



**'Nonconformity'  
and 'Comformity'**

**'Never' and 'For Ever'**

**A. W. Pink**

# **‘Nonconformity’ and ‘Conformity’ - ‘Never’ and ‘For Ever’**

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## **Nonconformity**

“And be not conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2). In the preceding verse the believer’s duty Godward is set forth: the same is continued here, first warning against that which will seek to prevent a continuance of his surrender and dedication to Him. The relation and attitude of a believer unto this world is a matter of no small moment, and one upon which the Scriptures have not a little to say. Christ gave Himself for our sins “that He might deliver us from this present evil world” (Gal. 1:4), therefore we are bidden “Love not the world, neither the things in the world” (1 John 2:15), and we are warned “the friendship of the world is enmity with God: whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4). But before proceeding further, we must ask, Precisely, what is meant here by “this world?” What is signified by “conformity” to it? Is the Christian’s nonconformity to be a relative or absolute one? If the former, where is the line to be drawn? It should be obvious that answers to these questions must be obtained ere we are in a position to render intelligent obedience to this Divine precept.

“This world” is in contrast with another “world:” it is the present and temporal world, as distinguished from the future and eternal one, and since faith is engaged with the latter, then the former is that system of things which is the enemy of faith. It is that world which hated Christ (John 15:18) and whose princes crucified Him (1 Cor. 2:8). It is that world the whole of which “lieth in the wicked one” (1 John 5:19). It is therefore the mass of mankind who are strangers to God, haters of His holiness and of all who exhibit His image (John 15:19; 1 John 3:1). It is both a society and a system. The members of it are described as “men of the world, which have their portion in this life” (Psa. 17:11)—whose chief good resides in the things of time and sense, whose consuming object is to crowd as much as possible of earthly joy into their brief lives. All who are self-willed and self-pleasing belong to its wide empire. As a system it is under the dominion of Satan: he is its “prince” (John 16:11), regulating its politics and policy; its “god” (2 Cor. 4:4), directing its religion.

This world is therefore the embodiment of Satan's spirit: bearing his image, and wearing his livery. In their unregenerate days the saints too "walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2)—mark well those last words, for they define the outstanding feature of its subjects. The language of their hearts is "What is the Almighty, that we should serve Him? and what profit shall we have, if we pray unto Him?" (Job 21:15); while their secret thought is "The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard" (Psa. 94:7). The world listens willingly to its seducer and readily credits his lies. They are persuaded that God's commandments are grievous and His service hard, yet they cherish the idea that somehow His indulgence may be safely counted upon in the end. Enlightened eyes should have no difficulty in recognizing what is and what is not a part of "this world" and the need of separation from it. The world is the open foe of Christ, and it is acting the traitor's part for any of *His* followers to hold close converse with the enemy's camp.

"*And* be not conformed to this world." In view of what immediately precedes, this means, Allow not the evil example of those surrounding you to mar or modify the completeness of your devotedness unto God. Be not like the unregenerate in heart and life. Be neither animated by their spirit nor regulated by their principles. Fashion not your ways after the *disobedience to God* which marks them. This is evident too from what follows, for the antithesis drawn in the second half of the verse shows plainly what is prohibited in the first: "but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." The unregenerate would fain have you believe that He is a hard Taskmaster, that His commandments are unreasonable and harsh. But so far from that being the case, if you run in the way of His commandments, you shall have experiential proof that God's preceptive will is blessed, agreeable to the one who yields thereto, yea most excellent. The transformation begins *within*: the "mind" here signifies the entire inner man; the soul is *purified* by "obeying the truth through the Spirit" (1 Pet. 1:22).

"Be not conformed to this world" means neither that the Christian is to decline all intercourse with its subjects nor that he should impose upon himself any restraints not required by Scripture in order

to make himself as unlike the world as possible. If, on the one hand, we must sedulously avoid any sinful compliance with the world, on the other, we need to be on our guard against a vain singularity which springs from self-righteousness and which repudiates the spirit and liberty of the Gospel. If instead of blindly following a multitude to do evil, or fashioning ourselves after the traditions, customs and whims of men, we are resolutely determined (by grace) to be guided by the Word, and have our “senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:14), little difficulty will be experienced in applying this Divine injunction to all the varied details of our lives. To renounce the society of the world was the error of those who fled to the monastery, for that made it impossible for them to “let their light shine before men” (Matt. 5:16).

