

THE  
PRESENT TESTIMONY,  
AND  
Original Christian Witness Revived.  
IN WHICH  
THE CHURCH'S PORTION  
AND  
THE HOPE OF THE KINGDOM,  
ETC.  
ARE SOUGHT TO BE DEVELOPED FROM SCRIPTURE.

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לֹא בְחַיִּל וְלֹא בִכְחַ כִּי אִם־בְּרוּחַי  
Zechariah iv. 6.

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VOL. I.

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THAT the present moment is, in the last degree, critical for the Church of God, none scarcely would be found to deny.

The desire, under divine grace, of those who have undertaken the present publication, is to meet the need of the Church in the position in which it is *actually* placed, by the communication of that truth (according to the measure in which it is given them), which the grace of God has furnished in the word for this as for every time of his Church's need. They are ready to receive any communication which may minister to this (provided it be according to truth and godliness), though it should not be precisely according to their own thoughts in every point, leaving each writer responsible for his particular view: yet they would carefully watch that nothing may escape them contrary to the faith of God's elect, or lowering to the standard of holiness and separation from the world, which becomes the Church of God—the Bride of the Lamb. That standard it is their desire to maintain in the fullest way in all earnestness of purpose and grace. They can only trust God to be kept and helped in this case. On the same ground, without sanctioning every thing in the original "Christian Witness,"\* and satisfied that God has brought out many things in a clearer light on several important points, yet they cannot doubt that God did by it afford to his Church much true light from Himself, to help it on its way. That grace they would own, and thus far receive, as the proof of God's goodness

\* The *first* edition only is here referred to.

to the Church. To own the goodness of God, is to receive the blessing of it. But they trust also to be enabled to afford a present testimony, according to the mind of God, towards His Church and Saints now. The rapidity of events, that is, of the development of principles—the principles of this world and of Satan—demand such a light and help to the Saints. Those who have undertaken this publication count upon the goodness of God, however feeble they may be, to supply it. Whatever really assists in the intelligence of Scripture will surely minister to this, and will find a ready place in “The Present Testimony.” Their confidence is in the Lord, that He will help them in thus ministering to the need of His Church. Upon His grace they cast themselves, recommending themselves and their labour to the love and prayers of their brethren.

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*The Editor (for the time being) adds a word:—*

*He feels and desires to keep intact, his own individuality of responsibility to the Lord Jesus, as Head—and to Him alone. As thus placed, he has, through grace, found fellowship with his brethren, partakers of one Spirit, children of one Father; their servant and fellow-helper, therefore, he would be; yet always under Christ.*

*While availing himself of all brotherly council, as to the details of his duty, he does not feel free to alter anything whatsoever, in any paper, except by request of the writer. At the same time he will feel free to add a note, signed ED., upon his own sole responsibility. EDITOR.*

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\*.\* As it does not seem to harmonise with the walk of faith to settle “how often such a Part or Number should appear”—let this be left where Faith casts all its burdens.

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# THE PRESENT TESTIMONY,

ETC., ETC.

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N<sup>o</sup>. I.

## ON THE HEAVENLY CALLING, AND THE MYSTERY.

- I. *What is meant by "THE HEAVENLY CALLING"; and what is its practical bearing upon the WALK and WORSHIP of Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ?*
- II. *What is meant by "THE MYSTERY"; and what connexion is there between it and "THE HEAVENLY CALLING"?*

THE knowledge of that infinite grace which has brought us, as redeemed sinners, nigh to God, through the precious blood of Christ, is the strongest appeal to our souls to render obedience unto Him who has shewn such wonderful love to us. And in proportion as our hearts are touched with a sense of this love, shall we love in return; "We love Him because He first loved us."

Love will ever produce a fervent desire to please and meet the mind of the object of its affections.

"If ye love me, keep my commandments," said our blessed Lord. But however true and sincere the heart may be, yet if there be ignorance as to the commands of the Lord, there must be failure in obedience. Love is not sufficient to enable us to walk so as to glorify God. A true heart and right desires are not enough. A true heart is of vital importance; but an instructed mind as to what the will of God is, is needed to regulate and guide the warmest heart: the want of this often leaves the Lord's people open to much sorrow, when really seeking to serve Him.

Mary's heart was true and warm enough—but she passed through much sorrow, because she "knew not

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the Scripture, that he must rise again from the dead" (John xx. 9).

We are not only called into fellowship with the Father and the Son, in the joy and peace of the Holy Ghost, but also to "be filled with the knowledge of His will, in *all wisdom and spiritual understanding*; that we might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing" (Col. i. 9); and that "love may abound more and more in *knowledge*, and in *all judgment*" (Phil. i. 9).

Knowledge without charity, we are taught, "puffeth up"; but knowledge and love must be combined and work together, or we shall fail in rendering real service unto God.

It may be said, that God often leads His children far beyond their spiritual intelligence. This is true (and happy for us that He does so) but are we to make this an excuse for our foolishness and ignorance, because His grace and goodness abound? It is not what we have any right to expect or reckon upon; for this reason, that He has given a full revelation of His mind and will, and His Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth, that we might *know* His will.

The word is the instrument by which He accomplishes His gracious purposes in us.

We are begotten by the word of truth (James i. 18).

We are born of the word (1 Peter i. 23).

By the word we grow (1 Peter ii. 2).

By the word we are cleansed (John xv. 3—Ephes. v. 26).

By the word we are kept undefiled in the way, and from the paths of the destroyer (Ps. xvii. 4—cxix. 9).

By the word—"the sword of the Spirit"—we are able to stand against the wiles of Satan (Ephes. vi. 17).

It is by the word, known in the power of the Spirit, that our practical sanctification is carried on. "Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth," was the prayer of Jesus for His disciples (John xvii. 17).

The written word, then, contains full and ample instruction whereby we may, in all things, have a sure guide, and learn from it how to glorify God—how greatly we need rightly to divide it, and understand what the will of the Lord is; not merely with reference to our personal walk, as individuals, but according to the design of God con-



*Introductory Remarks.*

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cerning the Church, and the character of its testimony, as well as position in the world.

There are certain characteristics of God's people, common to them in all ages, and under all dispensations; such as Faith, Hope, Love, Obedience.

But the form and manner in which obedience is to be manifested vary, according to the character of the calling, at different periods.

"Be ye holy, for I am holy," is a word of universal application, addressed alike to the Jew and to the Christian; for "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." But a Christian would walk very far below his vocation, if he were to walk like a Jew, however great his attainments in holiness and godliness.

What would be obedience in one, would be ignorance, and oft disobedience in the other, and for this reason:—God has been displaying his own character and ways at different times, and in different manners. His dealings with His people have varied according to his design and purpose respecting them. The Israelites were called to serve God in the enjoyment and abundance of all *earthly* blessings; Christians are called to be content with food and raiment, to be poor and despised, but blessed with all *spiritual* blessings:—the one was set in a dispensation of righteous government, the other in a dispensation of grace.

