

some of them are totally uninformed in the doctrines of Christianity, and have no more knowledge of the word of God than those who are born in a heathen land, where the oracles of God have never appeared, while others have been trained up in a doctrinal knowledge of divine truth from their infancy. It has been the lot of some to know the doctrines of distinguishing grace in their judgments, long before they have felt their spiritual importance and sanctifying effects ; so that, when these are converted, they have but little to learn as to the truth of the common points of the gospel. There are others, however, who have been placed under great appearances of piety and professions of practical godliness, but whose minds have rather been tutored to undervalue the doctrines of salvation, than to esteem and revere them. These poor things usually hang long upon human ability, and talk freely on the duty of all men to be pious, and the opportunities that all men have of ensuring eternal life, if they will but improve them : and these deceive many, who are swayed by mere appearances of religion, but are, all the while they talk of their duties, strangers to the living spring of all spiritual action, and acceptable service before God. Their enmity to the doctrine of divine sovereignty is great and inconcealable, though, sometimes, considerable pains are taken to hide the antipathy they privately vindicate. Their misguided zeal frequently prompts them to alarm the simple followers of the truths of discriminating favour, or to spread alarm by a cry of *Antinomianism*. And there are others who have a knowledge of the theory of the gospel, but whose lives are grossly immoral ; or who are frequently detected in acts of injustice, fraud, or oppression. These are generally clamorous against Legal Preaching, as they term it,—against the discipline of a church state, and are much inclined to undervalue the ordinances of the Lord, and will at times be heard to say, that they have the Spirit, and all the rest is of no consequence. Thus, various are the circumstances and habits of the natural world ; and thus are the chosen of God distinguished among themselves naturally, when the Holy Spirit comes to change their hearts and set them apart for God and eternal life. They are all regenerated alike, but not all converted alike, in every respect.

Some of them are first made to feel the power of God's saving arm while hearing the gospel ; some by means of reading ; and others without either. Whatever use the Holy Ghost may make of the word to some, it is certain that it is not essential to regeneration ; for were that the case, all who lived before the

days of Moses must have died unregenerate, and so be for ever excluded from the kingdom of God : but to this no good man can subscribe. The thief who was crucified with Jesus, was saved without the instrumentality of the written word, as also are infants. Besides the spiritual utility of the word depends upon the principle of spiritual life, and the energy of the divine Author of that principle ; and, therefore, regeneration cannot depend upon the instrumentality of the word. It may indeed be fairly questioned, whether the preaching of the gospel is ever instrumental, in the formation of an immortal principle in the mind, as that is wholly the work of God, and the creature is wholly passive, at the moment of its formation. It may be observed, that many are made thoughtful, while hearing the word ; but this will not prove that the principle of life and perception is inwrought by the instrumentality of the word ; it only evinces that the mind is made conscious of new feelings, which arise from the existence of a new principle instantaneously formed in the mind, by the overshadowing power of the Holy Ghost, while the person is under the word. The attention of Lydia to the things ministered, is ascribed to the Lord's secretly opening her heart. But the word is instrumental in the work of conversion, because, herein, the soul is wrought upon, and becomes an active agent, which affords room for an instrument to be employed.

Many have been made to feel concerned about their eternal state, while engaged in the affairs of this life, and their private feelings have induced them to attend upon the public worship of God : though, before then, they had never evidenced any regard for any such thing, but rather despised others who did. And as we find this difference in the *manner* of the Lord's dealings with his chosen, in bringing them to know and enjoy his name, so, we must own, no other reason can be given for this difference, but that *He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.*

All men are by nature under the law, and when the Holy Spirit enters the heart to effect a sound conversion, he ever keeps the holy law, and the rights of the Lawgiver, in view ; and will ever faithfully vindicate the claims of strict justice, and the honour of the holy, just, and good law of the Creator, in the consciences of all the redeemed. He causes the elect to feel the sentence, and to resign all hope in themselves : the language of their hearts is an acknowledgment of the justice of the sentence of death, and a disclaiming of all right to justification

by the works of the law. The commandment comes to their hearts with power: sin becomes active and evident,—and the sinner's hope in himself expires. His views are internally and entirely changed, and the foundation on which he built for safety, is proved to be only as a bank of sand. Thus the ministration of equity proves him a criminal, and by the balances of unalterable Justice, he is found awfully deficient. His sight and his hearing, his expectation and his feeling, are utterly new, and are daily influential, more or less, on his conduct. For mercy he sighs, but has no just conception, at first, how that mercy can be shown. But the same Holy Spirit who applies the authority of the law also reveals the rich blessing of pardon, in his own time; and this becomes precious to the sinner, who gladly learns, that Jesus, as his Surety, has paid his debts in the court of Justice, and cancelled the hand-writing that was necessarily against him. All, however, are not made to feel the terrors of a guilty conscience to a like degree, though all are brought in guilty, and delivered from carnal ease and fleshly confidence.