Nor is the Christian required to renounce the duties of relative life or to become careless in the discharge of the same. Rather is he to conduct himself according to the rules of God’s Word in that station wherein His providence has placed him, whether husband or wife, parent or child, master or servant, magistrate or civilian; bearing rule or yielding obedience as unto God, being faithful and diligent in the management of his temporal affairs. Neither are Christians required to refuse a moderate use of the comforts and conveniences of life, suitable to the place which God has appointed for them in the world. It is nothing but pride and “will-worship” which supposes there is anything praiseworthy in long fastings, abstaining from pleasant food, wearing meaner clothes than are suited to their rank of life. There is certainly great need of constant watchfulness against allowing lawful things to become harmful to us by their abuse, yet not a few have adopted an austerity which the New Testament nowhere enjoins. Some attract as much attention to themselves by their *prudery* as others do by their *pride*.

Taking upon ourselves unpleasant tasks and the practice of outward severities may be carried to great lengths without their performers having a spark of life. The mortifications and bodily macerations practiced by the Brahmins of India far exceed the most zealous superstitions and self-imposed severities obtaining among fanatics in Christendom. There is a “strictness” which arises from ignorance rather than knowledge, which is wholly concerned about *externals*, and which in reality gratifies the spirit of self in one way as much as it seems to deny it in another. It is possible to starve the

body in order to feed pride, but to those who fear God and order their lives by His revealed will, “every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving” (1 Tim. 4:4). In seeking to avoid the sin of epicureanism, let us beware of the folly of spartanism.

Notwithstanding the above limitations, the precept “Be not conformed to this world” is very extensive. Christians are “strangers and pilgrims” on earth (Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 2:11). Heaven is their country, and Christ is their King. They are to be known and noticed as *His subjects*. They are not to be assimilated to the sentiments of “the children of disobedience,” regulated by their counsels, nor dominated by their aims and ambitions. Believers are neither to be allured by the smiles of unbelievers, nor intimidated by their frowns. They are neither to be swayed by their opinions and objects, nor to adopt their standard of expediency. “Be not conformed to this world” means allow not your characters to be moulded by the influences of this present scene, where all who are unregenerate act according to the principles and proclivities of fallen human nature. The things which mark “this world” are its *spirit*—selfishness: self-will, self-seeking; its *pursuits*—the things of time and sense; its *inspirer*—Satan and not Christ; its *religion*—which is but a pose, a convenience, a sop for the conscience.

Christ declares of His disciples, “they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:14). They count its religion a delusion, they regard its principles as corrupt, they deem its happiness an empty bubble, and they know that its course is hellward. Just to the extent to which we are not conformed to this world, but are transformed by the renewing of our minds, walking in subjection to His sceptre, do we really witness for and honour our Master; and the world itself is conscious of that fact, for it is quick to see the inconsistencies of those claiming to be His followers, and despises them for the same. The world perceives and derides the insincerity of empty professors. Reader, you are either a man of God or a man of the world. You are either pursuing shadows and missing the Substance, or proving for yourself that in keeping God’s commandments “there is great reward” (Psa. 19:11).

### **Conformity**

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be

conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29). What an amazing statement is that!—certainly one which no mortal mind had ever thought of inventing. That some out of the fallen descendants of Adam should be not only saved from their sins and delivered from the wrath to come, but decreed by God to be made like that blessed One in whom His soul delighteth. That is the climax of grace, for it is not possible to confer a greater or higher favour upon its chosen subjects. That depraved creatures should yet become replicas of the Holy One—that worms of the earth should be fashioned after the Lord of glory—passes finite comprehension, yet faith receives and love adores. But mark the perfect accuracy of this statement: not predestinated “to be conformed to His Son”—for that would have involved our deification (which is impossible)—but unto His “image.”

What does this “conformity” consist of? Summarizing the teaching of the New Testament thereon, we may say it is a spiritual, a practical, an experiential, and a physical one. A line must not be drawn too sharply between those distinctions, for they shade off the one into the other. The first begins at our regeneration; the second has to do with our sanctification; the third concerns our mortification; and the fourth will not be effected until our glorification. Before there can be any real conformity to Christ outwardly, there must be an inward one of nature, as we must first “live in the Spirit” before we can “walk in the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25). At regeneration, the spiritual image of Christ is stamped upon the soul, and He is “formed” in the heart—the “new man” (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10) being created after His likeness. The members are of the same nature as the head: the life of Christ must be imparted to us before there can be any communion with or conformity to Him. “And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16)—i.e. grace communicated to us corresponding in nature to the grace of which He is full.