Hence, it is evident, that the saints need the clearest understanding as to the purpose of God concerning them (the grace in which they are set), and as to the character of their blessings and promises, or they will be unable to walk so as to meet the mind of God. Ignorance of those principles which correspond to the character of their calling will lead them to confound God's arrangements; and, mistaking His mind, they will be found acting upon principles, which at one time and under different circumstances were lawful, but are now condemned: a simple illustration of this is presented in Matt. v.21, etc.

How often this is the case with dear children of God! Many who have great peace, zeal, and devotedness, and who are indeed a sweet savour of Jesus, are yet so ignorant of the character of their calling, that they are

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systematically found in fellowship with an evil world, drawn into its course, acting upon its principles, seeking its patronage, and helping on its delusions and false expectations: thus marring their testimony, while they bring weakness, sorrow, perplexity, and disappointment upon their own souls.

The Lord has of late years taught many of His saints to see this, and has opened from His own blessed word much truth concerning "*the Heavenly Calling*" of the Church; and while there is doubtless much more to be learned, the practical power and blessing from that which has been seen have been extensively felt.

In considering the subject of the Heavenly Calling,<sup>a</sup> I have felt the need there is to keep before the mind, not only its prominent truths and varied features in detail, but also its *scope* and character as a whole.

A partial view of "*the Heavenly Calling*" will lead only to partial results, and, it may be, to an opposite line of conduct in two saints.

For instance, one person sees that the Church is called to a heavenly hope, and consequently that earthly rest and establishment are not now to be desired, but stranger-ship and separation from the course of this world.

Another sees how all the types and shadows of the law, ordinances of divine service, priestly services, and formal ceremonies, have been fulfilled and taken up in Christ; and this delivers him from confounding law and gospel, and from all formal worship.

But while the walk of one and the worship of the other have been set right, the limited view each has of "*the Heavenly Calling*," may leave both to pursue a line of conduct altogether at variance with it, and yet each suppose that his ways are regulated by its principles. Hence the importance of understanding what the scope of the truth is, and what it really embraces.

<sup>a</sup> At a meeting of brethren in the Lord, at Liverpool, in November, 1843, much light appears to me to have been given upon this subject, which I have ever since found to be most profitable, and a cause for much thankfulness. The distinguishing features between "*the Heavenly Calling*" treated of in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and "*the Mystery*" unfolded in the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians, were very definitely brought out.

*On the Heavenly Calling.*

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I will endeavour to point out the form which this truth assumes in my own mind. Further I cannot go.

I. *What is meant by "the Heavenly Calling"; and what is its practical bearing upon the Walk and Worship of Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ?*

"THE HEAVENLY CALLING" of the Church will be better understood as it is compared with the earthly calling of Israel;—the *contrast* between the two, and the distinguishing character of the blessings, promises, and worship, each serves to mark more definitely what is involved in this truth.

Converts from among the Hebrews were the most suitable persons to address upon the subject. Their history, and all the appointments under the old Covenant, furnish so many materials for explaining their new position. The scriptures, at once, could be referred to; which could not be the case when addressing Gentiles, who might not though converted, be so familiar with the scriptures as to make that mode of conveying instruction the most expressive to them.

The expression, "the Heavenly Calling," occurs only once in scripture (in Heb. iii. 1); but the whole argument of that Epistle refers to it.

The subject appears to me to bear practically upon two positions of believers.

1st. That which refers to their *Walk* in the world.

2ndly. That which refers to their *Worship* before God.

1st. *Our Walk*.—A brief consideration of Israel's history, keeping before the mind the *calling, hopes, habits, and associations* of that people, from whom the parties addressed were converted, will enable us to perceive the force of the arguments of this Epistle, and the light which the Heavenly Calling casts upon our *walk*.

Passing over the call of Abraham, and their bondage in Egypt, it will suffice to take them up at Mount Sinai. They were there acknowledged by God, as His peculiar people—a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation (Exodus xix. 5, 6).

He promised to bring them into a place which he had

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prepared for them, and to bless them there with everything that gives delight and happiness to the natural desires and affections of the heart of man (Exodus xxiii. 20—26, etc.; Deut. xxviii. 1—13).

He sought for rest and refreshment in them, of which the Sabbath was the sign (Exodus xxxi. 17). His rest in Creation had been broken by the sin of man; it was proved a second time, by Noah's failure, that there was no rest yet for God in the earth; but, again seeking it in Israel, the renewal of the Sabbath was appropriate and expressive of the earthly character of their dispensation.

They were then *a redeemed people* journeying through *the wilderness*, but with every provision made by God for them by the way—the visible token of His presence, and the most complete directions relative to His will and worship given to them. They had, too, *the promise* of a rich inheritance and rest, to animate and cheer their hearts amidst the weariness, conflicts, and perils of the wilderness.

The faithful, full of confidence and rejoicing in hope, spurned the thought of rest in the desert, and were content to be pilgrims and strangers till they possessed the land. The unbelieving and distrustful became fearful of heart, and were ready to return to Egypt, despising the glorious prospects God had set before them.

Israel's position in the wilderness then answers to the position of Christianity in the world. *Redeemed to God*, called to count the world in which they are as a *wilderness*, and to be strangers and pilgrims in it, but with a blessed and glorious *hope* before them.

The difference is this—that Israel was called to *earthly* blessings and an *earthly* hope; Christians are called to spiritual blessings and a *heavenly* hope. But the Hope separated their hearts from all around—gave the character to their walk and position in the wilderness; and thus, where faith was in exercise, they serve as a pattern and example to the saints now; or their unbelief serves as a warning lest any should fall, and so come short of God's rest.

Seeing then, as believers in the Lord Jesus, as "*partakers of the heavenly calling*," what kind of hope is given

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to us, we are taught that our place is "without the camp bearing His reproach" (xiii. 13). The principles of our calling will surely lead to separation from this evil world, not merely from its ungodliness, excess, and folly, but from its whole course and current, its schemes, politics, and glory, knowing that all is soon to be dissolved, and that our kingdom is one that cannot be moved.

We learn from this Epistle what power this heavenly hope had over the lives and conversation of these early Christians; they "endured a great fight of afflictions . . . were made a gazing-stock, both by reproaches and afflictions . . . took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing" that they had "in *heaven* a better and an enduring substance" (x. 32—34.)<sup>b</sup>

<sup>b</sup> The statements made concerning "*the rest*" in chapters iii. and iv. and in chapter xi. are well worthy of notice.