Some are long held under gloomy fear, and wait long at the footstool of mercy before peace is sealed on their consciences; while others are very sharply rebuked, and painfully exercised, but are soon released from all their dread of divine indignation, by a spiritual perception of the great atonement and righteousness of Jesus the Saviour. Some 'long repent and late believe;' but others are no sooner made truly penitent, than the mandate of forgiving mercy genders a lively hope. The dying thief, the Philippian jailor, Zaccheus the publican, and Mary Magdalene, are instances of the Lord's kindness, in granting speedy knowledge of remission; and to these might be added, the conversion of the apostle Paul; for he was shortly enriched with a testimony of forgiving favour, and sent to promulgate the mercy he so unexpectedly had obtained. But while this is the happy lot of some, there are many, who are all their days troubled, except at short intervals, with doubts and fears. These are mostly full of heavy tidings, and dwell much upon the ruin sin has made—the darkness of their minds—the smallness of their joys—the multitude of their fears—the barrenness of their souls—the imperfection of their services—the violence of temptations which they endure; their great ignorance of divine things, and want of zeal in the Lord's ways; also the fear of death is usually found in the catalogue of their complaints. Yet, if it be suggested to them to resign their hope, they instantly reject the idea, as

utterly repugnant to their wishes, and as utterly out of their power. These are the little ones, whom the Father of all mercies will not suffer to perish. Their faculties are but feeble, —many of them, their judgment but cloudy, and their enjoyments but small; but they are loved with an everlasting love, clothed with an everlasting righteousness, and are heirs of an incorruptible heritage. They are weak as a bruised reed, but shall never be broken; they are fearful, but not unsafe. And sometimes it is the pleasure of God to raise up some of these fearful folks, after a long period of severity, into a good degree of freedom and boldness in the faith. How are we to account for the difference we meet with in persons equally loved of God? We can only say, *He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.* And these feeble members of the mystic body of Christ, are as truly and inseparably united to him who is the Head of all vital influence as the strongest and most favoured of their fellow-members. It is true, their enjoyment of spiritual things is greatly intercepted by suspicion and darkness, yet are they not without their seasons of comfort and times of deliverance. And they are made just to God, and faithful to their brethren, whom they sincerely love for Christ's sake. They are made conscientious, dutiful, and diligent; and are strongly attached to the word, the worship, and ordinances of God.

Some of the Lord's chosen have been wrought upon under heavy afflictions, and bereaving providences; for while they have been stripped of almost all earthly comfort, the Holy Ghost has overruled the trying dispensation for their highest advantage in spiritual things; while he has shown them the nothingness of temporal things, and all earthly joys have seemed to be perishing before their eyes, he has caused them to observe the excellence of heavenly things, and to rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Thus, by the very dispensation through which they suffer the loss of all things, they are brought to inherit more largely celestial treasures. The death of a kind parent has been made subservient to the spiritual conversion of a surviving child. God can speak through the shadow of death, and cause his voice to be heard from the tomb. And the death of the infant has proved the means of serious inquiry and sound conversion to its tender mother, who, while it lay dead in her lap, was led to consider the certainty of her own dissolution, and to ask these solemn questions: Where is the soul of my child? What will become of my own soul when I die? Such inquiries, springing from a quickened and softened heart, and sincere desire, show, that the

band of the Lord is working within, to make room for the fulness of the Saviour. Thus the soul resigns one object, and takes up another; it suffers a sensible loss, and yet gains abundantly. Creatures fade and die, but the bereaved spirit finds unfading glories and eternal honours in its creating and redeeming God! In all those important changes that are made in the persons and circumstances of the Lord's elect, divine sovereignty breaks forth to our view, and we are again led to confess, the God of Heaven, *hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.*