That initial conformity is continued throughout the Christian’s life on earth: he is renewed in the inner man day by day (2 Cor. 4:16). It is both his privilege and duty to become increasingly Christlike in his character and conduct: that ye “may grow up into him in all things” (Eph. 4:15) is to be our ceaseless aim and endeavour. We are enjoined, “put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 13:14)—as the

soldier does his uniform— evidencing by our daily deportment that we serve under his banner. We are required to express or “shew forth” His virtues (1 Pet. 2:9, margin), making it manifest that He indwells us. Said the apostle, “Be ye followers [or ‘imitators’] of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). Our bearing the *name* of Christ is justified only so far as we display His *perfections*. Christ not only lives for His people, but in them (Gal. 2:20); and *He* cannot “be hid” (Mark 7:24). Christ died for them, and they are to die unto sin, self, the world. It is by their conformity unto Christ that His followers are distinguished from empty professors.

This spiritual and inward conformity to Christ is promoted by our regular use of appropriate means. “But we all [regenerate souls], with open face [in contrast with the veiled Jews—verses 13-16] beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18). The “glass” in which the “glory of the Lord” is seen is the Scriptures. That glory is “beheld” by faith, for faith is the eye of the spirit—as it is by our physical eyes, we take in light from the sun. As the regenerated soul is believingly and adoringly occupied with that wondrous “glory,” he is “changed into the same image:” not completely so in a moment, but gradually and progressively “from glory to glory.” Not by any effort or striving of ours, but “by the Spirit,” whose office it is first to unite us to Christ and then to make us like Him. The closer communion we have with the Lord Jesus, the nearer affiliation shall we have to Him. As faith feeds upon Him who gives us His own flesh to eat, we become assimilated to Him spiritually. The more we are affected by His love, the more we shall strive to please Him.

“Beholding as in a glass [Greek—‘mirror’] the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image.” The figure is taken from the mirrors used by the ancients, which, unlike ours, were made of highly polished metal. For their use, a brilliant light was required; and as it fell upon the mirror, not only did the person holding it see in it his countenance, but upon his face was reflected the glow from the metal: if the mirror was of brass or gold, the reflection would be yellow; if silver, white. And as faith is occupied with the person of Christ and the Spirit shines upon our hearts, His perfections are reproduced in us. We cannot bask long in the presence of the “Sun of righteousness” (Mal. 4:2) without our reflecting His beams. As

Moses descended from the mount after forty days' converse with Jehovah, "the skin of his face shone" (Exod. 34:30). The more the saint is in Christ's company, the more is he assimilated unto His likeness.

*Practical* conformity to Christ, in our conduct, is furthered by our following the example He has left us (1 Pet. 2:21). One of the great ends for which God sent His Son into the world in our nature was that He might reveal to us through His life in this scene how we should conduct ourselves acceptably unto God. In Christ, the divine ideal of manhood has been realized. All the original goodness (Gen. 1:31) of human nature has been exercised and exemplified to the glory of God in the perfect life of Christ. As all colours meet in the rainbow, so all virtues and excellencies meet in Christ. He is a perfect and glorious pattern of all graces. Not so the most eminent saints. The best of their graces and the highest of their attainments were marred by blots and failures. Christ is "altogether lovely" (Song 5:16) the Lamb "without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:19). In His life, we behold the Law translated into concrete terms and its requirements set before us by personal representation. In His deportment, we have a clear display of what practical holiness consists of.

In His life, Christ has exhibited what He requires from His followers: "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (1 John 2:6). As one of the lesser-known Puritans expressed it, "Christ is the sun, and all the watches of our lives should be set by the dial of His motions." A Christian is one who has renounced his own will and wisdom as the rule of his actions, and has surrendered to the sceptre of Christ to be governed by Him, and He teaches both by precept and example. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me" (Matt. 11:29) is His requirement, and compliance therewith is to be the business of our lives. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). We are to learn from Christ's conduct as well as His counsels, that holy obedience to God's will may mark us in all things. "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John [not their 'sweetness,' but their uncompromising fidelity, their loyalty at all costs]...they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13)!