The Lord brought Israel into the Promised Land, and blessed them in it, notwithstanding their forfeiture of every blessing by making the calf, and their subsequent rebellions; but for all that, it was not "*His rest*," nor could it be upon the terms and covenant they agreed to take it, conditional upon their obedience; for He can find rest alone in the provisions of His own grace. This rest of God in them and the Land is yet future, and cannot be till Israel is restored, and all the promises made to Abraham are fulfilled, through the blood of the Mediator of the New Covenant.

This is yet future, as well as the heavenly inheritance of Christians, so that it can be said to us, "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God."

But of Israel it might be asked, Had they not rest when brought into Canaan. They had in measure; but it was not *God's rest*; "For if Joshua had given them rest, then would he [David] not have spoken of another day" iv. 8; and this was spoken by David at least four hundred years after Joshua had brought them into the Land, proving that God looked upon the rest as yet future. So David himself felt at the close of his career:—"For we are strangers before Thee, and sojourners as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding" (1 Chron. xxix. 15). And the faith of many of the saints from Abraham onwards seemed to have looked beyond the *dispensational* and *national promises* to Israel to a heavenly hope, "a better country, that is, a heavenly"—"a city which hath foundations"—"a better resurrection," and so walked individually as pilgrims and strangers, suffering from the world, despising its pleasures and glory, and thus become a more direct example to us; but if these are not enough, let us "consider Him," even Jesus, the Prince of faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

We have then to bear in mind, "that this is not our rest, it is polluted," and walk accordingly, not in self-enjoyment and establishment, but hastening through the world, thankful for the rest our souls have now by faith in Christ, but still waiting for the rest of God.

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2ndly. *Our Worship.*—The second division of the subject leads to the consideration of the bearing which the truth of “*the Heavenly Calling*” has upon our *Worship*.

Here again we must remember the prominent features of Israel’s worship, and the very strong hold which all the offices and ordinances connected with it had over their minds and affections. We can well understand this:—

First. Because they were of Divine appointment, and so sacred in their eyes.

Secondly. They were the tokens of God’s special favour to them as His nation and people.

Thirdly. They were associated with every domestic and social thought and feeling from infancy.

Fourthly. From the strong hold which outward ordinances have over the natural mind—the tendency of the human heart, when at all exercised in conscience, to seek satisfaction and relief in that which is obvious to sense. And this is often the case, even after the soul has been long exercised, and found, through bitter experience, that it is not by works of righteousness that man can be made meet for the presence of a Just and Holy God; yet the poor heart, clinging to everything but simple faith, will turn and seek to find its rest and meetness for God in ordinances. Such was the case in the early Church. Circumcision was maintained by some to be necessary to salvation; and in our day Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are declared to be as necessary—the mind of the Lord in these institutions being mistaken altogether.

Remembering, then, this tendency of the flesh, and the former habits and associations of these Hebrews, at once we see the danger they were in, if *faith* declined, to turn again to those shadows and beggarly elements as they are called, and to forget how they were fulfilled and taken up by Christ in His Person, Sacrifice, and Offices.

That there were symptoms of this declension is very evident from the whole character of the Epistle, and from the solemn warnings and searching exhortations given unto them; but the Apostle does more; he takes the greatest pains to enlighten their understanding, and to give a right direction to their deep-rooted associations

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in all those points connected with their consciences and service.

It will be well to notice what these points were, which were so essential and absolutely necessary for conducting the worship according to the order of the tabernacle established by God.

They were as follows, though the first and indeed the last were not immediately requisite in the routine of the worship, part of the Priest's service being to inquire of the Lord.

1. A *Prophet* who communicated the word of the Lord to them.

2. A *High Priest* who appeared before the Lord for them—the priests who ministered subordinately.

3. A *Tabernacle* wherein the priests ministered and wherein the Lord appeared.

4. The *Sacrifice and Blood*, the ground of the priest's appearing before God for them.

5. The *Altar* which sanctified every sacrifice and gift.

6. A *Mediator*, the Securer of all their hopes and blessings.

Now the Apostle does not weaken one of these associations in connexion with the worship and service of God—all would be lifeless and powerless without them;—but he explains and points out to them how the *sacrifice* had been met by Christ, that He had become their Great *High Priest*, and that the place of his ministration for them was not in the *earthly* tabernacle, but *in heaven* where they must now by faith draw nigh and worship God through Him.

This will be more clearly seen by following the argument of the Apostle upon each of these points.

1. *Prophet or Apostle.* God had in times past spoken by the Prophets: in these last days He had spoken by His Son.

He, who was the brightness of God's glory, the Creator, Sustainer and Heir of all things, came from Heaven to declare the "great salvation." He was God's Apostle: hence the increased responsibility believers are under to give heed to what is spoken, and the force of the exhortation, "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the *Hea-*

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venly Calling," consider the *Apostle* . . . of our profession Christ Jesus."

God *had* communicated His Will from the *Earth*, but now from *Heaven*; so much sorer the punishment shall those be thought worthy of who turn away from such grace and condescension.

"See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on *Earth*, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from *Heaven*" (Heb. xii. 25). God speaking from *Heaven* by His Son as *Apostle*, is the first truth of "*the Heavenly Calling*."

He may still be considered as speaking from *Heaven*; for that which He first spoke by the *Lord* was confirmed by those who heard Him, "God also bearing them witness both with signs and wonders and with divers miracles, and gifts of the *Holy Ghost*" (Heb. ii. 3, 4).

2. *High Priest*. A clear understanding of what *Priesthood* really is, is deeply necessary for our souls' daily experience.

The communication of the word of the *Lord* by a *Prophet* or *Apostle* is one thing; but the worship and intercourse between the people and the *Lord* is another: this was effected through the *Priest*.

The *Prophet* speaks to man from *God*—the *Priest* speaks to *God* for man—the *Prophet* had oft to plead for *God* with man; but the *Priest* had to plead for man with *God*.

But the most simple definition of *Priesthood* is given in Heb. v. 1, 2. A *Priest* is one "taken from among men and *ordained for men in things pertaining to God*, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins, who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity."

A few more passages cast additional light upon this office:—

"Take thou unto thee *Aaron* thy brother, and his sons with him, *from among the children* of *Israel*, that he may minister to me in the *Priest's office*. . . . And they shall make holy garments for *Aaron* thy brother, and his sons"



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(Exod. xxviii. 1, 4). “Aaron shall bear their [the children of Israel’s] names before the Lord upon his two shoulders for a memorial” (ver. 12) also he “shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart when he goeth in to the Holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually” (ver. 29). The plate of gold upon the mitre “shall be upon Aaron’s forehead, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the Holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall be always upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord (ver. 38).

And the Lord said unto Aaron, “Thou and thy sons with thee shall minister before the Tabernacle of Witness” (Num. xviii. 2).

