

The Love of Christ in Giving Himself for the Church

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"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." Ephesians 5:25-27

Gospel precepts are grounded upon gospel truths, and are intimately connected with gospel promises. This is a much broader and nobler foundation for them to stand upon, and a much stronger bond of union between God's will and our obedience, than if the precepts were placed upon the basis of legal duty, or were connected with mere moral obligation. An example or two of New Testament precepts will perhaps convey more clearly my meaning. The apostle, writing to the Ephesians, urges this precept upon them: "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another." (Ephes. 4:25.) Observe how he not only warns them against falsehood, setting a broad and decisive stamp upon the common vice of lying, but inculcates truthfulness in all their communications with each other. But upon what ground does he base this precept to put away falsehood, and to speak truth every man with his neighbour? Because lying is dishonourable or immoral, disgraceful to the character, the vice of mean cowards, or if generally pursued would undermine the very foundations of society? No; he does not put the distinction betwixt truth and falsehood upon any such low ground, or inculcate veracity from such mere natural and moral considerations. But he says, "For we are members one of another." What is the

force of that motive? On what ground does that precept stand? Is it not this, "Shall members of one and the same body deceive each other? Shall my right hand deceive my left? Shall my left hand try to shuffle and cheat my right? Shall my eye mislead my foot? Shall my ear impose upon my eye? Would not the whole body be a mass of wretched discord if member after member were trying how each might get an advantage over the other by lies and falsehood? Is not truthfulness in every member, eye, ear, hand, foot, for the good of the whole body?" It is in this high and exalted way, upon this noble basis, namely union and communion between the members of the same mystical body, that the Holy Spirit inculcates universal truthfulness upon the people of God. Take another instance from the same Epistle: "Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another." Here he inculcates brotherly kindness amongst Christians, tenderness of heart, and mutual forgiveness of offences. But upon what basis? Why should Christians be kind and forgiving to each other? Because it is for their mutual comfort? Because the very need of Christian society requires it? Because it is ignoble to resent injury—not worth while to indulge in idle resentment? Or that we shall be damned if we do not? There is not a word of such motives. They would be all too low, too general, too weak, and the last too legal, too unworthy of the Holy Spirit to dictate. What then is the basis upon which he puts forgiveness? What is the motive whereby you should forgive your brother? "Even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Thus the gospel precept which inculcates mutual forgiveness stands upon the gospel truth, that God having forgiven us, we are bound to forgive one another for his sake.

As I wish to make this point clear, for it is one of considerable importance, let me give you another example. It shall be taken from what we may call relative duties. "Wives,

submit yourselves unto your own husbands." Here the apostle inculcates submission and obedience on a Christian wife as due to her husband. But why and upon what ground? Because woman is physically weaker than man? Because it would conduce to her happiness of mind; and because she would find more solid comfort in occupying her right place in being subject to her husband than by seeking to rule him? None of these motives, however, good they might be, does he bring forward; but takes far higher, more spiritual, and therefore more blessed ground. "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, *as unto the Lord*. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything." (Ephes. 5:22-24.) Is not that noble ground? Does not that put the subjection of a wife upon the highest and yet most comely and honourable basis? The believing wife, who sees and feels the spiritual subjection of the church to Christ as its head, may upon that ground, without loss of dignity or position, without shame or degradation, freely submit and be subject to her own husband as occupying to her in the marriage union the same mystical relationship which Christ occupies to the church.

Upon similarly noble and spiritual ground stands the exhortation in our text: "Husbands, love your wives." Why? Because it will conduce to your mutual comfort to treat her with love and affection? Because you have taken her from the bosom of her family, and are therefore bound to consult her happiness, which is best done by giving her that love which she seeks from you and can so fully return? Does he put the exhortation to Christian husbands to love their wives upon any such ground, which, though perfectly true, and so far good, must be called, from a Christian point of view, both weak and low? No; this is the ground: "Husbands, love your wives, even as *Christ also loved the church*, and gave himself for it." As then Christ loved the church, therefore you, as a

Christian husband, are bound upon that ground to love your wife. What a noble ground to put a Christian precept upon! How it elevates it far above all the low ground of legal duty or moral obligation; or even social happiness; and invests conjugal love with the very spirit of the gospel, by putting it upon a spiritual foundation, and bringing down, as it were, upon it, as its proper atmosphere, the very breath of heaven. O what an exalted, what a noble, what a godlike religion is the gospel of Jesus Christ! And how it raises and elevates social relationships and what we may call common duties into spiritual privileges by breathing into them the very mind and spirit of Christ!

But it is not my object or purpose this morning either to speak upon the precept generally, or give a lesson from it to Christian husbands. I shall therefore rather consider the ground on which the precept is placed by the apostle than the precept itself. This ground you will observe to be the love of Christ to the church, with what he has already done, and what he has yet to do in consequence of that love.