"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt.



16:24). The “cross” stands for self-sacrifice, a life yielded up to God; and it is not laid upon the disciple, but voluntarily “taken up” by him, so that he may be “made conformable unto his death” (Phil. 3:10)—dying daily unto sin. There must be an experimental conformity unto Christ *in suffering*. The members of Christ’s body share, in their measure, the experiences of their Head; and they do so in proportion as they follow the example which He has left them. As the world hated Christ, so it hates those who bear His image. It was the unregenerate religious world which most fiercely opposed Him, and sufficient for the disciple to be as his Master. The closer we follow Him, the more shall we bring down upon ourselves the hostility of Satan: “But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of *Christ’s* sufferings” (1 Pet. 4:13).

“But we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him” (1 John 3:2): *there* is the blessed consummation. Chosen in Christ, called to Christ, communing with Christ, fully conformed to Christ! As God has predestinated His people to be conformed to the image of His Son spiritually, practically, and experientially, so also physically: for at His return, Christ “shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21). Nothing short of *entire* conformity will satisfy the desires of God for His elect! “As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (1 Cor. 15:49). But conformity to Christ will not be consummated in heaven, unless it has been commenced on earth: there must be regeneration, sanctification, and mortification, before there is glorification. Christ was humiliated on earth before He was exalted in heaven; so with us the cross precedes the crown.

## Never

The word never means “at no time, in no degree,” yet, paradoxical though it seems, it is one of the emphatic and dogmatic terms of Scripture, as its occurrences show. It is both interesting and instructive to observe the different connections in which it is found in the Bible. They are of considerable variety. Some of them are inexpressibly blessed unto God’s children; others should evoke terror in those who are strangers to Him. What a fearful contrast is there between “Hell and destruction are never full” (Prov. 27:20) and “David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne” (Jer. 33:17);

and between “For thou hast made of a city an heap; of a defenced city a ruin...it shall never be built” (Isa. 25:2) and “The God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed” (Dan. 2:44)! It is by such graphic antitheses that the truth is presented more impressively. Set over against the complaint of the elder son to his professed father, “Thou never gavest me a kid” (Luke 15:29), is the promise of Christ, “He that cometh to me shall never hunger” (John 6:35). Let us now take a closer look at a few of the verses in which this term is found.

“Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7). Here is the “never” of *a fruitless quest*, and alas, there are many engaged in such. It is a sad thing that one may acquire much theological lore, be well versed in the writings of God’s most honoured servants, and sit regularly under sound preaching, and yet have no saving acquaintance with the truth. It is a still more solemn fact that one may spend considerable time daily not only in reading God’s Word, but in diligently studying the same, and yet attain unto no spiritual and experiential knowledge of the truth. The scribes and Pharisees are a case in point, and there are many in Christendom today who are in a like state. Why is this? What is the explanation of this fruitless quest? It is because such souls are not taught by the Spirit of God, and unless *He* be our Instructor, all our efforts are, spiritually speaking, in vain. It is because they are unregenerate, and therefore devoid of spiritual discernment: the Lord has not given them “an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear” (Deut. 29:4). Where such be the case, the mind is “corrupt” and the truth is resisted, as 2 Timothy 3:8 goes on to show.

“Never man spake like this man” (John 7:46). That is the “never” of *unique utterance*. Everything connected with Christ was unique. His birth was unparalleled, so were His character and conduct, His mission and miracles, His death and resurrection. His speech was no exception, His enemies being witnesses, for that testimony in John 7:46 was borne to Him not by His apostles, but by the officers sent by the scribes and Pharisees to apprehend Him. But instead of arresting Him, they had themselves been arrested and awed by what they heard from His lips. In like manner, those who listened to Him teaching in their synagogue were astonished, and asked, “Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?” (Matt. 13:54). And before the end, so nonplussed were His critics by the profound

solutions which He returned to their riddles that “no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions” (Matt. 22:46). And why was it that “never [any] man spake like” *He* did? (John 7:46). Because He was more than man—man’s Creator. In Him “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). It was the truth incarnate Who tabernacled among men. It was God speaking “by his Son” (Heb. 1:2), and therefore are we commanded to “hear ye him” (Matt. 17:5).