The circumstances of God's people also differ greatly concerning the means of edification afforded them, after they are become regenerate. Some are favoured with a faithful, sound, and useful ministry, while others are scarcely ever privileged to hear more than a small part of the counsel of God, and that plentifully blended with foreign matter. Many arise to teach others, who themselves are unacquainted with the *first principles of the oracles of God.* This, of course, leads to many sorrows, for disciples are kept back by the very men who profess to be their guides. The Saviour's lambs are to be fed; but alas! how often do we find our shepherds otherwise employed! In their often misguided zeal to convert the world, they seem almost to forget the church which Christ has redeemed out of the world: being anxious to save all, though Jesus only died and prayed for some, they, in their hurry, tread down the distinguishing fences of the Lord's heritage by which the spiritual kingdom of God is separated from the world, and piously profess a desire for enclosing the land of Edom, and of uniting it with the sovereign lot of Jacob, whom the Lord himself hath distinctly chosen from everlasting. For this liberality of spirit, not a few arise with open mouth, to trumpet forth their commendation. In short, erroneous notions, hostile in their tendency to the doctrines of discriminating and absolute grace, are so constantly mingled with a brief acknowledgement of those doctrines, that the simple are greatly imposed upon by specious appearances of friendship for truth, and by high sounding pretensions to evangelize the world.

Election is very rarely mentioned, and redemption is so represented, that the hearers must suppose, according to the scope of the preaching, that it includes the whole race of Adam. But God will finally rend these fleshly coverings, thrown over the lovely face of consistent truth, and cause the distinguishing acts of his eternal will and pleasure to be known. Conscientious souls, who feel an ardent desire to promote the glory of God, and the

salvation of sinful men, are easily drawn to applaud almost any measures proposed by men of high repute for their piety and zeal in the cause of religion; being unaware of the coldness and inattention shown towards the fundamental truths of the gospel, by the very men to whom they look up as their spiritual instructors. But the eternal Father of these little ones, in permitting godly zeal to be so blinded in our day, has, doubtless, done as *he hath pleased*. Therefore though the evangelized mind cannot rejoice in the darkness and disorder, that attend the uncommon zeal of the present period; yet, it can take encouragement from the persuasion, that all things shall finally terminate in the glorification of the only wise God our Saviour, *who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will*, in the world of professing men. *He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased*.

He can make darkness and confusion redound to his own praise; and yet reprove men, for spreading them among the assemblies of his worshipping people!

Those new-born babes that are favoured with a faithful ministration of the gospel, from the first hour of their spiritual consciousness, thereby reap great advantage, and escape much sorrow. They are taught *to desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby*; while some poor babes fall into the hands of ignorant nurses, and scarcely get a taste of unadulterated milk for months together. And though, they, at times, inwardly long for the breasts of free grace and finished redemption, and venture to turn in, to taste the entertainments other babes enjoy, in other nurseries, yet if they lisp a word about this, and it reaches the ear of their nurse, the rod is taken up and shook at them, if not laid upon them, for this is a greater offence than dirting their clothes, associating with profane boys, or almost any thing besides; because it is likely, that it may come into the heads of these young ones, to speak to their Father some day about the matter, and he may grant them liberty to choose the very nurse by which they have been fed with so much edification. There is, however, a great difference in the temper of children, and some of them are often wanting to change their nurse, from no want of good treatment, but from their own fickle and uneasy tempers; and, in general an honest nurse may be glad to be eased from the charge belonging to these refractory and whimsical children; for it mostly happens, that they are of a very shallow understanding, and yet exceedingly knowing in their own apprehensions.

A good minister of Jesus Christ brings forward, for the nourishment of his charge, the wholesome words of sound doctrine, and encourages the hungry to eat and live. Their necessities and appetites are known by him, and he is led by the Spirit, who has anointed him to his office, to set forth the very things which their heavenly Father has provided for them, and which from their very birth-state, they are moved to desire. While he labours in doctrine, the Holy Spirit applies the testimony, and they are fed *with knowledge and understanding*, and grow up into Christ in all things, who is their Head. They are taught to discover their election in their spiritual conversion, and to know the love of God towards them by its drawing power within them. They are instructed to know, that a tender conscience, and a hatred of sin, a Christ-receiving faith, and a loving heart towards him and each other, are the effects of vital and endless union to Jesus, and fruits of the Holy Spirit of adoption. They seek an inward experience of the doctrines of grace, as those doctrines are opened in the understanding, and written in the heart by the Holy Ghost. Experience without the inward possession of truth by faith, must be only natural, and hearts that hate the doctrines of grace are at enmity with God, and are not subject to his law. This is not the case with all men who profess religion, for God has made some to differ; and this difference is designed to manifest his sovereign pleasure. *He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.*

