

Sermons of John Newton

Based on Scripture Passages
Used in Handel's 'Messiah' Part 3

Booklet Twenty

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48. The Song of the Redeemed - Revelation 5:9
49. The Chorus of Angels - Revelation 5:12
50. The Universal Chorus - Revelation 5:13

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48. The Song of the Redeemed,

49. The Chorus of Angels and

50. The Universal Chorus

48. The Song of the Redeemed

“And they sung a new song, saying, Thou ... hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” Revelation 5:9.

The extent, variety, and order of the creation, proclaim the glory of God. He is likewise, * Maximus in Minimis. The smallest of the works, that we are capable of examining, such for instance as the eye or the wing of a little insect, the creature of a day, are stamped with an inimitable impression of His wisdom and power. Thus in His written Word, there is a greatness considering it as a whole, and a beauty and accuracy in the smaller parts, analogous to what we observe in the visible creation, and answerable to what an enlightened and humble mind may expect in a book, which bears the character of a divine revelation. A single verse, a single clause, when viewed (if I may so speak) in the microscope of close meditation, is often found to contain a fullness, a world of wonders. And though a connected and comprehensive acquaintance with the whole Scripture, be desirable and useful, and is no less the privilege, than the duty, of those who have capacity and time at their disposal, to acquire it; yet, there is a gracious accommodation to the weakness of some persons, and the circumstances of others. So that in many parts of Scripture, whatever is immediately necessary to confirm our faith, to animate or regulate our practice, is condensed into a small compass, and comprised in a few verses: yea, sometimes a single sentence, when unfolded and examined, will be found to contain all the great principles of duty and comfort. Such is the sentence which I have now read to you. In the Messiah Oratorio, it is inserted in the grand chorus taken from the twelfth and thirteenth verses of this chapter. And as it may lead us to a compendious recapitulation of the whole subject, and, by the Lord’s

blessing, may prepare us to join in the following ascription of praise to Him that sitteth upon the Throne, and to the Lamb; I purpose to consider it in its proper connection, as a part of the leading song of the redeemed before the Throne, in which the angels cannot share. Though the angels, from their love to redeemed sinners, and from their views of the manifold wisdom and glory of God, in visiting such sinners with such a salvation, cheerfully take a part in the general chorus.

* Maximus, means Greatness; Minimis, means Tiniest.

The redemption spoken of is suited to the various cases of sinners of every nation, people and language. And many sinners of divers descriptions and from distant situations scattered abroad into all lands, through a long succession of ages, will, by the efficacy of this redemption, be gathered together into one (John 11:52) They will constitute one family united in one great Head (Ephesians 3:14, 15). When they shall attain the end of their hope and encircle the Throne, day without night, rejoicing, their remembrance of what they once were, their sense of the happiness they are raised to, and of the great consideration to which they owe their deliverance, and their exaltation, will excite a perpetual joyful acknowledgment to this purport. They were once lost, but could contribute nothing to their own recovery. Therefore they ascribe all the glory to their Saviour. They strike their golden harps and sing, in strains, loud as from numbers without number, sweet as from blest voices, "Thou art worthy—for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation."

But though this song, and this joy, will only be consummated in heaven, the commencement takes place on earth. Believers, during their present state of warfare, are taught to sing it; in feebler strains indeed, but the subject of their joy and the object of their praise are the same which inspire the harps and songs in the world of light. May I not say, that this life is the time of their rehearsal? They are now learning their song and advancing in meetness [fitness] to join in the chorus on high, which, as death successively removes them, is continually increasing by the accession of fresh voices. All that they know, or desire to know, all that they possess or hope for, is included in this ascription.

I take the last clause of the verse into the subject. The words suggest three principal points, to our consideration.

1. The benefit, “Redemption, to God.”
2. The redemption price, “By thy Blood.”
3. The extent of the benefit—to a people “out of every kindred, and tongue, and nation.”

1. “Thou hast redeemed us to God.” Redemption or ransom, is applicable to a state of imprisonment for debt, and to a state of bondage or slavery. From these ideas taken together, we may form some estimate of the misery of our fallen state; a theme, which, if I cannot insist upon at large in every discourse, I would never wholly omit. For we can neither understand the grace, nor enjoy the comfort of the Gospel, but [except] in proportion as we have a heart-felt and abiding conviction of our wretched condition as sinners, without it. They who think themselves whole, know not their need of a physician (Matthew 9:12), but to the sick He is welcome.

If a man, shut up in prison for a heavy debt which he is utterly incapable of discharging, should obtain his liberty, in consideration of payment made for him by another, he might be properly said, to be redeemed from imprisonment. This supposition will apply to our subject. The law and justice of God have demands upon us, which we cannot answer. We are therefore shut up under the law, in unbelief, helpless and hopeless, till we know and can plead the engagement of a surety for us. For a time, like Peter, we are sleeping in our prison (Acts 12:6-10), regardless [unaware] of danger. The first sensible effect of the grace of God is to awaken us from this insensibility. Then we begin to feel the horrors of our dungeon, and the strength of our chains, and to tremble under the apprehension of an impending doom. But grace proceeds to reveal the Saviour and Friend of sinners, and to encourage our application to Him. In a good hour the chains fall off, the bars of iron and brass are broken asunder, and the prison-doors fly open. The prisoner understands that all his great debt is forgiven, blesses his Deliverer, obtains his liberty, and departs in peace.