In opening up therefore the words before us, I shall, as the Lord may enable,

I.—*First*, show a little—for who can describe anything of it beyond a little?—*of the love of Christ to the church.*

II.—*Secondly*, the *fruit* of that love: "*He gave himself for it.*"

III.—*Thirdly*, what is the *effect* of that love in our time-state: "*That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.*"

IV.—*Fourthly*, what will be the *glorious display* of this love in the realms of eternal bliss: "That he might present it to

himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

I.—When we attempt to speak of the love of Christ to his church, we can at best but lisp and stammer in setting forth a subject of such vast depth and infinite magnitude; for who can adequately conceive and who can sufficiently express the lengths and depths and heights and breadths of a love which the Holy Spirit himself declares to pass all knowledge? Yet would we fain essay to speak a little of this love of Christ to his church: for the apostle prays that we may "comprehend" it, or rather as the word means, "apprehend" it, for we may apprehend, that is, lay hold of and embrace what we cannot comprehend. It is also worthy of observation that the word "comprehend" (Eph. 3:18) is translated "apprehend" in the passage: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3:12.) As Hart says,

"To comprehend the great Three One
Is more than highest angels can."

And if we cannot comprehend the great Three One, how can we comprehend the love of the great Three One?

Yet will we attempt, with God's help and blessing, to set before you a little of the love of Christ to his church; and perhaps we shall be able to see a little more clearly what that love is if we view it from different points, and thus gather up a fuller and more connected idea of the purity, fulness, and depth of that love as it gushed forth from his eternal bosom.

1. First, then, that love was *free*. This feature is indeed stamped upon every blessing which God has given, both in

nature and in grace. God does nothing by compulsion. What he does, he does freely; what he gives, he gives liberally. The air we breathe, how free it is. How widely diffused, how spread through the whole earth and sky. When you have been shut up all day in the house, cabined, as it were, and confined to some little close room, and have got so jaded and wearied with indoor work that your very brain seems to reel and your head to ache to bursting, how refreshing to go forth and breathe the pure air of heaven. How free it comes, how it plays round your temples, blowing upon you with such charming fulness; not shut up and confined, but spreading itself all around and over you. Does not this very freeness, fulness, and freshness constitute its main charm, as it fans your pale cheek, and puts new life into your frame? So with the sun: how freely his rays fall upon the earth. What a fulness in his beams! How he fills every spot of space with the glorious rays which are continually gushing out of his bosom, unexhausted, inexhaustible. In him, as the fountain of light, there is nothing niggardly; nothing kept back; but he is ever flowing forth in millions and millions of beams to lighten, or warm, or exhilarate the earth; glorious type and figures of "the Sun of righteousness!" The rain, too, how freely it falls! How the whole heavens at times seem to discharge their watery contents, and how shower after shower falls and falls, until earth seems almost to cry out, "Stay, stay, ye bottles of heaven; I lack no more: I have all that I need; I am filled to the full." These are but faint emblems of the love of Christ. It is so free; and its being so free, is that which makes it so beautiful and so blessed. We hear sometimes of what is called love at first sight; and this is said to be the strongest of all earthly love. John Newton tells us that this was his case, and adds that his love for the young girl whom he afterwards married never abated or lost its influence a single moment in his heart from that bout; and that she was never absent a single hour together from his

waking thoughts for the seven following years. Now Christ's love to his bride was a love at first sight; for when she was presented to him by the Father that she might be his spouse,—I do not wish to degrade divine things by carnal comparisons, and yet I cannot forbear, though I wish to use the words with all solemnity, saying, that immediately Christ beheld his chosen bride he fell in love with her; for he saw her not sunk and fallen, but in all her beauty as clothed in the fulness of that glory in which she will one day shine forth, when she sits down with him to the marriage supper of the Lamb. How *free*, then, was this love!

2. But this love was an *everlasting* love. There can be no new thought in the mind of God. New thoughts, new feelings, new plans, now resolutions continually occur to our mind; for ours is but a poor, fallen, fickle, changeable nature. But God has no new thoughts, feelings, plans, or resolutions; for if he had he would be a changeable Being, not one great eternal, unchangeable I AM. All his thoughts, therefore, all his plans, all his ways are like himself, eternal, infinite, unchanging, and unchangeable. So it is with the love of Christ to the church. It is eternal, unchanging, unchangeable. And why? Because he loved as God. Never let us lose sight of the glorious Deity of Jesus. He loved her in eternity as the Son of God, prior to his incarnation. That was but the fruit of his love. "Who loved me," says Paul, "and gave himself for me." And so our text, "Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it." Do we not read, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love?" And what is the effect? "Therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." (Jer. 31:3.) We can therefore assign no beginning to the love of Christ, for it existed when he existed, which was from eternity. Neither can we put any end to that love, for it can only end with himself; and as he had no beginning, so he has no ending. His love then is as himself, which as it knew no beginning

shall know no end. O what a mercy it is for those who have any gracious, experimental knowledge of the love of Christ, to believe it is from everlasting to everlasting; that no incidents of time, no storms of sin or Satan, can ever change or alter that eternal love, but that it remains now and will remain the same to all eternity. Is not this Paul's triumphant challenge, where he cries out, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" adding his persuasion that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38, 39.) This eternal, unchanging character of the love of Christ gives us something to stand upon apart from our fluctuating feelings, our wavering frames, and the changes that ever take place in our apprehensions of divine realities. The love of Christ to us is not changing and changeable like ours to him, but like himself abides for ever.