But, if we for one moment suppose a man who is truly convinced of sin and weakness to be cast under what is now generally called an Evangelical Ministry, he must labour under great difficulty and disappointment. Such a man hungers and thirsts after righteousness and freedom; he pants for fellowship with God, and seeks that peace which passeth all understanding: he longs to enjoy a sense of his adoption in Christ, and the pardon of all his sins through the testimony of the Holy Spirit of adoption: he waits to have his spiritual strength renewed, and to discern his interest in the eternal and unchanging favour of God. Now, what is he to do under such preaching as is now most commended, and most prevalent? Can he reasonably expect to be nourished in the wholesome words of sound doctrine? Is he likely to discern his election in Christ, where that doctrine is rather concealed than preached? How is he to learn his adoption, where the work of the Spirit is rarely touched upon in the ministry? Or, how is he to grow up into the head of all things, when the headship of Christ is

scarcely ever opened to his understanding? Nay, perhaps, he will hear it spoken against, and represented as a dangerous doctrine! Instead of *a finished* salvation, he must hear of *a finishable* one; instead of *absolute* promises, he must aim to content himself with *conditional* ones; and in the room of given grace, he must submit to offered grace; and for certain salvation, he must think himself favoured in hearing of a possible one; and, instead of entering into rest by faith, he must fall to work, if he would escape damnation! And, the further to confirm him in his captivity, his candid minister will, at times, take heed to warn him against what he calls *Hyper-Calvinism*, or the dangerous doctrines of grace: such as eternal election and adoption,—particular redemption,—eternal justification in Christ as the Church's head, by imputed righteousness,—and the full forgiveness of all sin through the death of Christ,—the certain regeneration, preservation, and glorification of all God's elect. If he hears much about these matters at any time, it is a thousand to one but it arises from his preacher's desire to say something against them. Thus, the truth is partly kept from him, and he is warned against Antinomian extravagancies. O that the good Spirit of Truth may descend, and enlighten his churches, and that their zeal for God may be according to knowledge, and the word to the people cease to be *yea* and *nay*! II. Cor. i. 19, 20.

Again: Some of God's chosen are gradually drawn to know themselves and the Lord, and never experience very great terror, nor any extraordinary ecstasy of joy. These are brought to the same God, and to the same glory; but they are wrought upon in a different *manner* to what many are, whom they meet with in the gates of Zion. If these are not so deeply convinced of the wrath of God against sin, as some others are, yet they are convinced of sin, and grow in useful knowledge of the human heart, by increasing light shining into them from the throne of sovereign love. Some of the Lord's people have very little knowledge of the corruption of nature at the first, to what others have; and some are greatly impressed with a sense of it, before they have any good hope of salvation. In general, we find that, as the regenerate sons of God advance in the life of faith, they discover more and more of the evil of their own hearts, and detect the hidden workings of the sin of nature, in many ways, of which they before were utterly unaware. As their light increases, their imperfections become more fully mani-

fest to themselves ; so that they seem to themselves to be more ignorant and carnal after they have journeyed for years, than they were when they first set out on pilgrimage.

Much has been said against the idea of persons being drawn by love ; and some have called it a cant word, and reckoned it to be the language of Hypocrisy ; but we know it is the language of Inspiration, and, therefore, to be treated with reverence. And I am apprehensive that we should find as many hypocrites among those who profess to have been brought under great terror, were examination to be made, as we should among those who profess to have been drawn by love. In hell the greatest degree of terror prevails, but no holiness is found there. Judas felt much of it, no doubt, when he took back the thirty pieces of silver, which he had received for his treacherous conduct towards his kind Master. A guilty man may be filled with terror, and the ministration of condemnation may entirely destroy his former ease ; but, as love is the root of the ministration of the Spirit, so it must be necessary to the formation of the Christian character that the sinner be drawn by love. Neither is any man brought nigh to God until the love of God is shed abroad in his heart by the power of the Holy Ghost. It is common to say, ‘ Some are *driven* to Christ ;’ but the propriety of the thought may be reasonably questioned ; for, if a guilty man be *driven*, so long as he is under this driving power, and dread of harm, he wants a refuge from the danger he fears ; but he wants no Christ ! Nature affrighted will long for a shelter, but will ever seek it in her own way. So long as a sinner remains destitute of the drawings of infinite love, he turns to the deeds of the law, and promises himself peace and safety, favour and eternal happiness, by his own improvements, performances, and good intentions. He never becomes truly dead to the law, as a rule of justification, until conquered by the heart-melting charms of love divine. While a man’s face is towards hell, and instead of attracting his eye and turning him round, you fall to driving him, the greater the power by which he is impelled, the further he hastens to the point before him ; and if unprevented by sovereign grace, extended to his heart through Christ Jesus, he will pursue his course, according to the ruling principle of his own mind, until he arrives at that gloomy dwelling where hope never comes !

