to lost, ruined man. The gospel is here called "the gospel of Christ," for as he is the grand Subject, so he is the grand Object of the gospel of the grace of God. In him, that is, in his glorious Person, it all centres, and out of the fulness of his eternal love it all flows. Thus we may say that every line of the gospel comes *from* the Person of Christ as its eternal centre; and from every part of its wide circumference does every line also run *back* to him. It is therefore called emphatically "the gospel of Christ," as being a revelation of his love and grace, his Person and work, his blood and righteousness, his risen power, his ascending glory, his prevailing intercession, his sovereign dominion, and his mediatorial reign in heaven and in earth. But it is called the "gospel" chiefly as proclaiming the glad tidings of salvation to the children of men without money and without price.

i. But though it is chiefly the gospel as the revelation and proclamation of this salvation in time, yet its plan was laid in the mind of God from all eternity. We read, therefore, of "the counsel of the Lord standing for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations." (Psal. 33:11.) The counsel of God's heart was the gospel of peace, for we read that "the counsel of peace shall be between them both" (Zech. 6:13); that is,

the Father and the Son. This counsel of peace was ratified by an everlasting covenant, according to the words, "My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him." And, to show its stability, he adds, "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David;" that is, the spiritual and mystical David, God's own beloved Son, of whom the son of Jesse was but a type and figure. (Psal. 89:28, 34, 35.) In this everlasting covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ undertook to suffer and die in our nature for the sins of his people. He is, therefore, called "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," and as such to have "a book of life," in which the names of the elect are written. (Rev. 13:8.) He thus represents himself as addressing his sheep on his right hand at the last day, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matt. 25:34.) This may seem to some hard doctrine, and so indeed it is to the natural mind of man; but the very nature of an infinite, eternal, unchangeable God, apart from all other considerations, compels us to believe that it cannot be otherwise. For would it not make him a changeable Being if there could be any new thoughts in his mind, or if any fresh purposes could spring up in his heart? We must view the gospel, then, as a revelation of that eternal grace, mercy, love, and compassion which always were in the bosom of God; and that it is a making known unto us in time of "the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself," and "wherein he hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence." (Eph. 1:8, 9.)

No sooner, therefore, did sin enter into the world, and death by sin, by the fall of our first parents in Paradise, than the gospel began to rise as a light from heaven in the thick darkness that then fell upon the heart of man. It has ever

since shone upon this poor dark, benighted world—sometimes as a feeble star, glimmering through clouds, as under the Old Testament dispensation; sometimes as a bright and glorious sun, as when the Sun of Righteousness arose with healing on his wings; when the Son of God came from the bosom of his Father, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. But whether as a star or as a sun, it has always been a light that has shone upon this dark world, and in fact has ever been the only light that has guided man into the ways of truth and peace. Look with me, then, at the various times and ways in which this light has enlightened benighted man with the light of the living. It arose first in Paradise, in the first promise given by the Lord that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. Next it shone in Abel, when he "brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof; and the Lord had respect unto him and to his offering." (Gen. 4:4.) For was not this offering and the respect which God had to it and to the offerer a type of the sacrifice of Christ and the acceptance of his people in him? Then it shone in Enoch, who "walked with God and was not because God took him;" but how could he walk with God except as accepted in the Beloved, and being thus reconciled unto God was enabled to walk with him and before him in the gospel of peace? Next it shone in Noah, and especially in the ark wherein he and his family were preserved from the waters of the deluge—for the ark was a type of Christ; and as those in the ark rode safely over the waves of that flood which destroyed the world, so those who are in Christ, the ark of the covenant, will ride safely over the billows of God's wrath, which, not with water but with fire, will consume the present earth. Again it shone in Abraham, in the promise given to him that in him and his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed. It shone also in Isaac and Jacob; lighted up the soul of Joseph in the prison-house and in the court of Pharaoh; and though afterwards obscured

for 400 years, it burst forth with renewed splendour in the call of the children of Israel out of Egypt. It was typified by the Paschal Lamb; by the passage of the Red Sea; by the cloudy pillar in the wilderness; by the manna that fell from heaven; by the Rock that followed them through their journeys, which we are expressly told was Christ. (1 Cor. 10:4.) So also in all the Levitical sacrifices; in every ancient type and figure: in all the ordinances of the old covenant did this gospel continue to shine. It shone, too, in all the promises that stud the Scripture from Genesis to the close of the Old Testament canon. It shone in all the prophets, from Enoch down to Malachi; and in all the saints and righteous men, the Old Testament worthies, all of whom "died in faith, not having received the promises," that is, in their fulfilment in the Person and work of Christ, but "having seen them afar off, were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Some speak as if there were no gospel preached or known until Christ came into the world; but how clear are the words of the apostle to the contrary! "Unto us was the gospel preached as well as unto them." (Heb. 4:2.) It is true that it was a dim light compared with the glorious gospel preached by the apostles, but it was nevertheless a true light. But when the Son of God came into this world, then indeed in a more especial manner "the day-spring from on high visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." (Luke 1:78, 79.) Then the very angels were sent from heaven to proclaim "good tidings of great joy which should be to all people." And what were these good tidings but that "there was born in the city of David a Saviour, which was Christ the Lord?" (Luke 2:11.) It is, then, in the Person and work of Jesus that the gospel specially shines. When, therefore, he came into this world a babe in Bethlehem's manger, and for more than thirty years lived in it as a "man