“He that believeth on me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). That is the “never” of *an unfailing supply*. But let us first note that these words point a most solemn contrast between the satisfying portion of the believer and the experience of the Saviour upon the Cross. Near the close of His awful sufferings there, Christ cried, “I thirst” (John 19:28). He made reference to a far more acute pang than any bodily one. It was not mere physical thirst to which He alluded: rather was it to the anguish of His soul. During the three hours of darkness, the face of God had been turned from Him, and He was left alone—“forsaken”—as He endured the fierce fires of God’s outpoured wrath. That cry told of the severity of the spiritual conflict as He yearned for communion again with the Father. In *that* sense, the Christian will never thirst. Nor will he as he did when convicted of his lost state and dire need. Nor will Christ ever suffer him to be so parched spiritually as to have no moisture in him. He will indeed pant after a fuller knowledge of Christ, but that is more an evidence of deepening desire after holiness. “His soul’s desires are longing ones, not languishing; a desiring thirst he has for more and more of God, but not a despairing thirst”—Matthew Henry (1622-1714).

“And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. LORD, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong” (Psa. 30:6-7). That is the “never” of *carnal security*. It throws not a little light on the latter part of David’s life, and also shows us what foolish ideas even saints may entertain. This psalm was probably written (see verse 1) after his deliverance from Saul’s persecuting malice, when he was peacefully settled upon the throne. The LORD had wrought mightily and rendered him victorious over the enemies of Israel, and after the fierce storms there followed a great calm. David now felt quite secure from danger, and in his rashness, imagined all his troubles were ended. He indeed ascribed his prosperity unto the LORD; but to compare his present state to a mountain which stood

strong, savoured of pride; and to declare he would never be moved was the language of self-confidence. The sins into which he fell, and his flight from Absalom, demonstrated his error. “Let us beware lest the fumes of intoxicating success get into our brains and make fools of us also”—Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892). Neither a continuance of outward prosperity, nor inward peace, is anywhere promised us absolutely; yet how apt we are to say, “To morrow shall be as this day” (Isa. 56:12). Let us “rejoice with trembling” (Psa. 2:11), and seek grace to heed that warning, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

“And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:28). That is the “never” of *eternal security*. The ones to whom such safety is divinely assured are—as the immediate context shows—those who “hear” (heed) Christ’s voice, who are “known” (approved) by Him, who “follow” Him (and not their own natural inclination); and thus, their preservation is neither mechanical nor one apart from their own concurrence. From the divine-grace side of things, “they shall never perish,” because the Redeemer has given to them eternal life, because He has undertaken “to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Heb. 7:25), because they are gripped firmly by Omniscience: “All his saints are in thy hand” (Deut. 33:3). From the human-responsibility side of things, they shall never perish, because the LORD causes them to take to heart the solemn warnings and admonitions of His Word; and thereby avoid the things which would destroy them, because He gives them a spirit of prayer and dependence upon Him which delivers them from ruinous self-confidence; because He moves them to feed on His Word and obtain spiritual strength; because He brings them to comply with His precepts, and thus leads them safely Home along the way of practical holiness.

“I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:23). This is a word to graceless professors, and is the most solemn “never” in all the Bible, for it is that of *divine repudiation*, and sounds the eternal doom of those to whom it is uttered. Christ is here heard speaking in the Day of Judgment to many who boasted that they had preached and done many wonderful things in His name. His words do not signify that He was unacquainted with their persons or not cognizant of their performances, for the remainder of the verse

shows that He had penetrated their disguise and knew them to be workers of iniquity. Instead, it means that He did not accept or approve of them, that He refused to own them as His. When it is said, “the LORD *knoweth* the way of the righteous” (Psa. 1:6), it means that He is pleased with the same. “The Lord knoweth them that are his” (2 Tim. 2:19) imports that He *loves* them. “I never knew you” (Matt. 7:23): neither in the eternal counsels of God, nor while you were in the world, had I any affectionate regard for you; at no time did I view you with favour. To the contrary, you were an offence: “Depart from me.” Highly esteemed in the churches; objects of abhorrence to the Holy One.