True religion is the reign of Love, and all its subjects are sons of Freedom. Nothing will cast out servile fear, which hath tor-

ment, but the manifestation of the love of God in Christ Jesus, as our law-fulfiller, by the Holy Ghost. It has too often been the manner of good men to insist upon certain degrees of terror, as essential to the evidencing of a gracious state. To this they have been led by a wrong use made of their own experience. Suppose one man is shook over hell, as some express the matter, and feels the wrath of God to that degree that he cannot rest; and is so disquieted that he is ready to choose strangling rather than life, and so sensible of divine anger that he is afraid to die, and falls to wishing he had never been born; it does not follow that every child of God must needs be exercised this way. I am well assured that neither the great degree of terror, nor the great length of its continuance, will prove any thing satisfactorily as to the state of any man; except it be this, that such a sufferer must be a sinner. By imprudent affirmations on this subject, many of God's elect have been perplexed, and made sad without real cause. And we find by observation, that while *one* is tempted to conclude that he is no Christian, because he has not felt all that terror which he has heard some notable character speak of, as having been his experience; *another* is tempted to think that he is deceiving himself, because he has not experienced the liberating power of divine love upon his mind, as he hears some of his friends declare they have; though, with respect to terror, he is fully satisfied, that of that he has had as much as he could well sustain. Now, God is a Sovereign, and he will call his people as he hath pleased to determine. He that is brought through a raging tempest, is found at Calvary, and gazes with serenity and pleasure on his crucified Surety and Deliverer! And he that but slightly heard the thunder of Sinai, and tarried not in the smoke, nor saw much of the awful lightning, but was by speedy steps hastened forward to Sion and Calvary; he also is saved into an enjoyment of redeeming love, and takes his seat at the foot of the cross with his brother, who, in some respects, came by another road, but who, as well as himself, finds his home and his happiness in the Lamb that was slain, to redeem the elect unto God! Now, why should these brethren fall out, because they have been brought in different ways, as to the dealings of God with their souls, in the degree of fear experienced, of suffering endured, of enjoyment granted? Rather let such unite to sing of sovereign grace, that brings its favourites near, in different manners, the more to show that the work is of God, and is done altogether *as he hath pleased*.

It is true, that in the manner of the conversion of these breth-

ren, we find some difference ; but in essential points, and things that must testify the saving nature of their conversion, they are agreed. They both believe the doctrines of Christ, and that the law, in its requisitions, extends to the inmost powers of man ; that nature is in a state of vileness and death through transgression ; that mankind are as weak as they are wicked, and as unworthy as they are vile and frail ; that the law, against which we have all offended, is ir repealable and inexorable ; that without perfect righteousness no man can be justified ; that a sinner can never perform such righteousness ; that Jesus Christ has finished a perfect righteousness, and is therefore the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth ; that this righteousness is well pleasing to God, and is imputed to all the elect in Christ their Head ; that it is received by faith, and yields peace to the conscience : that the Holy Ghost bears witness to its justifying virtue, and seals remission on the hearts of all the sons and daughters of God Almighty ; that Christ is the Head of all vital influence, and the source of true sanctification to all his members ; that regeneration and conversion are of God, and not of man ; that he who is converted is dead to the law, as a rule of justification ; that he shall not come into condemnation, but shall hold on in the life and walk of faith, and finally inherit the kingdom of God. Now, as these, with other relative points, are believed and enjoyed by those brethren who arrive at Calvary, as their refuge and rest, though by different degrees of impression, there appears no reason why they should suspect each other's right to the Christian name. Let such, therefore, unite to extol the unexpected and unmerited grace, by which they are saved for ever and ever. For however in some things their experience may differ, in the main things they are agreed : seeing they both have received the atonement by faith, it becomes them to walk as brethren in Christ, and give unto God the praise of their certain salvation : for *He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.*

4. *As to their different employment in his cause, the Lord has done with them as he hath pleased.* Of some of his saints he is pleased to make public ministers, while others are called to hear. Some are chosen to the office of deaconship, and are therefore required to attend to the temporal concerns of his church, to wait at his table, and aid in the management of his family affairs. In the appointment of the officers of his spiritual kingdom, *He has done whatsoever he hath pleased.* It can only be accounted for in his pure sovereignty, why one man shall be

a minister of the gospel rather than another ; and why some of those ministers whom he hath chosen shall possess only two talents, while others shall occupy five, must be ascribed to the same supreme pleasure of his will. The *success*, also, attending the exercise of the ministerial function, is ruled by his pleasure ; and the difference of success that accompanies the same minister in one period of his life, to what is found to accompany him in another, results from the good pleasure of the Lord. And the same reason must be rendered for the different degrees of usefulness that await the labours of different ministers ; and on no other ground can we account for the great disparity of their labours, as to the length of time in which they are employed. Some stand on the walls of Zion fifty years, and others not five ; some are continued, whom the church considers to be of but small talent or utility, or who, perhaps, through age, are almost reduced to second childhood ; while men of large gifts, and extensive labours and success, are called from the vineyard in the midst of their usefulness, and whilst in the prime of life. All we can say, by way of accounting for these ways of the Lord with his ministers and churches, must be summed up in the words of our text : *He hath done whatsoever hath pleased him.*