of sorrows and acquainted with grief;" when he hung upon the cross in dolorous agony of body and soul; when he thus put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, and by one offering "perfected for ever them which are sanctified;" when he cried out with expiring voice, "It is finished," he gave the sealing testimony to the gospel of the grace of God. And this he more fully ratified by his resurrection from the dead; by his commission to the disciples to go into all the world and preach it to every creature; by his ascension to heaven; by his glorification at the right hand of the Father; by the sending down of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost; and by the mighty power which attended the preached word, when the apostles, under that divine influence, "gave witness of his resurrection," and "being filled with the Holy Ghost spake the word of God with boldness." However obscured at different times, the same gospel, and therefore called "the everlasting gospel," has shone ever since, and will shine unto the end of all time. It is true, indeed, that the Lord puts this treasure into earthen vessels when he gives his servants power to preach it with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; but so far as they proclaim it in its purity and power, it is the same message of glad tidings; and when attended with a blessing from above, every one that receives it into a believing heart is a witness that the gospel is still preached by the servants of the Lord, and that God still makes it his power unto salvation.

ii. But if the gospel mean "good news," "glad tidings," and if that be its distinguishing characteristic, we may next enquire to *whom* is it glad tidings? To *whom* does it bear in its bosom good news?

1. Is it so to the man *dead in sin*? How can it be? He has no ears to hear its joyful sound; no eyes to see the beauty and blessedness of Jesus whose love and blood it proclaims; no

heart to feel its power. Being dead in sin, he is utterly insensible to its melodious voice. Besides which, he loves his sins, is infatuated with his lusts, hugs and caresses his bosom idols; and as the gospel proclaims war unto death against these abominations, he naturally views it as a sworn enemy to all his delights. Its very sound is, therefore, hateful to his ears; for the gospel calls men to repentance of their sins, to the forsaking of their idols, to the giving up of their lusts, and to a life of holiness and godly fear. It is clearly impossible that the gospel can be glad tidings to a man in love with sin, drunk with his lusts, and madly determined sooner to perish than to part with his beloved idols. It is therefore, it ever must be, a gloomy sound to him, and he hates to hear its very name, for it speaks of a deliverance from the love and power of the very sins in which his whole heart and being are wrapped up.

2. But is it a pleasing sound—does it bring good tidings to the *Pharisee*, to the proud, unhumiliated professor, who is enamoured of his own good deeds, his long and unwearied attention to every religious and moral duty, and who as such is seeking to establish his own righteousness, and climb to heaven by a ladder of his own construction? How can free grace, salvation by atoning blood, justification by the imputed righteousness of the suffering Son of God, be good news to one who has never seen or felt his lost, ruined condition, or ever smitten his breast with a cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner"?

3. Is it glad tidings to the *man of business*, occupied from morning to night with anxious cares how he shall best advance his schemes and speculations, and to whom money is the one great object of life? Has he any heart for the riches of God's grace, or for the spiritual blessings which are treasured up in the Lord of life and glory? Six per cent is

more to him than any gospel promise; and to live and die rich a greater treasure than to live and die in the Lord.

4. Is it glad tidings to those whom the apostle describes as "*lovers of pleasure* more than lovers of God?" How can it be glad tidings to such bright, gay butterflies, who sun their short hour in the amusements, dress, and follies of this vain world, and hate the very name of religion as a sound full of melancholy and gloom? And why so, but because it would call them away from these vain pleasures, and sounds in their ears that the end of these things is death?

iii. We see, then, that to all such the gospel is not good news. But does it belie its name? Has God himself named it wrong? We durst not so think. To *some*, then, it must be good news, glad tidings. And who these are we will now enquire.