3. But again, it is not merely a free and everlasting love, but it is a love which does not *depend upon anything that is in the creature* for its origin, continuance, or completion. God does not look out of himself for any acts of his mind or works of his hand. He is sufficient to himself and for himself, for all his counsels, and all their execution; and therefore he cannot and does not consult his creatures what he is to plan for their benefit, or how to carry out his eternal purposes toward them. The apostle, therefore, speaks of "the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself." And again, "Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." (Eph. 1:11.) The love of Christ to his church is in the fullest harmony with these purposes. What then we are in ourselves, or whatever in this time-state may take place in us through temptation, suffering, or affliction, does not affect the love of Christ. It is wholly and purely in

himself, independent of and distinct from our love to him, which is but a reflex of his love to us. As the apostle speaks, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us;" and again, "We loved him because he first loved us." (1 John 4:10-19.) This love therefore stands distinct from any change in our mind, any fluctuation of feeling we may experience, because it depends wholly and solely on what the blessed Lord is in himself, as loving us before we loved him—yea loving us when we were alienated from the life of God, and enemies in our mind by wicked works.

4. This love again is a *very strong love*. The Scripture has used three or four very striking figures to designate its strength. You will find them in the Song of Solomon, I think all in the same chapter (8:6, 7), and in one or two verses. First, it is said to be "*as strong as death*." What an image! How strong is death! O the millions that death has destroyed! The millions that remain for death to destroy! The strongest must yield when he approaches. No man yet has ever been able to stand against death when he drew near to seize his victim. But the love of Christ is as strong as death; and though this is the greatest figure that the Holy Ghost can well employ, yet in one sense it is stronger than death; for the love of Christ bore him through death, rose with him at the resurrection from death, and has gone with him up to the right hand of God when he had destroyed death.

But the Holy Ghost has used another figure of an almost similar kind, to express the nature generally of spiritual love, and therefore applicable in the highest degree to the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. Speaking of jealousy, which is love's ever constant attendant, he says it is "*as cruel*"—that is, as insatiable—"*as the grave*." How the grave is ever opening its mouth! How grave after grave has opened its jaws in the churchyards of this town, till there is no space left

in them to bury our dead. And if you walk any day round our new cemetery, you will almost always see a grave with its mouth open; yes, as long as there is an inhabitant in this town, there will be a grave to open its mouth for him. So that however numerous be the inhabitants, there is a grave for each, and a grave for all. Fruitless are the widow's tears, the father's sobs, and the mother's bitter cries. The cruel grave still goes on to bury out of their sight the tenderest and dearest relations in life; and will in the appointed time draw us in and cover us up, as it has the countless generations that have lived before us on earth. Now the love of Christ or jealousy, which is the accompaniment of it, is said to be as cruel as the grave; that is, as the grave keeps devouring and is never satisfied, so the love of Christ in its jealousy against all rivals, in its indignation against all our idols, is ever opening itself to receive us into its bosom as our safe hiding place. If the grave has swallowed up a beloved husband or dear child, and you can believe that their remains are safely housed there till the resurrection morn, its seeming cruelty was real kindness, its cold bosom a warm shelter, its close bed a sure safeguard.

But love is also compared to *fire*: "The coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame." Fire we know devours everything. What can stand against it? Houses, buildings, the earth itself will one day be consumed by this destructive element. Such is Christ's love, which hath a most vehement flame, for it burned in his bosom with a holy fervour, as he said, "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptised with: and how am I straitened till it be accomplished." (Luke 12:49, 50.) The fire of his love which he was to send on the earth, was already kindled in his own bosom; and when this fire is kindled in ours it will make our hearts burn within us in love to him, and hatred of sin and

self.

The last figure of this nature which is used by the Holy Spirit in the Song of Solomon is almost of a similar nature to express the strength of love. It is compared to a flood of *water*: "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." How great is the power of water when it rushes down as a destructive flood, sweeping all before it. But the flood can fertilise as well as destroy. So the love of Christ poured itself forth in the days of his flesh in the garden and upon the cross, to sweep away, as it were all sin before it, and yet to bless and fertilise the church, making her fruitful in every good word and work.