5. *As to the degree of growth in knowledge and in spiritual strength*, with which the children of God are blessed, and the great disproportion that is very manifest among them : they greatly differ one from the other : and here we must also say, *He hath done as he hath pleased: even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.* Concerning the growth of Christians, the Scriptures speak as follows :—*The righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree ; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon: those that be planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God: they shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing, to show that the Lord is upright: he is my Rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him. Israel shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.—Speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, who is the head, even Christ. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.*

From these testimonies we may observe, that a state of grace must precede a growth in grace ;—a man must be in Christ by a new creation, before he can grow up into him in all things. The children must be born before they can be educated ;—and

the trees of the Lord must first be planted and made good before they can grow, flourish, and bear good fruit. But where they are planted there they grow, and where the chosen people of God are created anew, there they are nourished; and as they are quickened and sanctified in Christ, so they grow up in him, and bring forth fruit in him to the praise and Glory of God. Union to the living Root maintains the life and fertility of all the saints; but separate from God they can do nothing, or bring forth no fruit to the glory of God. When the trees of righteousness cast forth their hidden roots, of inward faith, hope, and love, in the everlasting love of God in Christ, and his covenant settlements, so as to take more extensive hold of these nourishing and fructifying fundamentals of salvation, with judgment and experience, they may be said to grow and cast forth their roots as Lebanon. Such living trees will bring forth the fruits of righteousness, goodness, and truth, through the Spirit of Christ, with increase.

The family of God consists of babes, young men, and fathers. Some grow far more than others do; all fathers were once babes, but all babes do not become fathers, nor even young men. Many of the household of God remain babes all their days, but their Father is very kind and careful in all his dealings towards them. He will not suffer them to be tempted beyond their strength, and though they grow very little, they are made heirs equally with their brethren. These can scarcely ever enjoy any food but milk, while their brethren, who are grown up to young men, desire strong meat. *Every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.* Heb. v. 13, 14. By milk we are to understand the most familiar and easy parts of truth, which are very plain to the weakest capacity; as the everlasting love of God to his people,—the riches of his mercy in and through Jesus Christ,—the death of Christ for lost sinners,—the cleansing virtue of his precious blood—the justifying merit of his righteousness,—the free promises and invitations of his grace,—the certain perseverance of the saints unto eternal life. These are what the children live upon by faith, and the weakest of the household are found to relish and digest these things, and to lament when they are withheld: which shows that they are the milky provision prepared for spiritual babes by their heavenly Father. By strong meat,

I understand those branches of the gospel which require a more enlarged understanding, and a greater degree of spiritual gifts to conceive of them with profit and pleasure. Strong meat requires an inward strength to digest it; and it ministers great strength to those who are able to receive it. Thus strength increaseth strength, and we go from strength to strength in Zion. Those who are of full age, take pleasure in the *manner* of things as well as in the *truth* of them; they not only know that Christ is the only Saviour, but they know in a good measure *how* he is the Saviour. They delight in the knowledge of his personal glories, as they shine forth in his relations and acts as the Mediator; while babes mostly content themselves without ascending higher than his acts as a Redeemer.

The doctrine of Christ's headship,—of his incarnation,—of the eternal union subsisting between Christ and his people,—of eternal adoption and justification; also the covenant of grace and redemption, together with the grand distinctions contained in the great plan of salvation; to which may be added, the doctrine of Christ's Sonship, and his antiquity as the Man, as well as his eternity as God;—all these, with other fundamental points may be considered as the strong meat to which the apostle alludes. Now, those who are able to live upon the foundational points just mentioned, as displayed through the work of the cross by the Holy Ghost, are said to be of full age, and are called young men, and fathers. But those who are babes might have been fathers, and fathers might have been babes, had it seemed right in the eyes of the Lord so to ordain the matter; so that, *he hath done whatsoever hath pleased him*. Some of the children of grace bring forth thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred fold; for there is all this difference: yet all are compared to good ground, to intimate that all are in one state. Some of the regenerate sons of God have respect to the whole worship of God, and the duties of a church state, according to the law of Christ; others are negligent, it not being given to them to enjoy the whole truth and service of God. The fruits of righteousness, which are by interest in Christ, are not alike in all, as to degree of perception, affection, reverence, humility, diligence, firmness, faithfulness, and gratitude; but the Lord, in giving his grace, has done *as he hath pleased*. Yet, he who brings forth thirty fold, is as truly fruitful, though not equally so, as he that brings forth an hundred fold.