1. First, then, it is good news to the *self-condemned* and *self-abhorred*; to those who by the law and by the verdict of their own conscience are brought in guilty before a holy God. These are "the sinners" of whom the Lord speaks that he came to call them to repentance (Matt. 9:13); these are "the lost" whom the "Son of Man came to seek and save;" these are "the ungodly," that is, feelingly so, whom God freely justifieth (Rom. 4:5); and these, too, are those "without strength" to help or save themselves, for whom Christ died. (Rom. 5:6.) These are "the mourners in Zion," whom he came to comfort; "the broken-hearted," whom he came "to bind up;" "the captives," to whom he was anointed "to proclaim liberty;" and "the meek," to whom he preaches "good tidings." (Isa. 61:1, 3.) To tell such that in Christ there is a full salvation from all their sins, a blessed pardon through his atoning blood, a complete deliverance from death and hell through his finished work, and all this without

money and without price,—what good news to them is this! What glad tidings does the gospel bear in its bosom to such hopeless, helpless wretches as these!

2. Again, to those who are *stripped of all their strength, wisdom, goodness, and righteousness*, who lie before God in the dust of self-abasement, having nothing and being nothing but a mass of sin and wretchedness:—to these the gospel is good news, for it tells them that there is a righteousness which can perfectly justify them "from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses;" that there is a fountain opened in a Saviour's blood for all sin and for all uncleanness; that the work of Christ is a finished work; that those who believe in his name are "complete in him," "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing;" that no goodness on our part is required, but that salvation is all of grace for the repenting sinner. Is not this to such the best of all tidings, the happiest of all news?

3. Again, it is good news to the *afflicted*; by which, I mean not so much those who are loaded with worldly sorrow, which often works death, but those who are afflicted by sin, by Satan, by spiritual trials and temptations; and besides these sorrows in grace, are often also afflicted in body or in mind, in family or in circumstances, so as to have been stripped of all worldly comfort, and to find nothing but death within and death without. To these the gospel is glad tidings, good news; for it declares that as the afflictions abound so also do the consolations, and leads up their heart to the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who is able to comfort them in all their tribulations, and give them a deliverance out of all their troubles.

4. Again, to those who truly *fear God*, who have spiritual life in their bosom, whose conscience has been made tender,

whose hearts are broken, whose spirits are contrite, and who are humbled in the dust to receive salvation as a free gift; who have worked and worked until they are worn out of working, as finding themselves getting every day worse and worse instead of growing better and better; to such as these the gospel of the grace of God is good news, glad tidings, for it tells them that "their warfare is accomplished, that their iniquity is pardoned" (Isa. 40:2); and that God has "cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:19.)

II.—But let us look a little further into this subject, and view the matter in connection with the experience of a soul taught and blessed of God; which leads me to my *second* point, which was to show how the Gospel of Christ is "*the power of God unto salvation;*" for it is this peculiar blessing belonging to it, which makes the gospel to be so precious.

i. The Gospel in its power is not a mere proclamation of mercy; not a mere declaration of good news; but it brings the mercy which it proclaims, and communicates the salvation that it reveals; for you will observe that these two things are perfectly distinct—a wide gulf of difference between them. Say, for instance, that the Queen sent forth to-morrow a proclamation of a general gaol delivery, and that in consequence there was a royal pardon for all the criminals now shut up in the various prisons of the land. That would be very good news to them if they heard through the bars of their prison windows the herald with his trumpet proclaiming that such was the Queen's good pleasure. But what if they were imprisoned still, and that for weeks or months after they had heard the sound of the trumpet? What if they were yet under bolts and bars, and neither warder nor keeper ever came to open the prison doors and take them into the light of day? What would the mere proclamation be for them if they were still in gaol? An aggravation only of their misery. So the

gospel is good news, glad tidings; but if the gospel do not reach the heart; if it do not speak peace to the conscience; do not reveal pardon and peace to the soul as a manifested blessing; do not set the prisoner free, or bring the captive out of the low dungeon; however blessed the declaration may be in itself, it falls utterly short if it leave the prisoner still in the prison house. We see then that something more is needed than a mere proclamation of mercy; and that the same God of all grace, who has sent forth the glad tidings of pardon and peace in the gospel, must himself apply it with a divine power to the soul; for I am sure that without this, it falls utterly short of a deliverance from the curse of the law, the accusations of Satan, and the condemnation of a guilty conscience. Now God will not let the gospel thus fall short to any vessel of mercy: he will make it more than a mere message of good news; it shall be in his hands something better than a mere proclamation of mercy. It shall *do* as well as *speak*; it shall act as well as preach; it shall liberate the prisoner as well as tell him that there is liberty for him. This is what the apostle means when he says that it is "the *power* of God;" for God puts forth a certain power in the preached gospel, which he does not exert in any other way, or through any other instrumentality. It is true that the law has power to condemn, but the law has not power to save; the law has power to kill, but not to make alive; has power to put into prison, but not to break open the prison doors; power to curse, but not to bless; power to send to hell, but not to take up the soul to heaven. But the gospel can do what the law cannot do; for "what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh," God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh could and did do, which was "to condemn sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit." (Rom. 8:3, 4.) When, then, God the Holy Ghost is pleased to apply the gospel to the sinner's heart, and to