We are likewise in bondage. The servants, the slaves of a harder task-master than Pharaoh was to Israel. Satan, though not by right, yet by a righteous permission, tyrannizes over us till Jesus makes

us free (John 8:34, 36). The way of transgressors is hard (Proverbs 13:15). Though the solicitations and commands of that enemy, who works in the children of disobedience (Ephesians 2:2) are, in some respects, suited to our depraved inclinations, yet the consequences are grievous. A burdened conscience, a wasting constitution, a ruined fortune and character, swiftly and closely, follow the habits of intemperance and lewdness. And they who seem to walk in a smoother path are deceived, mortified and disappointed daily. If persons, who openly and habitually live in a course that is contrary to the rule of God's Word, "speak swelling words of vanity" (2 Peter 2:18, 19), and boast of their liberty, believe them not. We are sure they carry that in their bosom, which, hourly, contradicts their assertions. Yea, sometimes their slavery is so galling that they attempt to escape, but in vain. They are soon retaken, and their bonds made stronger. The issue of their short-lived reformation, which they defer as long as possible, and at last set about with reluctance, usually is, that their latter end proves worse than their beginning. At most, they only exchange one sinful habit for another, sensuality for avarice, or prodigality for pride. The strong one armed will maintain his dominion, till the stronger than he interposes and says, "Loose him, and let him go, for I have found a ransom." Then, by virtue of the redemption price "the prey is taken from the mighty, and the captive is delivered" (Isaiah 49:24, 25). Then the enslaved sinner, like the man out of whom the legion was cast, sits at the feet of Jesus, in peace, "and in his right mind" (Mark 5:15). He becomes the Lord's freedman.

For he is not only delivered from guilt and thrall [enslavement]; he "is redeemed to God." He is now restored to his original state, as an obedient and dependant creature, devoted to his Creator, conformed to His will and image, and admitted to communion with Him in love. These are blessings which alone can satisfy the soul, and without which it is impossible for man to be happy. While he is ignorant of his proper good, and seeks it in creatures, he is, and must be, wretched. Madness is in his heart, a deceived, disordered imagination turns him aside, and he feeds upon ashes, and upon the wind (Isaiah 44:20). But by grace he is renewed to a sound judgment, his mind receives a right direction, and he is "turned from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18).

2. What unspeakably and beyond conception, enhances the value of this deliverance, is the consideration of the means by which it is effected. For it is not merely a deliverance, but a “redemption.” It is not an act of mere mercy, but of mercy harmonizing with justice. It is not an act of power only, but of unexampled, and expensive love. “Thou has redeemed us by Thy blood!”

The sentence, denounced by the law against transgressors, was death. And therefore when MESSIAH became our surety, to satisfy the law for us, He must die. The expression of “His blood” is often used figuratively for His death; perhaps to remind us how He died. His was a bloody death. When He was in agony in Gethsemane, His “sweat was as great drops of blood, falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44). His blood flowed when He gave His back to the smiters, under the painful strokes of the scourging He endured, previous to His crucifixion. It flowed from His head when the soldiers, having mocked His character of King by crowning Him with thorns, by their rude blows forced the thorns into His temples. His blood streamed from the wounds made by the spikes which pierced His hands and His feet, when they fastened Him to the cross. When He hung upon the cross, His body was full of wounds and covered with blood. And, after His death, another large wound was made in His side, from which issued blood and water. Such was the redemption price He paid for sinners—His blood, the blood of His heart. Without shedding of blood there could be no remission (Hebrews 9:22). Nor could any blood, but His, answer the great design. Not any—not all the bloody sacrifices appointed by the law of Moses, could take away sin as it respects the conscience, nor afford a plea with which a sinner could venture to come before the high God (Micah 6:6). But the blood of MESSIAH, in whom were united the perfections of the divine nature and the real properties of humanity, and, which, the Apostle therefore styles “the blood of God” (Acts 20:28), this precious blood cleanses from all sin. It is exhibited as a propitiation of perpetual efficacy, “by which God declares His righteousness,” not less than His mercy, “in forgiving iniquities” (Romans 3:25, 26), and shows Himself just to the demands of His holiness, and the honour of His government, when He accepts and justifies the sinner who believes in Jesus.

If these things were understood and attended to, would it be

thought wonderful that this Saviour is very precious to those who believe in Him, and who obtain redemption by His blood? How can it possibly be otherwise? Grace like this, when known, must captivate and fix the heart! Not only to save; but to die, and to die for His enemies! Such costly love, productive of such glorious consequences, and to such unworthy creatures! Surely the Apostle's mind was filled and fixed with these considerations when authenticating an epistle with his own hand, he subjoined this emphatic close, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be * Anathema Maranatha!" (1 Corinthians 16:22).