6. *As to the circumstantial differences* that appear in the lot of the righteous, the words of our Text are exemplified: *He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.* While the children of God are equally loved in Jesus, their circumstances widely differ, to show the sovereignty of the Lord, by whom they are covered and fed in this life. Some of them are rich, and others are very poor; but this distinction, as well as others, is accounted for in the supreme pleasure of God, who orders the allotments of his people according to his own sovereign will, and therefore the sons of God are called to acknowledge him in all their ways, and to rely on his providential care, who, while he claims a supreme right in all the fulness of the earth, also promises his saints a supply of every needful thing.

His words are, *Dwell in the land and do good, and verily thou shalt be fed. Take no anxious thought, saying, What shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or, Wherewithall shall we be clothed? For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things: but seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.* Matthew, vi. 31—33. But according to the provision made for many of his poor saints, it is manifest he considers a very small pittance sufficient for them. He teaches them, by the ways of his providence, *to think what they can do without*, as well as what they want; and by close observation and experiment made, they are often convinced, that it is possible for them to live, without possessing certain things, which before they had thought to be indispensably necessary; and I am persuaded from observation made, and from the testimony of others, that in many instances, people in good circumstances deny themselves, both in food and raiment, and especially the former, beyond what the truly indigent are *willing* to do. I mean to say, that, allowing for the difference of circumstances, there is a spirit of extravagance among many poor people, far exceeding what others, who are possessed of great property, will suffer in their manner of living. This should be guarded against; because it prevents liberality, and is often made an argument against the poor being relieved; for we all know, that the penurious are too ready to catch at these imprudences, as sufficient excuse for withholding their contribution,—while the most generous cannot help being grieved and suspicious. Thus, by the imprudence of some, others are made to suffer great loss. I hope, my brethren, whether rich or poor, will aim to know the right way, and to walk therein, towards God, and each other. The above observations are well

designed, and it is hoped they will be well received. The poor, therefore, are as much bound to be careful how they use what they receive, as the rich are required to mind how they communicate; and this becomes more strikingly impressive, when it is recollected, that perhaps the contributors are not rich; but give a portion of the fruits of their industry to relieve their poorer brethren, out of real kindness. To those whom God has blessed with a little to spare for the relief of others, I say, 'Be not weary in well doing, for in due season ye shall reap, if ye faint not:' and to those who are favoured to receive the sacrifices of kindness, I say, 'Be neither discontented, imprudent, nor ungrateful.

There are of the Lord's dear people, some, who pass through seas of sorrow, and whose path is rugged almost from beginning to end; while others there are, who move in an easy track, compared with that of their brethren, and are rarely called into deep waters of tribulation. Some commence their Christian Journey in a calm day, and end their pilgrimage in a stormy season.—Some travel much by night, and seldom enjoy the reviving beams of the Sun of righteousness,—others walk in the light of life through the darkness of this wide wilderness, anticipating Heaven as their certain home. While fearful apprehensions often trouble the feeble, they who are strong in the faith, are led to rejoice in hope. But, why are children, equally dear, thus differently treated? It is all to show the sovereign pleasure of God their Father, and to bring honour to his name: and they are taught to acknowledge his indisputable right to do as he will with his own; and to confess that what he does is ever best. They can praise him as their wise and gracious God, and firmly believe, that he will cause all things to work together for their highest advantage: when, being filled with his Spirit, they are strengthened in faith to give glory to his holy name.

Among the many sons ordained to eternal life, some there are who obtain and retain a good report by faith; and this, I trust, may be affirmed of the major part. But there are others of the family, who are ever under a darkening cloud, through the errors or follies into which they are permitted to fall. These not only bring sorrow and shame upon themselves, but subject their brethren to many bitter reflections; nor is this the worst; for on account of their offensive words and ways, the name of the Lord is blasphemed, and his holy doctrine and worship unjustly derided, suspected, and censured! Let these things be duly considered, my Christian friends. It is most awful to cherish