make it known as a personal message from God, in which he himself speaks with his own pardoning voice to the guilty conscience, then there is something more than a mere message; something far beyond a mere proclamation; for it does that for him in a moment, which nothing else could do, viz., it assures him of his personal interest in the blood and obedience of the Son of God, and thus brings salvation in all its fulness and blessedness into his heart. It is this feeling experience of "the power of God" as an inward, divine reality, which distinguishes the "blessed people," "who know the joyful sound" from those who merely hear it in the letter, and to whom it comes merely in word; for "the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power." It is this power also, which distinguishes the preaching of the sent servants of God from the ministry of those who know nothing, and preach nothing beyond the mere letter of truth. The apostle, therefore, declares that his preaching was "in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power;" and assigns the reason why he was so desirous thus to preach the gospel, that the faith of his hearers "should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." (1 Cor. 2:4, 5.) He thus tells the Thessalonians, that he knew their election of God, and the reason was, because his gospel "came not unto them in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." (1 Thess. 1:5.) Do look at this point, for it is one of the deepest importance. Never think that you have heard the gospel to profit unless you have felt that gospel to be, in some measure, the power of God to your soul. Never think that you have heard the joyful sound as a message of mercy from God, unless it has been made a joyful sound to you by communicating some joy to your troubled heart, and speaking peace and consolation to your guilty conscience. This is the very glory of the gospel, its distinguishing feature and its highest blessing; that it is the very power of God himself.

ii. But if it then be "the power of God," it will display that power in a variety of instances. Let us look at some of them:

1. First, then, it *raises the dead*, for "the Son of God," we read, "quickeneth whom he will." (John 5:21.) And again, "The hour is coming, and now is when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and they that hear shall live." (John 5:25.) This voice of the Son of God is heard in the gospel, for it is "the gospel of Christ." But who are the dead here? Are they the dead in sin, or the dead in feeling? In the latter surely. Let us look at this point a little more closely. Here, then, is a poor soul dead under the law, in the same sense as Paul was when he said of himself, "When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." (Rom. 7:9.) And why was this, but because "the commandment which was ordained to life, he found to be unto death?" (Rom. 7:10.) In this sense is the condemned sinner "counted with them that go down into the pit, even as a man that hath no strength" (Psa. 88:4); for he is without power even to lift up a hand or utter a sigh or cry for mercy, in his feelings doomed to die, and in some cases on the very borders of despair. Now what can give help or hope to one in this state? What can lift him up out of his miserable condition? Nothing, nothing but the gospel as the power of God; for when that reaches his heart as the very voice of the Lord speaking with power to his soul, it at once lifts him up out of condemnation and death into the light and life of God's countenance. And every such poor, self-condemned wretch, who has ever felt the power of the gospel to give him light and life, liberty and love, knows that it is the power of God; for nothing short of that divine power could reach his heart and save him experimentally from death and hell.

2. It is the power of God also in *opening the ears*; as we

read, "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped;" for that this is by the power of the gospel is plain from the words that immediately precede, "Behold your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you." (Isa. 35:4, 5.) And how does God come and save but in the gospel, and by making it his own power unto salvation? If you look back at your experience you will see that one of the first effects of the power of the gospel upon your heart was, to open your ears to receive it as a message from God. When, for instance, you were first brought under its sound, and began to understand and feel what you heard, was there not given you, as it were, new ears to hear it and a new heart to receive it? Were those not with you memorable days when you first heard the joyful sound of salvation by free grace; when it first dropped that blessed news into your soul which made your very heart thrill with unspeakable joy? God was then circumcising your ear, unstopping it, and conveying the gospel into your heart through it. "For faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Rom. 10:17.) "As soon as they hear of me," says, the Lord in prophecy, "they shall obey me: the strangers shall submit themselves unto me." (Psa. 18:44.) That gospel which was death to others was life to you; and that message at which others perhaps gnashed their teeth, came into your heart with an indescribable sweetness as the very voice of God to your soul.

3. The next thing that the gospel does is to *open the eyes*; for "the eyes of the blind are opened" as well as "the ears of the deaf unstopped." See how the Lord works in bringing about these miracles of mercy through the power of the gospel. First, life flows through it into the soul to lift it up out of condemnation and death; then the ears are opened to receive in faith the message of mercy; then as the ears are

opened, and a way is made through them into the heart, there is a dropping from the eyes of the scales of darkness and unbelief. Now as you look up and see the glorious Person of the Son of God in the vision of faith, then you see the beauty of the gospel; of salvation by free grace; of manifested mercy; of the atoning blood of Jesus; of his divine righteousness as covering your needy, naked soul; and especially of the glorious Person of Immanuel, God with us, as the very sum and substance of the gospel itself. It is in this way that you see a beauty and blessedness in these divine realities, so as at times to rejoice in them, as thus seen and felt, with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