How suitably and expressively do these figures, death, the grave, fire, and water, set forth as emblems the strength of that love of Christ which nothing can quench, nothing destroy, but which will prevail over sin, death, and hell, yea, over every impediment and obstacle, till it gain the day, achieve the victory, and in all the blaze of full perfection and fruition fill heaven with its eternal glory.

II.—But I pass on to show what is *the fruit* of this love; which is, that Christ *gave himself for the church*.

i. God exacted, so to speak, a sacrifice from his dear Son. I wish to speak cautiously upon this point; for in these deep and solemn mysteries we must be careful how we tread, and not penetrate into divine counsels any more than they are revealed, or put thoughts and words of our own into the mouth of God. Yet may we reverently and devoutly search the Scriptures to ascertain from them what the Holy Spirit has revealed for our instruction, though not for our speculation.

I have already shown that the Son of God freely, fully, and unchangeably loved the church which was given to him by the Father in the councils of eternity, and presented to him as his future spouse and bride. By sovereignty, by purpose, by foreseen, fore-determined creation she belonged to God. Does not our Lord say to his heavenly Father of his disciples: "Thine they were and thou gavest them me;" and again, "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine." (John 17:9.) Thus the church, as belonging to the Father, was originally and actually God's gift to his dear Son. But though thus given to him to be his pure and spotless bride, she was foreseen in the infinite wisdom of God as able to fall; nay, as known that she would fall. But the fall was not only foreseen, but fore-provided for. We therefore read of "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8); and that our Lord, though "by wicked hands crucified and slain," yet was "delivered," that is unto death, "by the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God." (Acts 2:23). When, therefore, our Lord accepted the church from his Father's hand, he perfectly knew that she would fall; but that as nothing sinful could enter unto the presence of God, and as his own precious blood alone could save and sanctify her from her sins when fallen, he knew that there was a sacrifice to be offered, a penalty to be exacted, the law to be fulfilled, justice to be satisfied, and every debt contracted by her to be paid to the uttermost farthing. The gracious Lord therefore thoroughly knew what would be the consequence of his espousing the church unto himself—that she would fall; that he must redeem her from the fall; that in order to do so he must come unto this lower world; must take of her flesh; must suffer, living the most sorrowful of lives, and dying the most agonising, disgraceful, and terrible of deaths. None of these sufferings and sorrows were hidden from his eyes. He knew that he must suffer all that she must otherwise have

suffered, go through all that she must otherwise have gone through; in a word, endure her hell that she might enjoy his heaven. "He thus gave himself for us;" that is, in the councils of eternity, he gave himself up to God that he might do his will, which will was the redemption of the church. Hear how he himself spoke ages before his first coming: "Lo, I come [in the volume of the book it is written of me] to do thy will, O God." (Heb. 10:7.)

ii. But we must come down from these divine transactions, these heavenly and eternal councils, though they form the basis of all our salvation, and of our very hope of eternal life which God that cannot lie promised before the world began (Titus 1:2), to what actually took place in time. We must come down from heaven to earth—to what the eyes of man actually saw, what the ears of man actually heard, and what was actually fulfilled and accomplished in the days of the flesh of Jesus.

1. In this sense, then, Jesus "gave himself" first when he took flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary. But the question may perhaps arise, "Why did not Jesus Christ come at once as man—a fully grown, adult, and perfect man, as Adam was created? What need was there for him to be conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary, to be born as we are, a little babe, and then grow into a child, a boy, a youth, a man? Why could he not come at once in his divine and human nature from heaven? Would not that have been a more astonishing miracle? one more likely to give us faith?" Such thoughts may cross our minds; but they are idle at best, not to say irreverent and profane. But how could he have taken of the actual flesh and blood of the children except by taking part of the flesh of the Virgin? How could he be descended, according to the promise, from the seed of David, except he sprang from one who was of the lineage of David? Or how

could he be altogether one like us as man, unless he had come into the world in the same way that we came? The nature that was to be redeemed must be partaken of by the Redeemer. This the apostle seems clearly to intimate when he says, "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16); plainly implying that if angels had to be redeemed angelic nature must be taken, but if men the nature of man. And yet not a sinful, a fallen nature; for that could not have been offered as a sacrifice. God, therefore, in his infinite wisdom, provided that sin should not intermingle with Christ's conception as with ours; that though conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the human nature of our blessed Lord should not be by natural generation, lest there should be the taint of sin attached thereto. The angel, therefore, in revealing this mystery to the Virgin Mary, said unto her: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35.) Thus that "holy thing" which was born of the Virgin, though flesh, blood, and bone of her substance, and therefore flesh, blood, and bone of the children, yet by the supernatural operation of the Holy Ghost was conceived without sin, and thus became not a person but a nature. This "holy thing," therefore, was the pure humanity of our blessed Lord; not mortal, yet capable of death; not fallen, though made of a woman who was fallen; not able to sin, but able to suffer, both in body and soul; and taken at the moment of its conception into indissoluble union with the Person of the Son of God.