“I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5). Here we have the most blessed and comforting “never,” for it is that of *the abiding companionship of Christ*, which ensures His continual provision and protection. Living as we are in a world where all is “change and decay”—ourselves unstable and unreliable—how thankful we should be that there is One whose care may ever be counted upon. The power of this companion is illimitable, His wisdom infinite, His faithfulness inviolable, His compassion immutable. And why will He never desert one of His own? Because He loves him, and love delights to be near its object. Because he can do nothing to kill or even chill that love, for He foreknew his every sin when first setting His heart upon him. Because of His covenant engagement: “I will not turn away from them, to do them good” (Jer. 32:40). Therefore, we should fear no want, dread no trial, nor view death with any trepidation.

## **For Ever**

The term “for ever” and its variants occur very frequently in the Bible—one of the many marks by which it is distinguished from the writings of men. Necessarily and obviously so. Man is but of yesterday, a creature of time; and though he is endowed with an immortal soul, his interests are confined to temporal things, and his energies are devoted almost entirely to the acquirement and enjoyment of the same. With very rare exceptions, until he be quickened by the gracious power of God, the outlook of man is limited to the present. Hence, it is that his writings are confined to those subjects pertaining unto things of time and sense; and if he should turn his thoughts unto “the great beyond,” it is but to dream or

indulge in idle speculations. But not so of the One who gave us being: of Him it has to be said, “From everlasting to everlasting, thou art God” (Psa. 90:2). He is the unchanging I am, “which art, and wast, and art to come” (Rev. 11:17). This excellency of His being is clearly reflected in His Word, for it reveals to us those counsels which He made before the foundation of the world, and acquaints us with things after it is finished. The Bible treats of everlasting realities, and makes known to us our eternal interests and destinies.

The certainty of the divine decrees: “The counsel of the LORD standeth *for ever*, the thoughts of his heart to all generations” (Psa. 33:11). There is no if or but, peradventure or perhaps, about them: all the divine counsels are inviolable and infallibly sure. At the close of time, it will be clearly demonstrated before an assembled universe that the whole of God’s will was fully accomplished: “There are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless, the counsel of the LORD, *that shall stand*” (Prov. 19:21). Man’s purposes are like himself—fallible and fickle: but God’s are firmer than a rock, for they are formed by infinite and immutable wisdom. It cannot be otherwise, for “he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth” (Job 23:13). With Him there is “no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17). None can bribe or induce Him to alter one detail of His eternal plan. No unforeseen contingency can arise, for “known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18). His power is invincible, and therefore, it is impossible for any to thwart Him. He “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph. 1:11), so that none of the devices of His enemies can prevent Him—if they could, He would not be the supreme and universal LORD of all.

The perfection of the divine workmanship: “I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be *for ever*: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him” (Eccl. 3:14). God’s works are like Himself—incapable of improvement, perfect. “O LORD, how great are thy works!” (Psa. 92:5). The execution of them may be opposed (as Saul “kicked against the pricks” Acts 26:14), but they cannot be obstructed by any created power. Since there be no deficiency in them, nothing needs adding; since there be no superfluity, nothing taken away. “And all men shall fear, and shall declare the work of God; for they shall wisely consider of his doing” (Psa. 64:9). While the immediate

reference in Psalm 33:11 was to God's decrees, this one is to the execution of them. His covenant is "ordered in all things, and sure" (2 Sam. 23:5). The work of Christ is a "finished" one, so that none can add to or diminish from it. God's promises are all "Yea" and "Amen." His sentence of justification will never be reversed. Pardoned sins will never be remembered by Him. The miracle of regeneration is durable. The graces which God works in us "abideth" (1 Cor. 13:13). Well may we exclaim, "Marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well" (Psa. 139:14).