4. The same power put forth in the gospel also *opens the heart*. It was in this way that the Lord opened the heart of Lydia, so as to receive into it the love of the truth that she might be saved thereby. Until this melting power is felt within, the heart is closed and barred by unbelief, infidelity, doubt and fear, guilt, sin, and shame, so that the gospel cannot find its way in, nor obtain an entrance so as to be entertained in its inmost depths by faith and love. His promise is, "I will break into pieces the gates of brass and cut in sunder the bars of iron;" which he accomplishes when he brings the gospel with power into the heart. Then all obstructions give way; then "the stony heart is taken out of the flesh and a heart of flesh" is given, which is the "new heart" God has promised to give his people, and the "new spirit" which he puts within them. (Ezek. 36:26.) This is God's rending the heavens, and coming down so that the mountains of unbelief flow down at his presence.

5. But when the heart is thus opened to receive the love of the truth, then *the mouth is also opened* to bless and praise God for his mercy. How we find this was the case with the saints of old! Look, for instance, at Hannah. There was a time

with her when she could only mourn and weep; she was so troubled that she could not even eat, but could do nothing but lament and sigh, as fearing that the hand of the Lord was gone out against her in smiting her with the curse of barrenness. But when the Lord was pleased to reveal a sense of his mercy to her soul by manifestly hearing and answering her cry, then her heart and mouth were both enlarged, and she could sing a song of holy triumph to him and before him. "My mouth," she sang, "is enlarged over my enemies, because I rejoice in thy salvation." (1 Sam. 2:1.) Was not this salvation the gospel as the power of God unto the salvation of her soul? So David speaks of being brought up out of a horrible pit, his feet set upon a rock, and "a new song" put into his mouth. (Psa. 40:2, 3.) And is not the Church bidden in Isaiah to sing "a new song?" (Isa. 43:10.) Why new? Because until then she had never been able to sing it.

6. But the power of God is also made manifest in *guiding the feet* into the ways of peace. Is not this the effect ascribed to "the dayspring from on high" (and what is that but the gospel?) in the words, "To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace?" (Luke 1:78, 79.) Thus David speaks of God's making "his feet like hinds' feet," that is, to leap with joy like "a hind let loose" (Psa. 18:33; Gen. 49:21), and thus set him upon his high places, the mountains of salvation.

7. But the same power also *opens the hand* to receive the blessings that God has to bestow; for as without the hand being stretched out and opened to receive, no gift is effectually made our own, so we may view the opened hand as the acting of that living faith whereby Christ with all his saving benefits is received and entertained in the heart. We, therefore, read of "strengthening the weak hands" (Isa.

35:3); for until they are strengthened by the power of God they cannot hold the mighty weight of a full and free salvation.

iii. But this leads us to see what the gospel specially is in its full and eternal blessedness; for not only is it "the power of God," but it is so "unto salvation." It does not end with time as it did not begin with time, but as it originated in an eternity past, so it stretches into an eternity to come. And here indeed is the main blessedness of the gospel, that it does not leave us at the grave's mouth, but is with us in death and takes us to heaven after death; for it is "unto salvation," and if unto salvation it can be nothing less than a full and complete deliverance from death and hell. Now everything but the gospel falls short of this, and therefore falls short of giving eternal life. A good life, a consistent walk, acts of kindness and benevolence, a rigid attention to all the claims of duty and morality; nay more, a long profession of religion without a vital experience of its power, all fall short of salvation, all leave the soul exposed to the wrath of him who is a consuming fire. But if these be insufficient to save the soul, look at the various schemes of earthly happiness; count them one by one: examine the long catalogue of all that this world can give; and then see where and what they all are when death comes to close the scene. Are they not all in a moment cut off? As when one cuts off the bough of a tree on a summer's day, at once it falls to the ground, and with all its leaves, fruits, and flowers withers and dies; so how often death comes to cut down youth, health, and beauty in their prime; and then where are all their schemes of earthly happiness? How terrible to such it is to die! But the gospel of Christ is not only the power of God in life; it is the power of God in death, for it is "unto salvation" in death and after death. This is, then, its supreme and unspeakable blessedness, that every one who has received the gospel into

a believing heart is everlastingly saved thereby, and will surely be in heaven with all the saints who are now before the throne. Nothing, then, can give real and solid peace to the conscience but this; for everything short of salvation leaves us under the wrath of God, the curse of a broken law, and the condemnation of a guilty conscience. We want something that can save our souls; and what is any religion worth, call it what you will, that cannot do this? But, O, how many are deceived here! And what an end is theirs! To go on for years, perhaps, in a profession of religion, associating with God's people, sitting under the sound of truth, singing the most spiritual hymns, and constantly assembling themselves in the house of prayer, even perhaps to partake of the ordinances of the church, and to be considered by themselves and others children of God; and then after all this profession, it may be of a long life, to sink and die under the wrath of God, and be cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, as having no interest in the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ—O what an end is this! And yet, it is to be feared, the end of many who for a time flourished like a green bay tree in the courts of the Lord. But to have received the gospel into a believing heart as the power of God made there effectually known, so as to be saved thereby with an everlasting salvation,—what a contrast is this, and how worthy of the eternal praise of an immortal tongue!