“Thou and thy sons with thee shall keep your priest’s office for every thing of the altar, and within the veil; and ye shall serve: . . . and the stranger that *cometh nigh* shall be put to death” (ver. 7).

Those only “whom he hath chosen will he cause to *come near* unto him” (Num. xvi. 5). “No stranger which is not of the seed of Aaron [shall] *come near* to offer incense before the Lord” (ver. 40). “*Neither must the children of Israel henceforth come nigh* the tabernacle of the congregation” (Num. xviii. 22).

While all the priests had constant access into the Tabernacle, the High Priest alone entered within the veil where the Lord appeared in the cloud upon the mercy-seat; and that only once every year, when reconciliation was made, “because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel” (Lev. xvi).

These will suffice to shew us that the priests were a favoured class of the people; they had nearer access to God than the people; they made reconciliation for them, presented their gifts. The High Priest bore their burdens, carried them on his heart before the Lord, hallowed their holy gifts; that they might be accepted—decided who were clean (Lev. xiii. and xiv); pronounced the blessing upon them (Lev. ix. 22, and Num. vi. 22—27); in fact, was the one through whom their worship and service were presented to God, and who stood as their representative before God. No wonder, then, that an

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Israelite should so look for and lean upon the service of the Priest. The Apostle would not weaken this dependence; but leads their minds to *Christ* their High Priest in the Heavens; and shews them how it is no earthly priesthood now they have to do with, "For if he were on earth he should not be a Priest." The believer, delivered now from the law, knows of no priest or order of men between him and God; or that he stands in need of any one service being performed for him.

How forcible then the exhortation, "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of *the heavenly Calling*, consider the . . . *High Priest* of our profession, *Christ Jesus*."

A few words as to his qualifications for this office: they are well calculated to meet the feelings, and to give confidence and comfort to the souls of believers; especially to Hebrew converts.

The Son laid aside his Glory and became a man to be an Apostle. This was also needful to fit him to be a Priest; for a priest is one "taken from among *men*." He has gone back into Glory, still a man, to be a Priest.

Having passed through all the circumstances of suffering which sin had entailed upon man, "made flesh and blood," "encompassed with infirmity" and weakness; "tempted though without sin," "tasted death," "having learnt obedience by the things which he suffered," known what it was to "offer up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears"; he is in every respect personally qualified for his office, for "he *can* have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way"; and thus in all things "made like unto his brethren", can be reckoned on as a merciful and faithful High Priest.

An Israelite could have had no confidence in a priest *not "called of God."* "So also Christ glorified not himself to be made a High Priest." . . . . but was "called of God an High Priest after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb. v. 10). There was much in this high order of Priesthood to give more confidence and security to the believer than in Aaron's.

In the first place, it was of higher order; for Melchisedec was greater than Abraham. He was both King

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and Priest—it was an unchangeable Priesthood—therefore able to save to the end, “*ever living* to make intercession”:—made “after the power of an endless life” by the Oath of God (vii.)—the surety also of a better covenant than that of the Law.

The poor weak failing or defiled Israelite had oft to turn to the Priest, to be cleansed and fitted to resume his place in the camp, or his service before the Tabernacle; and oft indeed has the believer in Jesus to turn to him, his High Priest in the heavens, for sympathy and grace to help, for healing and restoration of soul, and renewed communion with God.

The heavenly Priesthood of Christ is the second prominent truth of “*the Heavenly Calling.*”

3. *Tabernacle.*—But *where* does Jesus exercise this service of Priesthood? Not upon *earth*: “for if he were on earth he should not be a Priest” (viii. 4); but “on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in *the Heavens*; a minister of the sanctuary, and of *the true tabernacle*, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (viii. 1, 2); “he is passed into the *heavens*” (iv. 14). The Lord no longer appears in the cloud in the *earthly tabernacle* (Exod. xxv. 22; xxix. 43—45; xl. 34—38; Lev. xvi. 2). His Glory has been withdrawn from thence, where he was wont to meet his people (Eze. i. and x.); and now the only meeting-place is in *heaven*, where in Faith the worshipper through Jesus must draw nigh.

4. *The Sacrifice and Blood.*—But there is now an essential point to be considered in connexion with this office. What was his *title* to stand in the presence of God for others? The proof that their sin was put away. The xvi. of Lev. explains all this in type; and the ix. of Heb. is the application of that chapter to Christ and his work.

The High Priest under the Law had *every year* to make atonement for the sins of the people; and he could only appear within the veil before the Lord with blood, which he sprinkled upon the Mercy-seat: but Christ entered in *once* by his own blood, having obtained redemption, not for a year, but *eternal redemption* for us.

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“Once in the end of the world hath he appeared, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”

Jesus the Son of God, in virtue of his own righteousness, had ever free access into Heaven and the throne of God; but if he is to appear there as the representative of others, he must produce the proof of their sins being put away, that the sacred Holiness of God may be maintained while he thus deals in mercy with the sinner. Hence the need of atonement and the accomplished redemption of the people, before the priest could appear in the presence of God for them.

Jesus' own blood is his full and perfect title to exercise this position and service for his people before God; and by it He will also reconcile the heavens and the earth (Heb. ix. 23; Col. i. 20).

There is still another point that the soul of the worshipper needs to be set at rest about. He may be satisfied as to the perfect qualifications of Christ for the office—that he was duly “called of God” to it—of its high order, dignity, and peculiar power—of his full title to execute it; but what is all this to one who is in any uncertainty about his own personal condition before God. This was felt under the law: the conscience had not rest, neither of priest nor people, “it could not make him that did the service perfect as pertaining to *the conscience*” (Heb. ix. 9). They never made “the comers thereunto perfect, because, if *once purged*, [they] should have had no more conscience of sin” (Heb. x. 1, 2).

Now, how is this met? We learn from Acts xxvi. who the sanctified are, “sanctified by faith that is in me.” Whenever there is faith in Jesus, that person is sanctified. By the will of God “we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all,” and for ever. “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Heb. x. 10, 14).

Here we learn who are sanctified—those who believe in Jesus; through what means they are sanctified—the offering of His body; and then, lest a fear might arise as to the loss of this blessing, it is written, “*perfected for ever.*” The conscience purged, and the testimony of the Holy Ghost, “their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.”

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Then these two things are provided for the worshipper. The blood of Jesus as his personal confidence to enter; and Jesus Himself, with all the proof that He has put away sin, standing there ready to receive him. Oh then the force of the word, "Let us draw near with a true heart, in *full assurance of faith*, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed in pure water." Let us as duly consecrated priests, enter even within the veil, and, through our great High Priest, worship our God with reverence and godly fear.