2. When, too, this blessed Redeemer came into the world from the womb of the Virgin, he still "gave himself." From the day he was circumcised, when he came under the law, till the day he was crucified when he endured its curse, he was

ever giving himself. With every thought of his holy mind, every word of his holy lips, and every action of his holy hands, he was giving himself to God, as ever doing the will of God; ever performing the work which the Father gave him to do. Thus even as a child, before he entered upon his public ministry, he could say, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49.) What condescension in him who was the eternal Son of God to think with human heart, to speak with human lips, to touch the things of earth with human hands, to walk upon human ground with human feet. We lose much of the blessedness of redemption from want of seeing or bearing in mind what the Son of God was here below as the God-Man. We are so habituated, in reading of his words and acts in the gospels to think of him only as a man, that we much lose sight of the Deity that was in the closest union with his human nature, and of his being God-Man as well as man. When we look at the shame, the scorn, the contempt that he endured during his sojourn here below, living a life of the greatest poverty, and yet going about ever doing good, what an object is presented to our believing eye, if we can view this God-Man with faith as thus ever doing the will of God. When, too, we are enabled, under divine leading, to draw near the sacred precincts of Gethsemane's gloomy garden; when we can stand as under the shadow of the olive trees, and view the Redeemer as God's own Son, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Ghost, not now as filling heaven with his glory, but as a poor, bowed-down, drooping man, suffering, groaning, and agonising under the weight of sin, till the huge drops of blood and sweat fell from his forehead, pressed out of his holy body by the pressure of God's anger, the curse of a broken law, and the sins of millions resting upon his innocent head—what a sight for faith! Here truly he was giving himself. Who compelled him to this act? Was it man? Was it the force and fury of his enemies? Did he not say in the hour of his greatest woe—and

O what words they are!—"Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" He had but to look up and utter one word of prayer, and angels in millions would have flown to the rescue. But he meekly added, "How then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" (Matt. 26:53, 54.) And well we may ask with him, How could the church have been redeemed had these angels come? Here was the struggle, the conflict, the agony; the bitter cup lay on one side, and deliverance from drinking it on the other. Deliverance from the bitter cup was to save himself a weight of woe, to be rescued from the agony of the cross, and the drinking of the wrath of God to the very dregs. But this escape from personal suffering was to lose the Church, renounce the bride, leave her to sin, death, and hell, forfeit his word, deny his engagements, give up all he came upon earth to do, and thus sacrifice his own glory, and with it the glory of God. On the other hand, there was the bitter cup, the shame and bodily agony of the cross, and, what was far less endurable, the curse of the law, the terrible wrath of God, the hidings of his Father's face, producing the deepest agony and distress of soul, with all the dreadful pangs of that blackness of darkness into which but for his enduring it the church must have forever sunk. As then he tasted the first drops in the gloomy garden the cup was so bitter that for a moment, as it were, there was a pause in his holy mind whether he could or would drink it up. But it was only for a moment, and would not have been recorded, but to show us the depth of his sufferings, and to encourage our fainting faith. Immediately, in all the meek submission of his holy nature, strengthened as it was by the Holy Ghost who held him up in this mighty conflict, he said, "Not my will but thine be done." Then it was decided. Meekly he took the cup into his holy hand, and drank it to the very dregs.

3. But now let us follow him to the cross, and see what he endured there. We will not dwell upon his bodily agony, though beyond conception distressing, for many have endured that. Peter was crucified—tradition says with his head downward. Many have suffered crucifixion, it being in those days the common punishment of slaves. Josephus tells us there was not wood enough round about Jerusalem to supply crosses for prisoners at the siege of that city, whom Titus crucified. Thousands have died in greater bodily agony than the Lord, for he only suffered in body for six hours. But of all the generations of men, none have ever felt what the Lord endured in his soul; for he had to suffer in his soul what the elect of God would have had to suffer in hell, if he had not suffered it. What is the body? That is not the chief seat of suffering: martyrs have rejoiced in the flames. It is the soul that feels. It was so with Jesus. His body, it is true, was racked and torn, but it was the racking of his soul in which lay his chief agonies; and the greatest of all was the final stroke God reserved to his last moments, the last drop of the cup in all its bitterness, which was hiding his face from him. Nothing else but this last bitter drop extorted the cry of suffering from his lips. He could look from the cross upon his mother and the disciple whom he loved, and speak in most affectionate language to both. He could pray for his very murderers with holy calmness: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." But when, to crown all the scene of suffering, the Father hid his face from him, *that* was more than his holy soul could bear; *that* extorted from him the dolorous cry—such a cry as earth never before or since heard, a cry which made the sun to hide his face as if in sackcloth, the solid earth to shake, and the very graves to open their mouths as if they could no longer hold their dead, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But then all was finished; he had given himself: the whole work was now done; and every type and figure of the law fulfilled and

accomplished. Thus the law was satisfied, justice honoured, God pleased, the church redeemed, and all the counsels of eternity in her deliverance from death and hell fully accomplished. Then, therefore, and not before, the blessed Lord cried out with a loud voice, to show that he gave up his life—that it was not taken from him by violence or weakness—"It is finished!" and then, with all the tranquillity of his holy soul, he meekly bowed his head, and committing his spirit into the hands of his heavenly Father, quietly and solemnly gave up the ghost. To give himself thus to death was the last act of his giving himself.