III.—But we now come to the distinguishing *character* of the persons to whom the gospel is made "the power of God" unto a salvation so full and so free. It is made such "*to every one that believeth;*" not to every one that worketh; nor to every one that willeth; nor to every one that runneth; nor to every one that professeth; for "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong;" and "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." (Rom.

9:16.) How precious must be that gift and grace of faith, which gives the soul a manifested interest in so great and glorious a salvation! But in proportion to the value of this faith we must be careful, in examining its nature, to distinguish between the true and the false; for there is more than one sort of faith. There is a faith that is of nature, which endures for a time, but does not save the soul; and there is a faith which is God's own gift and work, which is raised up by his own power, which does save, for we read, "receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your soul." (1 Peter 1:9.) There is a faith which may remove mountains, which may enable its possessor to bestow all his goods to feed the poor, and to give his body to be burned, and yet profit him nothing. (1 Cor. 13:2, 3.) Esau, Balaam, Saul, Ahithophel, and Judas all had faith. But what faith was it? Not one raised up by the power of God; and therefore it neither saved nor sanctified their soul. The only true faith is that which accompanies salvation, and through which, as being wrought in the heart by the power of God, salvation is made known as a most blessed inward reality.

i. But if saving faith is a blessing so great, may we not inquire *how* a man is made to believe? I have already shown that it is God's gift, God's work, and therefore given in a certain way, and done at a certain time. When, then, does God give it; when does God work it? When he makes the gospel to be the power of God, as a felt inward reality. Examine this point in the light of your own experience, for it is one of very great importance. Have you not often tried to believe the gospel, but could not? Have you not often endeavoured to work yourself into a faith that you were one of God's people; but were scarce able to raise up even a good hope through grace? Have you not tried, when you have read a promise or heard of Jesus Christ, to summon, if you possibly could, faith to your aid, that you might look

unto him and receive him into your heart as your own most blessed Saviour? But you felt your inability to call him yours. And have you not sometimes, as you sat under the preached word, and heard Christ held up as the only Saviour of the soul, the work of grace traced out, the experience of God's saints described, atoning blood proclaimed, and his justifying righteousness set forth—have you not assented to all those gospel truths as they sounded in your ears and were brought before your eyes, but you could not with all your power raise up in your bosom a living faith so as to appropriate any one of them, so as to be sure of your personal interest in it, and thus to make it your own? And this brought condemnation into your conscience, so that the very gospel itself seemed to increase your trouble. Now what did you learn by these lessons, painful though they were? This grand truth, that faith is the gift and work of God. But there may have been another time when your eyes seemed as if suddenly opened, your ears unstopped, your heart softened, your spirit broken, your mind humbled, and a certain indescribable power commended God's truth to your heart, so that you could not only believe it, but could believe also your interest in it. You could not, perhaps, describe what the feeling was, and yet were sensible of it; for it came in a still small voice which broke your heart, softened your spirit, and melted down your unbelief like a wreath of snow before the sun. Now here the gospel was made "the power of God" to you, for you heard the voice of God speaking in it; and as this power was felt in your soul, it raised up faith, and a faith which stood not in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. We do not believe the gospel first, and then find in it the power of God; but the gospel is first found and felt to be the power of God; and as this power sweeps away unbelief, infidelity, doubt, fear, and a guilty conscience, faith is raised up, as its fruit and effect, to believe the gospel, and receive it as bringing to us the good news and glad tidings of our salvation. You must

not, as many do, invert the way of God's dealings with the soul in this important matter; believe first, and get the gospel after. "Take God," they say, "at his word." But this taking God at his word never brought pardon and peace into a guilty conscience. No: get the gospel into your heart first, as a message from God in its experimental power; and then you will find that the same power which makes the gospel sweet will raise up a living faith in your breast which will work by love, purify the heart, make Christ precious, cast out fear which hath torment, give union with Jesus, and lift the affections from earth to heaven. It is in this way that the kingdom of God is set up in the heart, which is not in word but in power; even that blessed kingdom which is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." It is in this way that the gospel of Christ becomes "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." If you have never thus been favoured and blessed, have you not, at least, been made to feel your deep need of this power of God that your soul may be saved thereby? You may have been exercised, it may be for many years, with a sight and sense of your sins, fearing there was no hope; or may have felt yourself a poor, guilty backslider, dreading that your backslidings never could or would be healed; or been tempted by Satan to suicide, infidelity, despair, or to give up even a profession of religion; and under these painful feelings you have sighed and cried, groaned and prayed, and yet got no relief. Like the poor woman with the issue of blood, you have tried many physicians, and instead of getting better have only got worse; so that, like her, you have almost despaired of a cure. Now you are the very character for the gospel; you are the very person to whom it is good news; for its end and object is to save such poor self-condemned sinners as you. But you cannot believe it for yourself; you can believe it for others; but for you it seems almost too good news to be true. Such a polluted wretch as