5. *The Altar.*—Every sacrifice and gift, under the law, was brought to the altar. It was there the blood was shed, and from thence the sweet savour ascended. It sanctified every gift—Whatsoever toucheth it shall be holy (Exod. xxix. 37; Matt. xxiii.).

Now the Apostle shews, that those who serve the Tabernacle have no right to the Altar, which the believer in Jesus has communion with. That He might sanctify the people by His own blood, He suffered without the gate. Jesus Himself is the altar now; and He it is that sanctifies us, and every gift that is presented to God. No worship or service of any amount is accepted but through Him and His work. His is the true altar: "By Him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually; that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name; but to do good and to communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb. xiii. 10—16).

6. *Mediator.*—A few brief remarks before closing, upon the Mediatorship of Christ.

We read that a change in the order of the priesthood necessarily made a change of the law; that there was a disannulling of it, because it made nothing perfect; but then there was the bringing-in of a better hope (Heb. vii. 12, 18, 19). This is secured in Jesus—a Priest after the order of Melchisedec—who has entered within the veil, and is made the surety of a better covenant.

The Jews ought to have been expecting this new covenant: for, if a *new* was spoken of, they should have been prepared for the passing away of *the old* (Heb. viii. 6).

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This covenant was strictly made with the *house of Israel*, and with the *house of Judah* (Heb. viii. 8); and in whatever measure Christians may share some of its blessings, it applies to Israel, and will be confirmed to them upon their restoration, "when the Redeemer shall come to Zion." The Apostle appears to refer to it here to draw the minds of the Jewish converts away from the old covenant and its ordinances, and to lead them to see that Jesus is the Mediator of the new covenant; "and that, by means of death [His death] for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they who are called might receive the promise of *eternal inheritance*."

I have now gone through what appears to me to be the prominent characteristics of "*the heavenly calling*," and have endeavoured to shew its practical bearing both upon the walk and worship of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

How entirely this truth grounds our souls in *grace*! We are exhorted to hold fast grace, and encouraged to put confidence in God as the God of grace, under all afflictions, contradiction of sinners, and chastenings of his loving hand; and to remember that we are not come unto the mount where He was displaying Himself as a consuming fire, and in all the tokens of terrible majesty; but that we are come "unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the *heavenly Jerusalem*," etc.

It gives, then, the character to our supports and consolations under affliction and suffering—furnishes us with clear principles to regulate our walk; and while it forbids us to think of rest or settlement in the world, and points out our path as pilgrims and strangers in it, without the camp, bearing Christ's reproach, it presents to us, as our hope, a kingdom which cannot be moved—a heavenly inheritance.

We are called, then, to walk by faith, and to worship God in faith. When this is understood, there will be no attempt to frame the worship after the pattern of Jewish observances.

Those who minister the word, will neither wish to take, or be forced into the position of the priests of old, and

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form a distinct class, or order of men between the congregation and God; but all worship together in the privilege of that universal priesthood and liberty, alike common to all believers.

The feeling of veneration towards the *building* which affords convenience to the assembly, will vanish along with its usual appellation, "the house of God;" and the thoughts will be carried upward, within the veil, to the building not made with hands—even heaven itself, the throne of the Majesty on high. No visible altar will be needed. Christ within the veil hallows the worship; and by Him we offer praise and thanksgiving and good works, the only *sacrifices* which we know are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Many of the Lord's people do not see the injurious tendency of these external things; but I am satisfied they tend to weaken faith in invisible objects. They may assist the imagination, and produce *feelings* of veneration, but will not quicken the *conscience* in the presence of God. Without them, the worship will doubtless be less imposing and attractive to the natural mind, but will be more "in spirit and in truth."

The Heavenly Calling overturns them all, by presenting to our faith the Object to which they point.

If this blessed truth is clearly understood, the perfect acceptance and everlasting security of the believer are known, for the priesthood of Christ involves them; also, full deliverance from the law, whether as to justification, or as a rule of life—Christ being, not only our *Saviour*, but perfect *pattern* and *example*. May we know more of him, and what it is to be "partakers of *the Heavenly Calling!*"

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II. *What is meant by "the Mystery"; and what connexion is there between it and "the Heavenly Calling"?*

FROM the remarks which have already been made, it has been shewn that the calling of God's people derives its character from the nature of their blessings, and from the nature of the hope set before them.

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The *earthly* blessings and promises given to the Israelites, made theirs an *earthly calling*.

The *spiritual* blessings in *heavenly* places, and the *heavenly* hope of believers in the Lord Jesus, make theirs a *heavenly calling*.

But there is a truth relating to the Church, and its relationship with Christ, and standing before God *in Him*, of a very special character, opening out privileges and blessings of even *a higher order* than are spoken of in the Epistle to the Hebrews. These also *necessarily* make the calling of the Church *heavenly*, though that precise term is not found in those scriptures which refer to it.

It is called "*the Mystery*"; and I am perfectly satisfied that the true character of the Church cannot be known if there be not a clear perception of the distinctive truths involved in this term.

I will endeavour briefly to point out, under different heads, what appears to me of deep practical importance to observe relative to "*the Mystery*."

1st. The character and high standing of the Church are involved in it.

2ndly. The *highest* motives to a holy and spiritual *walk* are drawn from it.

3rdly. *Worship* and *Ministry* are set in their true light by it.

4thly. The interpretation, and right application of scripture, depend upon attention to its distinct features.

The Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians contain the fullest and most *direct* statements concerning the mystery, though it is also referred to in other scriptures.

The truths embraced by it I would now consider.

In Ephes. i. 8, etc., we read that God "hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us *the mystery of his will*."

What this is, is explained in the tenth verse, viz.: "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in *heaven*, and which are in *earth*; even in him.

Thus, "*the mystery of his will*" embraces God's complete purpose of blessing in both of these spheres.

But the apostle speaks, after this, of Christ and the



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Church, and says "this is a great mystery" (Ephes. v. 32); and throughout these Epistles, and other scriptures where he uses this term, it is with reference to those truths immediately connected with the Church. Let us examine this:—

1st. The character and high standing of the Church are involved in it.

These Epistles declare, in common with other scriptures, the redemption, reconciliation, forgiveness of sins through the blood of the cross, and heavenly hope of believers in Christ, but upon peculiar and distinct ground—not merely that Christ died *for* us, but that *we died with him*, and are *risen with him*.

"Buried with him in baptism, wherein ye are also risen with him (Col. ii. 12).

"If ye then be *risen* with Christ . . . . For ye are *dead*, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is *our life*, shall appear" (Col. iii. 1, 3, 4).

God "hath *quicken*ed us together with Christ; . . . and hath *raised us up together*, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephes. ii. 5, 6; see also Col. ii. 13, 20).