III.—But now we come to *the effect* of this giving of himself, and especially that which flows from it as its fruit and result in this time-state.

i. From the cross flows all our salvation. The cross is, as it were, the sun of the gospel; for from the cross shine forth all the grace and glory of the gospel; nor is there a beam of light, life, pardon, or peace which ever reaches a contrite soul, but what comes from and through Christ, and him crucified. It was this which made Paul say: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." It was this too which made him preach "Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

But let us now look at the fruit of the cross as manifested to the church in her time-state. We read in our text that "Christ loved the church and gave himself for it, that he might *sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.*" Two things are here spoken of as the effect of Christ giving himself—sanctification and cleansing. I think we may understand these words in two different senses, first, the

sanctification and cleansing of the church as effected upon the cross; and secondly, the sanctification and cleansing of the heart and conscience by the application of Christ's blood by the Holy Ghost.

1. When Christ died upon the cross, he opened a fountain in one day, as the prophet Zechariah speaks, "for sin and uncleanness." (Zech. 13:1.) We may, therefore, view the church as washed on that day from all her sins in his most precious blood. Does not this form the grand theme of the eternal anthem sung in the courts of bliss: "Unto him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood" (Rev. 1:5); and again, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Rev. 7:14.) We may view, then, the church as in that day washed, because the iniquity of the land was to be removed in one day—the day of the atonement at Calvary. (Zech. 3:9.) It was removed when Christ shed his precious blood, for then he washed the church in his own blood from all her transgressions; and not only so, but on that day he clothed her in his spotless righteousness. Thus, under the teaching and leading of the Holy Spirit, we may come to the foot of the cross with eyes of faith and see on that day, on that solemn spot, the church washed in the atoning blood and clothed in the justifying righteousness of the Son of God. And as the church was on that day cleansed, so was she on that day sanctified; for do we not read, "Wherefore Jesus also that he might sanctify the people with his own blood suffered without the gate" (Heb. 13:12); and again, "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all;" and so again, "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." (Heb. 10:10, 14.)

2. But we have to come to the experience of individual souls:

for what is the church but the aggregate of believers? We have therefore to pay special regard to what is wrought by the Holy Spirit in the heart of every saint of God; because unless there be a work begun and carried on by the Holy Spirit in the heart, there is no inward faith in, acquaintance with, hope towards, or love to Christ and him crucified, or any looking to the blood of the cross as that whereby we have redemption, even the forgiveness of sins. We read in our text, that he gave himself for the church, "that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the *washing of water by the word.*" Thus, there is not only a sanctifying and cleansing of the church by the blood of the cross, but a washing of water by the word of truth. By the word is meant the gospel, the word of his grace, and that as applied with power; for this is God's appointed instrument, which the Holy Ghost employs to bring the benefits and blessings of Christ's finished work in the soul. It is therefore called the "washing of water by the word;" that is, the inward cleansing and baptising of the soul, which is compared to the washing of the body with water. You recollect what the Lord said to Nicodemus: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God;" and please to bear in mind, that in being born of water there is no allusion to any baptism, infant or adult, but an allusion to the influences of the Holy Ghost upon the soul, of which water is a standing emblem all through God's inspired word. It is indeed marvellous upon what a slight foundation has been built that huge, towering structure which has overshadowed the church of England and thousands in it with such destructive influence; I mean the figment, for it is neither less nor more than an ecclesiastical figment, of what is called "baptismal regeneration." This vast edifice stands upon two or three words of the Lord, being "born of water," which have no reference whatever to the ordinance of baptism. The washing, then, with water by the word signifies the regenerating, sanctifying influences and