you are, you think never can be the object of God's love; and Christ is surely too holy ever to cast a glance of his favour upon you. This is true humility; this is real self-abasement, a sincere putting your mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope; a hiding your face, as Elijah hid his in his mantle when he heard the still small voice. You may not see it to be so in your own case; but this is to be "the poor whom the Lord raiseth up out of the dust, and the beggar whom he lifteth up from the dunghill to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory." (1 Sam. 2:8.) But when the Lord shall be pleased to appear on your behalf and to send his gospel with power into your soul, your present fears and desponding feelings, though they now seem against you as so many impassable mountains, will all become as chaff before the wind.

ii. But I would not be misunderstood. In speaking of faith, I have spoken chiefly of that degree of it which is raised up in a special manner and at special seasons by the mighty power of God applying the gospel to the heart. But I would by no means say that there is no other faith but this. The word of truth plainly speaks of different degrees of faith, such as "little faith;" O, thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt; and "weak faith," as "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye" (Rom. 14:1); and "faith as a grain of mustard seed" (Matt. 17:20), "which is the smallest of all seeds." Then again there is "strong faith," as Abraham is said to have been strong in faith giving glory to God" (Rom. 4:20); there is also the "full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:22); and the apostle thanks God that the faith of the Thessalonians grew exceedingly. (2 Thess. 1:3.) It is evident, therefore, that all believers have not the same degree of faith. There is the faith of the babe, the faith of the young man, and the faith of the father. There is faith in the blade and faith in the ear. There is faith in the bud, in the bloom, and in the fruit. But

all faith has salvation in it; for we are saved not by the quantity of our faith, but by its quality. It is not the amount; it is the living possession. It is not whether I have so much or so little faith, but whether I have faith at all? Now a child of God may be often deeply exercised whether he has any faith at all; for when he reads what faith has done and can do, and sees and feels how little it has done for him, he is seized with doubts and fears whether he has been ever blessed with the faith of God's elect. This makes him often say, "O, do I indeed possess one grain of saving faith?" But he does possess it: nay, it is his very faith which makes him so anxiously ask himself the question, as well as see and feel the nature and amount of his unbelief. It is the very light of God shining into his soul that shows him his sins, their nature and number; convinces him of their guilt and enormity; lays the burden of them upon his conscience; and discovers to him the workings of an unbelieving heart. But besides this, if he had no faith at all he could not hear the voice of God speaking in the gospel, nor receive it as a message of mercy; so that he has faith, though he has not its witnessing evidence, or its abounding comfort. This faith will save his soul; for "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11:29); that is, God never repents of any gift that he bestows or of any calling which he has granted. If, then, he has ever blessed you with faith, however small that faith may be in itself or in your own view of it, he will never take it away out of your heart, but rather fan the smoking flax until it burst forth into a flame. He will never forsake the work of his own hands, for he which "hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." (Phil. 1:6.) If ever then, if but once in your life, you have felt the gospel to be the power of God unto salvation; if you have ever had one view of Christ by living faith; if but once only, under the influence of his blessed Spirit on your heart, you have laid hold of him and felt even for a few minutes that he was

yours, your soul is as safe as though it were continually battling in the river which maketh glad the city of God, continually drinking of the honey and milk of the gospel, and walking all day long in the full light of his most gracious countenance. Not that a man should be satisfied with living at a poor, cold, dying rate; I mean not that, but merely to lay it down as a part of God's truth that as regards salvation, it is not the amount, but the reality of faith that saves the soul.

IV.—But now for our last point. The apostle declares that he was *not ashamed of the gospel of Christ*. Are we one with him here? Are we not rather often ashamed of it? But why so? Because we do not continually feel it to be the power of God unto salvation. When this feeling is gone, need we wonder what shame creeps in? Yet what is the reason that we are so often ashamed of it? Several causes may be named why this shame is felt.

1. Because the *enmity* of the human mind is more directed against the gospel than any other object. And why? Because the gospel sets forth more conspicuously than anything else the glory of God, and leaves less to the creature to boast of and glory in. This enmity, though really against the gospel, naturally falls upon the persons of those who profess it. Thus, when we feel that we are hated on account of the gospel, it makes it at times a galling yoke to bear, and we are tempted to be ashamed even of the truth of God, if it brings upon us the dislike of those with whom we wish to stand well.