We learn from these scriptures, that the Church is spoken of as having *died with Christ*, *risen with him*, and made to *sit in heavenly places in him*—made alive with him, yea, that he is our *life*. This is the essential and prominent feature of the mystery. *Life* in Christ—one with our risen Lord.

"We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones . . . They two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church" (Ephes. v. 30—32).

"He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. vi. 17).

The blessings of the Church are *spiritual*, her portion is in *heavenly* places in Christ" (Ephes. i. 3).

She is a witness of the manifold wisdom of God, to principalities and powers in *heavenly* places" (Eph. iii. 10).

Her spiritual conflicts are with wicked spirits in *heavenly* places (see margin Ephes. vi. 12). These mark her heavenly character; but there are other privileges to notice;—

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The church was chosen in Christ *before the foundation of the world*—before *time* commenced its course (Ephes. i. 4; see also 2 Tim. i. 9; Titus i. 2): not merely an elect body, but her election traced to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus" (Ephes. iii. 11).

"Predestinated unto the adoption of *children*" (Ephes. i. 5). Before God in all the perfectness and love of Christ. "Complete in him" (Col. ii. 10). "Accepted in the beloved" (Ephes. i. 6).

"Sealed with the holy Spirit of promise, unto the day redemption" (Ephes. i. 13, and iv. 30).

"Buildèd together for *an habitation of God* through the *Spirit*" (Ephes. ii. 22).

These are the wonderful privileges of the Church, opened to us by the revelation of the mystery. Christ is presented in the Epistle to the Hebrews, as having been partaker with us, his brethren, in all our circumstances of weakness and sorrow down here; or ministering *for* us in heaven above, while we are passing through the wilderness; but, by the revelation of the mystery, we learn we are *one* with Christ in life and blessing, and set in him in heaven above; this, while a fact, is known to us by faith.

Paul was the chosen instrument to make known this "Mystery" to the Church. To him was committed this dispensation of the grace of God, as the following passages declare:—

"Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given *to me* for you, to fulfil the word of God; even *the mystery* which *hath been hid* from *ages* and *from generations*, but *now* is made manifest to his saints" (Col. i. 25, 26).

Again, (Ephes. iii. 2—5) "If ye have heard of the *dispensation of the grace of God* which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation he made known unto me *the mystery* . . . which in other ages was *not made known* unto the sons of men, as it is *now revealed* unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit."

He was to make all men see what was the "fellowship of *the mystery*, which from the beginning of the world *hath been hid in God.*"

But there is another feature of the mystery, which the

apostle takes special pains to make clear, and which, if overlooked, would leave us with a defective apprehension of the character of the Church, and of the scope of the mystery.

It is this:—Who are the parties which constitute this body, brought into union with the Lord Jesus Christ?

And to answer this satisfactorily, we must consider the past and future purposes of God with reference to Israel; for it is by the strong *contrast* between Israel's order of blessing and the Church's, that the distinct character of the latter stands out in its prominence before the mind.

It was clearly revealed, that Israel was to be the centre of all God's dealings and arrangements with the *Earth*, (Deut. xxxii. 8). We have seen how they were acknowledged by God as His peculiar people (Exod. xix. 5, 6);—of the dominion promised them over other nations, and the earthly character of their blessings (Deut. xxviii. 1-13).

And though now they are "Lo Ammi," and scattered over the world, it is distinctly revealed they shall be restored, forgiven, and every promise made to them fulfilled. "The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Isa. lix. 20, 21). Israel shall then stand in pre-eminence of glory as a nation, the Gentiles shall bow down before them, and serve them, and the nation that will not serve them shall perish" (lx. 12). Jerusalem shall also be the centre of true worship. "And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of *the God of Jacob*; and He will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isa. ii. 3). "My tabernacle also shall be with them, yea, I will be *their* God, and they shall be my people. And the heathen shall know that *I the Lord do sanctify Israel*, when my *sanctuary* shall be *in the midst of them* for evermore" (Ezek. xxxvii. 27, 28). Pre-eminent in national greatness and glory, pre-eminent in religious privileges, they will still remain a *distinct people*, while the truth and blessing flows from Jerusalem, and "the Earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea,"—"And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse,

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which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious" (Is. xi. 10).

I need not multiply passages, as this is a truth extensively acknowledged. Christ is the source of all this blessing both *to Israel* and *the Gentiles*. "He is the Redeemer of Israel," the Mediator of the New Covenant to them; but He is also given to be "a light to the Gentiles," and God's salvation to the ends of the Earth (Isa. xlix. 6, 7).

The Prophets of old speak expressly upon these two points. *This is the order of the future blessing*—the distinction still existing amidst the universal blessing, and ever maintained between *Jew* and *Gentile*.

Now the peculiar character of "*the Mystery*" sets all this aside during the dispensation of the Mystery.

Israel, having rejected Christ, is cast down from her high privilege for a season, and stands upon the common level of *all sinners*.

"The Preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the Mystery" addresses *all*, Jew and Gentile, as lost sinners; and gathers from *both parties* a body of believers, who are brought into the *same* privileges, partakers of the *same* Life, of the *same* promises in Christ, of the *same body*, and are all alike *fellow-heirs*. Those who were afar off [Gentiles], and those who were near [Jews], have now equal access through Christ "by one Spirit unto the Father": He "hath made *both one*, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition . . . for to make in himself of *twain one new man*, so making peace: and that he might reconcile *both* unto God in *one body* by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them which were nigh," etc. (Eph. ii. 14—17). "Now therefore ye [Gentiles] are no more strangers and foreigners, but *fellow-citizens* with the saints, and of the household of God."

Not brought into Jewish privileges, but both now *fellow-citizens* in those new blessings just before described.

All this was strange to the ears of the Jewish believers, ah, even at first to the Apostles; it was so contrary to the *order* of blessing they looked for.

They were slow to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles at all. Peter was led to do it by the vision of the sheet and his interview with Cornelius, and was afterwards called to an account for it by the Church at Jerusalem, though subsequently they rejoiced "that God had also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts xi. 18).

This makes it additionally clear that *the Mystery* was not known to the early pentecostal Church. The Gospel declaring the death and resurrection of Jesus, and His exaltation as Lord and Christ, salvation through His name, forgiveness of sins, and the promise of the Holy Ghost to all who believed, was preached; but it was reserved for Paul, after Jerusalem had rejected the testimony presented to her, to unfold the high and peculiar privileges into which believers were now brought.

The prominent features of the *Mystery*, then, which constitute the real character of the Church are:—Partakers of the Resurrection-*life* of Christ, risen with Him, *seated in heavenly places* in Him, blessed with all *spiritual* blessings in *heavenly* places in Him, witness to those in *heavenly* places; conflict with wicked spirits in *heavenly* places; the Hope of *heavenly* Glory; the *distinction* between *Jew* and *Gentile* gone, *both of one body*, and that body the dwelling-place of *the Holy Ghost*.