The immutability of the saints' standing: "For by one offering he hath perfected *for ever* them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). That is a wondrous and blessed statement, yet one which the faith of few of God's people lays hold of. It makes known the present and perpetual acceptance of the Church unto God. It tells of what the efficacious sacrifice of Christ has secured for all His people: not merely the putting away of their sins, not only obtaining for them immediate access to God, but also securing such a perfect standing before Him that they may draw near in full confidence. All the excellence of Christ's oblation is upon them. His infinite merits have been imputed to them, and therefore, does God view them with the utmost complacency and delight. The word "perfect" here means "completed or consummated" and refers not to anything subjective, but objective. Likewise, "sanctified" here signifies not an experiential but a relative one, having the force of "hallowed." As another has said, "The sanctification of Hebrews 10 is as complete and permanent as the justification of Romans 5, admitting of neither addition nor diminution." This sacrificial "perfection" of Christians is irrevocable and cannot be lost, for it rests on something *outside* of themselves. "Perfected for ever:" contrary to all our sense of unworthiness and unfitness for such blessing and glory, it must be *believed* if our hearts are to be kept in peace. Yet, while rejoicing in the same, we shall be for ever humbled by the remembrance that it is all of grace and gift, and that we have no part in it except as the objects of God's love and the recipients of His favour. Let us rest on the finished work of Christ and express our gratitude in lives which honour Him.

The permanency of the mediatorial office: "Thou art a priest *for ever* after the order of Melchizedek" (Psa. 110:4). Only in the God-man is the chasm between the creature and the Creator bridged; and

therefore, His mediatorial office is to be exercised not only throughout this time-state, but *eternally*. That office is threefold: prophetic, priestly, and kingly. No doubt, there will be a great change of method in the exercise of that office in heaven; yet exercised it will be. Though the knowledge of His glorified saints will be vastly increased, they will not be infallible, but in need of teaching still; and as Revelation 7:17 assures us: “For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall *feed* them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters.” Though sinless, perfectly holy, yet the merits of Christ are the foundation of their eternal standing before God; and they will still need the great High Priest to present their praises unto God. As for His kingship and government of them, even on the new earth, it is “the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev. 22:1): “God is supreme, but the Lamb administers the power and authority of the throne”—Walter Scott (1796-1861). “Christ shall be the means and way of communications between God and His glorified saints for ever”—John Owen (1616-1683).

The durability of the divine clemency: “O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth *for ever*” (Psa. 136:1). This injunction is repeated in the two following verses, so that we have therein a call to laud the Triune Jehovah; and in each instance, for the same reason. Special thanks are due unto Him for His perpetual benignity unto them, for even at the Redeemer’s return, this characteristic will be exercised by Him—“Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude :21); “The Lord grant unto him that he may find *mercy* of the Lord in *that day*” (2 Tim. 1:18). No less than twenty-six times in this psalm occurs the refrain, “For his mercy endureth for ever.” Numerous examples of the same are cited: in putting forth His power in cleaving a way through formidable obstacles for the deliverance of His people, in providing for them in their wilderness journey, and in giving them a rich heritage.

The utter hopelessness of the lost: “To whom is reserved the blackness of darkness *for ever*” (Jude :13). This in nowise clashes with the foregoing, but rather supplies a confirmation, for the separation and banishing of the wicked unto their own place is an act of mercy unto the saints. Equally so is it an act of divine justice on the wicked: since they “loved darkness rather than light” (John 3:19), it is fitting that the darkness should be their final and dismal abode. This “blackness of darkness” seems to be a parallel expression with



the “outer darkness” of Matthew 8:12—remotest from God, who is the Fountain of light. Thus, it expresses first their eternal exile from God—“punished with everlasting destruction *from* the presence of the Lord” (2 Thess. 1:9). Second, as “light” is a figure of life and blessing, so is darkness of wretchedness and woe. Third, the utter remedilessness of their condition—unrelieved by a single ray of hope: after millions of years, their suffering no nearer an end than it was at the outset. “This is the hell of hell, that, as the torments thereof are without measure, so without end”—Thomas Manton (1620-1677).

The perpetuity of the saints’ bliss: “I will dwell in the house of the LORD *for ever*” (Psa. 23:6). This is in marked and blessed antithesis from the “punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord” (2 Thess. 1:9), which constitutes the doom of the lost. Their respective portions are contrasted at every point. The wicked enjoy “the pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb. 11:25); we shall participate in those “pleasures at God’s right hand,” which are “for evermore” (Psa. 16:11). Agents of Satan seize their souls at death; ours are carried to heaven by the angels. They shall be raised “to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2); we in “honour and glory” (1 Pet. 1:7). To them it shall be said, “Depart from me, ye cursed” (Matt. 25:41); to us, “Come, ye blessed of my Father” (Matt. 25:34). They “shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Rev. 20:10); we shall “ever be [for ever] with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 22:5).