operations of the Holy Spirit upon the heart, which are produced by the application of the word of truth to the heart and conscience. Here is the word of grace which I hold in my hands, and in full accordance with which I hope I am now speaking in your ears this morning. That word of grace, if the Spirit is pleased to accompany any portion of it with power to your hearts, has an influence upon your conscience. Some, God is pleased thereby to regenerate and quicken into spiritual life; some, to bless and deliver from bondage and trouble, guilt and sorrow; others to comfort and strengthen, encourage and revive; others to warn, teach, and admonish. But what God does, he does by the word of his grace and the influences which accompany that word; for ever bear in mind that God does nothing but by his word. The sanctifying, cleansing effects therefore which attend the word of his grace under the operations of the Spirit are spoken of here as "the washing of water by the word." The "word" is the written Scripture; the "water" is the power of the Holy Ghost; the "washing," is the cleansing effect of the application of the word. Let me ask you this question, if you doubt my words, How are we to get the burden and guilt of our sins off our conscience, the defilement of mind which sin produces, the bondage of spirit which sin creates, the fears and alarm of the soul which sin works? You will say, "By believing in Jesus Christ, for being justified by faith we have peace with God." That is true; but how can we believe in Jesus Christ, so as to find this peace? By the word of his grace, accompanied by the special influence, unction, and dew of the Holy Ghost revealing and making known pardon and acceptance with God, which is therefore spoken of here as "the washing of water by the word." For as water washes the body, so the word of truth washes the soul, by washing away the guilt and filth and defilement of sin. As the blessed Lord said: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:32.) And again: "Now ye are clean through the word which

I have spoken unto you." (John 15:3.) So also: "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit." (John 13:10.) Thus as water when applied cleanses the body from natural filth, so does the word of promise, the word of truth, the word of salvation revealing and making known the Saviour's precious blood, cleanse the conscience from the guilt, filth, and defilement of sin.

2. But Christ gave himself for the church, not only that he might cleanse, but might also *sanctify* her, and that by the washing of water by the word. This points to the sanctification of the Spirit, for washing in the blood of Christ and sanctification by the Spirit go hand in hand; as the apostle testifies, "But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. 6:11.) View the church without the sanctifying operations and influences of regenerating grace. She is far from Christ; she has no desire towards him, no manifest union, no communion with him; no faith in his blood, no hope in his mercy, no love to his name. Were she left always thus, where would be her meetness for heaven? But when the word of truth comes with power, and is accompanied by the influences of the Holy Ghost to the heart, then there is not only a cleansing of the conscience from the guilt and filth of sin, but the communication of a new heart and a new spirit. How plainly is this spoken of by the prophet Ezekiel, where, after the promise, "From all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you," it is added, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you." We have not only therefore to be washed from our sins in the blood of the Lamb, not only to be pardoned and forgiven and thus have a title to heaven, but we want a meetness for heaven; we want a new heart and a new spirit given to us, whereby we may taste, handle, feel, and enjoy the love of Christ as shed abroad in the heart, and

experience the flowings forth of love to him in return. As then the blood cleanses, so the Spirit sanctifies. John therefore says, "This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood." (1 John 5:6.) The blood is the blood of the atonement; the water is the sanctifying influences of the Holy Ghost.

Observe the order in which these blessings come. First, is the love of Christ in eternity; secondly, the gift of himself in time; thirdly, the cleansing by blood; fourthly, the sanctifying by the Spirit. Now look at these things for yourselves. Are your sins pardoned? Have you any evidence that you are washed in the blood of the Lamb? Do you believe that you are going to heaven? What does your belief of this, or your hope in it, rest upon? Where are your evidences? Surely not from merely seeing these truths in the Scripture as the bare revelation of God, or believing them from my statements. Such a faith and such a hope, if you have no better, will prove delusive, and will leave you in the hands of him who is a consuming fire. If your hope of eternal life is well grounded, it is because the word of life has come into your soul, and you have been not only cleansed by the application of the blood of sprinkling to your conscience, but sanctified and renewed by the power of the word, through the Holy Spirit, upon your heart.

But let us bear in mind that we continually stand in need of this "washing of water by the word." Our conscience contracts fresh guilt, which needs to be cleansed away by the blood of sprinkling. We are continually sinking into deadness, darkness, carnality, and sloth, and therefore we need continual revival out of death by the power of the word of life. And Jesus is ever sending forth the power of his grace and communicating the influences of the Holy Ghost, both to

cleanse the conscience from the guilt of sin, and to revive the life of faith in the soul. As then the Holy Spirit is pleased to accompany the word of truth with his own divine influences, it not only cleanses the conscience from the guilt and filth of sin, but renews and sanctifies the soul, and brings it into sweet union and communion with, and a holy obedience unto the Lord the Lamb.

This then is the mighty work, the fruit and effect of Christ's loving the church and giving himself for it, which is now being carried on upon earth. And this is the work that must be done in your soul; for by this alone can you prove your title to heaven; and by this alone obtain a meetness for it.