These are points which cannot be neglected without impairing the integrity of "*the Mystery*."

Most blessed is the truth taught us in the Epistle to the Hebrews; in many respects more necessary for our daily experience than any other part of Scripture, yet the full privileges and peculiar character of the church are not taught there: for instance, while it treats so largely of "*the Heavenly Calling*," not one principle or truth connected with it would be affected or weakened, had *no Gentile* been brought into its blessings.

But the Gentiles form one of the constituent parts of "*the Mystery*," and the place they occupy in it must be marked, to enter into its character.

2ndly. The *higher motives* to a holy and spiritual *walk* are drawn from it.

Because we learn by it, that we are *dead* and *risen men*,—that we are one with Christ—"blessed with all

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spiritual blessings in *heavenly* places in Christ"; that we possess a *life*, a new nature, which can find fellowship alone with him "who is our life." We are called then to walk as heavenly men, yet upon earth. How forcible is the Scripture upon this point.

"If ye then be risen with Christ, *seek those things which are above, . . . . set your affections upon things above, not on things on the earth.* For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God . . . Mortify *therefore* your members which are upon the earth" (Col. iii. 1—5; see also Rom. vi).

If the apostle exhorts us not to lie one to another, it is upon the ground of the nature of the new life and of the oneness of the body—"seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him" (Col. iii. 9, 10) . . . . "which after God is created in *righteousness and true holiness. Wherefore* put away lying . . . . *for we are members one of another*" (Eph. iv. 24, 25).

Again, Christ's love to the church and his oneness with it as his body, is the blessed motive urged upon the husband to love and cherish his wife as his own flesh. The submission of the church to Christ, is the pattern presented to the wife of subjection to her husband (Ephes. v. 22, etc.)

The church being the habitation of God through the Spirit and our bodies the temple of the Holy Ghost, what a motive to glorify God in our body and spirit, and with what care and godly fear should we walk lest we grieve the Holy Spirit whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption (1 Cor. vi. 18, 19; Ephes. iv. 30).

We learn specially by "the Mystery" the *sovereign grace* of our God. We are brought into its blessings "to the praise of the glory of his grace . . . . according to the riches of his grace . . . . By grace ye are saved." Consequently the principles of grace are to regulate our walk here—praying for our enemies, doing good to them who hate us, resisting not evil, forgiving injuries, "*even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven*" us.

From what has been advanced, it will be seen how this

truth bears upon our walk in every respect. What a separative power there is in it, if we have learnt by the principles of "*the Heavenly Calling*," that our path in the world is that of pilgrims and strangers, that we can take no part in its politics and schemes, how much more when we learn we are dead to the world and are heavenly men though in it.

It does not take us out of the relationship in which God has set us, or teach us to be recluses and not perform the duties assigned us, but to act upon God's principles in doing them. It is true that we shall not be able to carry his principles into fellowship with the world; the men of this world will not care for us if we were to attempt it: we could not unite with them without lowering the holy standard given to us; but, standing apart from its course and energy and baseless expectations, our minds will be kept free from its confusion and distractions, and be better able to express Christ in all our ways, Christ being ours in "*the High Calling of God*," therefore condemns earthly-mindedness, sensual enjoyments, and teaches us to have our conversation in heaven; from whence we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil. iii. 14).

It is "*a Holy Calling*" (2 Tim. i. 9). "God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness" (1 Thess. iv. 7).

It is a *calling to glory*—"whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. ii. 14).—"Walk worthy of God who has called you into his kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. ii. 12).

3rdly. Worship and Ministry are set in their true light by it.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the worshippers are called to draw nigh to the Living God, as purged from sin, having boldness through the blood of Jesus, the One who has made reconciliation for them, and is not ashamed to call them brethren, standing in the presence of God for them as their High Priest.

Wonderful and blessed is this, the creature brought nigh to the Living God, his Maker.

But we draw nigh in a still more blessed character and

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relationship as taught by "*the Mystery*"; as *children* we have access to God as *our Father*. "Accepted in the beloved" (Ephes. i. 6), "in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him" (iii. 12). "What manner of love the *Father* hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the *sons of God*" (1 John iii. 1). Thus, while we should draw nigh in the spirit of adoption in child-like confidence, our hearts alive to all the happy affections and thoughts associated in that relationship, yet with reverence and awe, never forgetting that while *sons* we are still *creatures* in the presence of Him who is glorious in holiness, fearful in praises—the Eternal God!

The Holy Ghost is the power of our worship. "For through him we both have access by one *Spirit* unto the Father" (Ephes. ii. 18). "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit" (vi. 18).

Praying in the Holy Ghost (Jude 19). We can discern now, by the light of the Mystery, the drift of the Lord's conversation to the woman of Samaria, when he was speaking of the true character of worship and the gift of the Spirit.

But the basis of all worship is reconciliation and peace with God. How fully this is established by "*the Mystery*." If *one* with Christ, quickened and risen with him, then the question about acceptance is for ever settled. When faith has not apprehended this, and the finished work of Christ is not seen, the flesh will work and seek to find something else to rest in.

It would appear the Colossians needed to be warned against any who might beguile them with enticing words; and he shews how the truth of "*the Mystery*" overthrows all their reasoning.

He had great conflict for them, that their hearts might be comforted, being *knit together* in love unto all riches of *the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the Mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.*"

"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Col. ii. 2, 8).



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We may consider this warning under four distinct heads.

1. Philosophy, or human wisdom and reasoning.
2. Vain deceit—Superstition.
3. Tradition, or the commandments of men.
4. Rudiments of the world—Ordinances.

1. Philosophy would determine what is or is not pleasing to God by human reasoning, instead of receiving in humble faith what God has revealed. It seeks to exalt the powers of man's mind, and in pride of heart would hide from itself the corruption of human nature and the miserable ruined condition into which sin has plunged him.

2. Vain deceit. Superstition admits perhaps the ruin; but devises a way of its own to remedy the evil. Philosophy tends to infidelity, though it may end in superstition, if conscience becomes alarmed.

“Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.”

This is the way superstition works—great apparent humility—veneration for angels. God says, He is the only One to be worshipped. Christ is the only Mediator; and of Him it was said, “Let all the angels of God worship him;” but superstition, vainly puffed up by its fleshly mind, turns to worship and seek the aid of those who are said to be “ministering spirits”; and in worshipping them would fain persuade itself it is exhibiting humility—but Christ is slighted in it all. Another form superstition assumes, neglecting or punishing the body; but enough has been said to mark its character and workings; it is altogether intruding into things not seen—it has a *show* of wisdom in *will-worship*, but springs from the depraved heart “to the satisfying of the flesh” (Col. ii. 18—23).