2. Again, the gospel is generally very much *despised* and *ridiculed*. Those, then, who profess it are considered very weak-minded people, if not worse, to believe such foolish doctrines; and as they usually hold them with great firmness

and tenacity, as knowing their value and preciousness, they are viewed as poor narrow bigots, who condemn everybody but themselves, and think that nobody is going to heaven but a few such as they. As then our poor, proud nature feels contempt even more than dislike, we are often tempted to be ashamed of the gospel, for bringing with it such an amount of scorn and ridicule.

3. Again, the gospel is often *misunderstood*. People who are themselves ignorant of what the gospel is, and of what the power of God can effect by it, cannot distinguish between a true and a false profession of it. But this they know, that it requires consistency of religious and moral conduct. When, then, they see that the lives of men who profess the gospel are often inconsistent with its principles and practice, they cast the blame upon the gospel, instead of throwing it upon those who are virtually ignorant of it, and by their conduct disgrace it. As having thus to bear the consequence of this inconsistency, we have to endure a measure of its shame.

4. But as a natural consequence of this, it is often *misrepresented*. The doctrines which we profess are called licentious, and our principles are calumniated, as if they were opposed to good works and to a life of holiness. These are indeed sad misrepresentations; for if such persons had ever felt the power of God upon their souls, they would know that the gospel leads to holiness and every good word and work, and that what does not lead to holiness in heart, lip, and life, is not the gospel. Still, we feel these misrepresentations; for as there is yet much natural pride of heart in our breast, we sensitively shrink from calumny and misrepresentation; and this, as I may call it, foolish feeling makes us sometimes almost ashamed of the precious gospel of Christ, though all our hope of salvation centres in it. This is a part of the conflict between nature and grace; for we have still natural

feelings, and our proud heart revolts from everything which galls and mortifies it. But when the gospel is made the power of God unto our salvation, and we know something experimentally of its sweetness and blessedness in our own heart, are we ashamed of it then? No. We rather bind it to our bosom, with all its shame, as our choicest ornament, and if men hate, persecute, revile, or despise us for the gospel's sake, we count ourselves even unworthy to suffer such shame for Christ's sake. To experience this, and I have experienced it, is to glory in the cross of Christ; not to be ashamed of the gospel.

But we know the solemn doom which awaits him who is *openly* ashamed of Christ. Christ will be ashamed of him before his Father and before the holy angels. We must not then be ashamed of the gospel before men, though we may often internally feel so; nor must we allow ourselves to be so ashamed of it as to hide our colours. What would be thought of an ensign in the day of battle, who, for fear of being shot at by the riflemen on the enemy's side, should take the colours off the standard, throw them upon the ground, or hide them out of sight? No; he advances with the colours in his hand, that his men may follow his lead, and he and they may rather die than flee. So ministers especially, who bear the gospel flag, should of all men be least ashamed of their colours. They should be willing to mount the breach with the banner of truth in their hands, and unfurl the gospel which they have felt to be the power of God unto salvation in their own bosom. Do we not read, "thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be *displayed* because of the truth?" (Psalm 60:4.) "Displayed," not put out of sight! And you will find, whether minister or hearer, that if you are enabled from time to time not to be ashamed of the gospel, but boldly to declare what you know of it in its experimental power, and what God has done for your soul by it, he will

honour that testimony; he will smile upon you, will give you the inward support of the light of his countenance under reproach and shame; or if not so favoured, you will at least have the witness of a good conscience that you do not deny his name.

But one thing I would have deeply impressed upon your conscience and mine,—that we may never bring reproach upon this gospel! We need never be ashamed of the gospel itself, but may justly be ashamed if we do anything to tarnish it. The ensign is not ashamed of England's flag; but he might well be ashamed of his own cowardice if he dropped it in the day of battle, or if he tarnished it by turning back in the face of the enemy. So we are not to be ashamed of the gospel; but we may well be ashamed if by our life or conduct, words or actions, we bring discredit upon it, cast any reproach upon that name which is above every name, or cause men to speak evil of those doctrines which they know we profess. Thus there is a being not ashamed of the gospel, yet a being ashamed of any conduct unbecoming the gospel.

If, then, the gospel be unto us what I have attempted to describe it to be, let us not be ashamed of it before friend or foe. If it has reached our heart and been made the power of God to our soul, let us speak well of a blessing so great, so undeserved, and so free. The patient healed can speak well of the physician who cured him, and well of the remedy. If, then, the gospel has been to us a healing medicine, we can speak well of the balm which we have found in Gilead, and can proclaim with no faltering voice to every sin-sick soul that there is a Physician there.