IV.—But I pass on to our last point, which is, what will be *the future fruit* of Christ's having loved the church and given himself for it—*a state of eternal holiness, happiness, and glory*. "That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

What is the church now, so far at least as she can be viewed by the eyes of man? Full of spots, wrinkles, and blemishes. And what are we ourselves as viewed by our own eyes? What do we see in ourselves every day but sin and filth and folly? What evil is there in the world that is not in us, in our hearts? It is true men cannot read our hearts; but we read them; yea, are every day and sometimes all the day reading them. And what read we there? Like Ezekiel's roll, it is "written within and without;" and we may well add, if we rightly read what is there written, we have every reason to say it is "full of lamentations, and mourning, and woe." (Ezekiel 2:10). For I am sure that there is nothing that we see there every day and every hour, but should cover us with shame and confusion of face, and make us blush to lift up our eyes

before God, or almost to appear in the presence of our fellow man. And yet with all this our life may be circumspect, and our walk and conduct irreproachable. Nay, it should be so and ought to be so, in order to maintain a godly and consistent profession before men.

But neither others nor we ourselves now see what the church one day will be, and what she ever was in the eyes of Jesus. He could look through all this time-state—through all the sins and sorrows of this intermediate period, and fix his eye upon the bridal day—the day when before assembled angels, in the courts of heaven, in the realms of eternal bliss, he should present her to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy, and without blemish. O what a day will that be, when the Son of God shall openly wed his espoused bride; when there shall be heard in heaven, "as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." (Rev. 19:7.) How cleansed, how sanctified, how washed, how clothed must the church be in that day when the very eyes of omniscience, which can read the slightest departure, even a wrinkle from infinite purity, will find in her neither spot nor blemish, so that God himself in all the blaze of his holiness may say of the church, "I have viewed her with my omniscient eye; I have looked at every member of the mystical body of my dear Son; I have examined each with all the eyes of Godhead: but there is no spot, there is no wrinkle, no blemish in any one of them; all are complete in him; all stand accepted in the Beloved."

Now, my friends, if any of you know what you are, and what you have been, and what you fear you yet may be, can you entertain any hope of being one of this glorious church which

is to be presented to the Lord the Lamb without spot or blemish, except it be by having an interest in the atoning blood and justifying righteousness of the Son of God? Do you think that your own works, of whatever nature they may be, can ever present you before God without spot or wrinkle or any such thing? Are they now without spot or wrinkle in your eyes? Can you now look upon anything which your heart conceives, your lips speak, or your hands execute, and say there is no wrinkle, no spot, no blemish in it? What, are you yet so ignorant both of God and yourself, both of law and gospel, both of sin and holiness? Can pride and self-righteousness have so blinded your eyes, can Satan have so deluded you as to make you say of any word from your lips or any action of your hands, "It is as pure as God in heaven, it is as holy as the glorious I AM?" You know that you dare not say so. Yet the church—and if you are to be saved, it must be as a member of this church—yet the church is to stand before the throne of God and be examined by his omniscient eye to see if any one in that glorious assemblage has any spot or wrinkle in him or upon him; for if the eye of God were to see any spot or wrinkle in you, would he not, so to speak, at once commission an angel to take you and hurl you from heaven into hell? You could not stand amongst the church of God if you had spot or wrinkle in soul or body. You would be ejected with ignominy out of heaven. You might have crept in there as an interloper, but would be cast out as polluted into the depths of eternal woe. How foolish, then, how vain, how delusive must every hope be which is founded upon good works, so called. Take them one by one. Examine the best of your religious duties, as they are termed, and ask yourself whether one of them is without spot or wrinkle.

But O, if renouncing all your own righteousness and fleeing to Christ, you are interested in the finished work of the Son of God; if you are washed in his precious blood; if you are

clothed in his glorious righteousness, then you will stand at the last day before the bar of God without spot or wrinkle; and Christ will present you unto himself as the bride and spouse of his heart, holy and without blemish.

But you may ask—and this is an inquiry well worth pressing upon your conscience—"How am I to know that I shall stand at that day without spot or wrinkle?" To answer that inquiry, what do you know, I ask, of the cleansing, sanctifying influence of regenerating grace, of the word of truth laying hold of your conscience, of the word of power coming into your heart, of the blood of Christ being applied, and the love of God shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost? If not now, yet before you are called away from these lower scenes, you are blessed with a living faith in the Son of God, with the application of his love and blood to your conscience, when time ends with you, it will open to you a glorious eternity, and for ever delivered from all your present sins and sorrows, fears and anxieties, you will be presented at the great day amongst that glorious church, which has neither spot nor wrinkle nor any such thing. But if you live and die without any interest in these heavenly blessings, should I be faithful, standing up here in the name of the Lord, should I be faithful to my commission and to my conscience, if I were to say it will be all well with you? that you have only on your death-bed to send for a minister to pray by your bed-side, give you the sacrament, and speak a few comfortable words, and it will be all right with your soul? Should I be faithful to my commission to encourage such a delusion as this? a delusion by which thousands are continually deceived? I dare not do it. Yea, I would lift up my voice and cry aloud, "There is no salvation past, present, or future, but what flows through the precious blood of the Lamb, and is made experimentally known to the soul by the power of the Holy Ghost."