The advocates of such a system may *appear* to be of deep sanctity, and the severity of their discipline and self-denial, and their solemn and imposing worship, calculated to produce an effect and excite the veneration of the *natural* mind; but the *spiritual* man discerns its true

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character "*the flesh*," and knows that it is all in the place of Christ and His work, and the absence of simple faith in Him and His precious blood.

3. Tradition, or the "commandments of men," may either enforce what God once appointed, the ordinances of the Law; or seek to make that binding for which there is no authority in Scripture. The Lord gives its character and results in Mark vii.

Let anything of man become authority, and binding upon the conscience; however simple and harmless it may appear, that moment it takes the place God and His Word should have in the soul, and becomes vain worship, weakens the authority of God's Word, and prepares the mind for laying it aside, and for formality (Mark vii. 1-8). But mark the next stage that tradition leads to. Having put the commands of men upon a level with the commands of God, it soon lays aside the latter, and ends in establishing something which is in *direct contradiction* to God's Word, making it of *none effect*, and *rejecting* the commandment of God, that the commandments of man may be observed. The two come into collision. *God* commands children to honour their father and mother: *tradition* says, "No, we are free to help them or not" (Mark vii. 1-13).

4. *Rudiments of the world, ordinances.*—Enough has been said before to show the strong tendency of the heart, and the reason it so cleaves to ordinances.

The Apostle appears to have before his mind a statement very prevalent in those days:—"Unless ye be circumcised and keep the Law ye cannot be saved" (Acts xv.1). Mark how the truth of the Mystery at once delivers the soul from such teaching. Why, "*Ye are circumcised . . . by the circumcision of Christ . . . buried with Him . . . risen with Him . . . quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses. Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances . . . and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross*" (Col. ii. 11-14). What a triumphant answer to such teachers! Meats, drinks, holy-days, new moon, or sabbaths, all disposed of by the same truth; they are the shadows of things to come; but the body is of Christ. "Ye are complete in Him," He is

the great ordinance, and “If ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances” (Col. ii. 20)?

In considering the light which the Mystery casts upon *Ministry*, there are two things to be borne in mind.

i. The fulness of Christ, the *Head* of the body the Church.

ii. And that the Church is the habitation of God through the Spirit.

i. Christ is not only Head of the Church, but Head over *all things* to the Church. Having triumphed over all powers, He is the Head of all principality and power, and “in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Eph. i. 21, 22; Col. ii. 9, 10).

“When He ascended up on high He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” He “ascended up far above all heavens, that *He might fill all things*, and He gave . . . Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers, for the perfecting of the saints,” etc., for their preservation from seducers, and for their growth up to Him in all things, who is the Head. “*From whom* the whole body fitly *joined together* and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body to the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. iv. 8-16).

The same in Col. ii. 19, we see how every thing for the nourishment and unity of the body and for its increase with the increase of God, flows from Christ the Head. When this is not known, or as soon as faith becomes weak, human power, wisdom, and qualifications are exalted; and instead of faith in the fulness of the Head, men lean upon them.

ii. *There is one body and one Spirit.*—The Holy Ghost dwells in the body; and it is from His energy and operations, “dividing to every man severally as he will,” by His immediate and direct action, that all ministries flow.

The operations of the Spirit are more fully taught in 1 Cor. xii.; while in the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians we are led to see more of the fulness of the Head.

The basis of all ministry then, is: *the fulness of the Head*, and the *development of the operations of the Holy Ghost* dwelling in the body.

There is such an intimate connexion between the real character of the Church and Ministry, that defective views of the one would be very likely to lead to imperfect views of the other.

4thly. The interpretation and right application of Scripture depend upon attention to its distinct features.

It cannot be denied, that the Scriptures give us the history of a holy faithful people, suffering for righteousness' sake, who cannot be standing in the privileges of the Church. If it were said, These Scriptures refer to the exercise of some of God's people previous to Christ; well, mark their distinct character:—They feel God's hand is heavy upon them, that they are suffering for their iniquities (though now most true in heart to God); they call upon Him not to cast them off for ever, no longer to hide his face, but to purge them from their sins; clearly they are not standing in the position or knowledge of reconciliation and acceptance. At once, then, we see how unsuitable such language would be in the lips of those who stand in union with Christ, and in all the favour and acceptance which the Mystery teaches us we are set in. While we may derive much instruction and profit, and learn much of God and his ways in them, if our experience answered to theirs, we should have got off the ground of grace altogether. Hence the necessity of holding fast the principles of our calling, that we do not misapply such scriptures to the injury of souls.

Further:—They pray for vengeance upon their enemies — call down God's righteous judgment upon them. All this is the very opposite to the state of heart of those who know God's *grace*, and are commanded even *to act in grace* to all, and to pray for their enemies.

Their hopes are *earthly*—the fulfilment of God's promises made to the Fathers. These are not what sustain our souls in affliction, but the *Heavenly Hope* set before us. We see what the expectations of a godly Jew were in Zechariah's praise, and what he looked for by the

truth of Christ (Luke i. 68–79). *We* look for His coming again to receive us unto Himself, to enter the Father's mansions. While He tarries, 'tis the time of tribulation: it may vary as to intensity; but the characteristic portion of the Church as to earth is *tribulation*. "In the world ye shall have tribulation."

Now if what I have said concerning certain Scriptures in their application to saints of old, if they describe the experience of saints who are yet to use them previous to the appearing in glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and who find deliverance and acceptance at His coming—how careful we must be not to confound them with the Church, nor conclude because of their faith and devotedness that they are one with the Church. I allude specially to the Prophets and Psalms, though there are other scriptures that these remarks apply to, which will be readily discerned by those exercised upon these points. I have now gone through what appears to me to be necessary to note and keep before our minds in relation to the Heavenly Calling and the Mystery. By the light of the latter, we see what was in the Lord's mind in His conversation with His disciples as recorded by John, and the additional instruction, specially chapters xiv.—xvi. concerning the presence and office of the Holy Ghost in the Church, which we need well to consider in connexion with worship and ministry.

The first epistle of John is all in harmony with this subject, leading us to the spring of all our blessings, *God's Love*; and the knowledge of it, and our oneness in Christ, the power and spring of the new commandment in us.

The Lord guide us into all truth, and make our love abound one to another!

1. See how within the holiest  
The blessed Saviour stands;  
There He prepares for us a place,  
With incense from His hands.
2. Brethren! His glory all is ours,  
His fellowship with God,  
Yes, there we sit in Christ the Lord,  
Fruit of His precious blood.  
(Hymn 368.—*Poor of the Flock*).