sin in our lives, while we profess to love him, who died to put it away by his own blood. Sin may offer you pleasure ; but it cannot ensure you any continuance of happiness : its pleasures *are but for a season*. But, though it can only give a shadow of happiness, it can, and will, if indulged, rob you of substantial peace and comfort. The man who can sin by a faith in Christ as a Saviour is utterly unworthy of the Christian name. To such an one, hell is only disagreeable by reason of the punitive justice there displayed ; and not from any aversion to the wickedness of its inhabitants. The greater damnation awaits these poor deluded, presumptuous, wanderers, if indeed they possess their final character : but if, on the contrary God hath chosen them in Christ that they should be holy, a change will be effected by the Spirit of the Lord. This, however, ministers no encouragement to vileness or presumption, but plainly shows, that such characters are not truly partakers of electing love, through the Holy Ghost : but I rather intended to mark the difference that arises to view in the conduct of God's own people. Among these, many hateful things have been found ; and, to grace be all the praise, that their number has not been greater, and their consequences more dreadful. He that has not defiled his Christian garments, has nothing to boast of ; but much to be ashamed of before his God. But he that has not kept his garments of profession clean, has abundant cause for shame before both God and men. The difference of character, manifested among the saints, is an illustration of the sovereignty of God ; for what but grace can account for the better conduct of the just and upright? That sovereignty which placed Moses in official capacity above Aaron, could have set Aaron above Moses : and the same supreme authority which kept the latter from making a golden calf, could have preserved the former from that wicked conduct. Peter dissembled, and Paul did not, but God could have reversed the matter, had he pleased so to ordain the event. While corruption has its due blame in these and similar events, we still have reason to say, that, in distinguishing his servants, *God has done whatsoever he hath pleased*. And they who rightly know his name will glorify him, as the sovereign Ruler over all; through whose hand all things pass, and yet in whose directions and decisions error or injustice has never appeared. He can sustain a sinner and not sanction his sins ;—he can permit the sins of his people, and not promote them ;—he can give to some of his chosen and new-born children a greater victory over sin, in their spirit and conduct, than what he gives to others ; and be righteous still. In all the distinctions which he has made in his

beloved and sanctified people, *He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased*

7. *As to the manner of their departure from this world by death, he deals not with them all exactly alike.* For, though they all die in the Lord, they do not, in other respects, die in a like manner. It is appointed unto all men once to die; but some die in youth, some in the middle age of life, and others in a good old age. Some die suddenly, and others are lingering over the mouth of the grave for years. While one is called to end his days under great affliction of body, mind, and circumstances, another scarcely feels pain or sickness, but gently breathes his life away in the Saviour's arms. One is favoured with a large enjoyment of the presence of the Lord—while another is left to finish his course under a cloud of gloom, and feels but little of the joy of God's salvation. But all the saints resign their spirits into their dear Redeemer's hands; and those who are not filled with the manifested love of God, are convinced of his faithfulness, and they die depending on his sure word of promise. This is a great part of what is meant by *dying in faith*. These are as truly in the Lord, as others who may die in the triumphant exclamations of victory and joy. Happy, thrice happy the men, who have been enabled to walk with God in life, and whose last moments are not disturbed by the painful remembrance of presumptuous or licentious conduct! It must be dreadful to feel a guilty conscience in a dying hour; yet, it is better, than to be judged, reprov'd, and griev'd,—than to be left under sentence to the last great judgment-day. The saints are judged now, that they should not be condemned with the world; but the difference that appears in their death, is ordained for wise ends; and the Lord, in appointing their different circumstances and degrees of knowledge and enjoyment, has done *whatsoever he hath pleased*.

It is the good pleasure of God to give his people the immortal kingdom of glory, when their pilgrimage on earth is ended. In that blessed world of perfection, they are made for ever happy, while perpetual displays of good pleasure are opening in the person of Christ to delight and feast their souls. Heaven will be for ever new, and God for ever near. What we *shall be*, does not at present appear; but this we know, our heaven shall be that, both as to place and state, which hath pleased our loving Father. Now, if his eternal mind is pleased with it, we may safely conclude that when he brings us into it, we shall be pleased also. At his right hand there are pleasures for evermore,

and in our exalted Saviour, who is seated on the right hand of the Majesty on high, is all our pleasure contained, and it is secured to us graciously, justly, and everlastingly. In this glory of God in Christ, the objects of eternal love shall all for ever dwell; for thus hath God ordained, and for this hath Christ covenanted as their Head; and for this self-same thing hath the Holy Spirit engaged to form and meeten all the adopted family of God;—as it is written: ‘He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God; who hath also given unto us the earnest of the Spirit; therefore, grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.’—May the blessing of God Almighty accompany his truth, and the glory shall be his own, world without end! AMEN.

THE END.

BY THE AUTHOR.

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