* Anathema: 'accursed; Maranatha: 'The Lord is coming!' or 'O Lord, come!'

Do you think, my brethren, that the Apostle took pleasure in denouncing so severe a sentence against all those who did not see (as we say) with his eyes? Had he so little affection for sinners, that he could thus consign them to destruction by multitudes, for differing from him in what some persons only deem an opinion? Rather, consider him not as breathing out his own wishes, but as speaking in the name, and on the behalf of God. He knew it must be, and he declared it would be so. It was no pleasure to him to see them determined to perish. On the contrary, He had great grief and sorrow of heart for them, even for the Jews who had treated him with the greatest cruelty. Even for their sakes, he could have been content to be made an Anathema himself (Romans 9:3) that they might be saved. But upon the whole, he acquiesced in the will of God, and acknowledged it to be just, right and equal, that if any man would not love the Lord Jesus Christ, after all He had done and suffered for sinners, he should be accursed. By this comparison of the Apostle's severe language, with his compassionate temper, I am led to digress a little farther. It suggests an apology [defence; extenuation] for ministers of the Gospel in general. When we declare the terrors of the Lord, when we assure you that there is but one solid foundation for hope, and that, unless you love the Lord Jesus Christ, you must perish; some of our hearers account us bigoted, uncharitable and bitter. But if you could see what passes in secret, how faithful ministers mourn over those who reject their message, how their disobedience cuts them to the heart, and abates the comfort they would otherwise find in your service; if you could

believe us when we say (I trust truly) that we are ready to impart unto you, not the Gospel of God only, but our own souls also, because you are dear to us (1 Thessalonians 2:8), and we long for your salvation, then, you would think more favourably of us. But after all, we cannot, we dare not, soften our message to please men. What we find in the Word of God, we must declare. It would be at the peril of our souls to “speak smooth things,” to “prophecy deceits” (Isaiah 30:10) to you; and, so far as we preach the truth, it will be at the peril of your souls, if we are disregarded.

3. The benefits of this redemption extend to a numerous people, who are said to be redeemed out of every kindred, tongue and nation. I have, upon a former occasion, offered you my sentiments concerning the extent of the virtue of that blood, which takes away the sin of the world (Volume I, Sermon XVI). But the clause now before us, invites me to make a few additional observations, upon a subject which, I conceive, it much concerns us rightly to understand.

The redeemed of the Lord, are those who actually experience the power of His redemption, who are delivered from the dominion of sin and Satan, and brought into a state of liberty, peace and holiness. That the people of every kindred, nation and tongue are not redeemed, in this sense, universally, is as certain as evidence of faith and express declarations of Scripture can make it. “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” Multitudes, thus disqualified, will be found trembling, on the left hand of the Judge, at the great day. But, “a remnant will be saved, according to the election of grace.” For they who differ, who are redeemed to the service of God, while others live and die in the love and service of sin, do not make themselves to differ (1 Corinthians 4:7). It becomes the potsherds of the earth, to ascribe to their Maker the glory of His sovereignty, and to acknowledge that if they have a good hope, it is because it pleased the Lord to make “them His people, who once were not His people” (1 Corinthians 4:7). Yet, a way of conceiving of the doctrines of the divine sovereignty [Yet, an understanding of the doctrine of divine sovereignty], and of a personal election unto life, has often obtained [has often been held], which seems to have a tendency to render the mind narrow, selfish and partial, and to

strengthen the exercise of that philanthropy, which the genius and spirit of the Gospel powerfully inculcate [powerfully impress upon the mind]. The best of us, perhaps, are more prone than we are aware of, to assimilate the great God to ourselves, and to frame our ideas of Him, too much according to our own image. So that, often much of man's natural disposition may be observed in the views he forms of the divine perfections and conduct; as on the other hand, his conceptions of the character of God, strengthen and confirm him in his own tempers and habits. There are persons, who being persuaded in their minds (we would hope upon sure grounds) that they, themselves are of the elect, appear to be little concerned what may become of others. Their notions of God's sovereignty, and His right to do what He will with His own, though often insufficient to preserve them from repining and impatience under common events of human life, raise them above all doubts and difficulties, on a subject which the Apostle speaks of as unsearchable and untraceable. Where he acknowledges depths which he was unable to fathom (Romans 11:33), all appear to them quite plain and easy. Where he admires and adores, they arrogantly dispute, and determine *ex cathedra* [from the chair of authority], and harshly censure all who are not so eagle-sighted as themselves. Methinks they who know the worth of a soul, from its vast capacity for happiness and misery, and its immortal duration, cannot justly be blamed for allowing no limits, to their benevolent wishes for the salvation of mankind but the will of God, as it is plainly made known to us in His Word. To this we are to submit, not as of necessity only, but cheerfully, assured that His will is wise, holy and good; that the Judge of all the world will do right; and to wait for the day, when He will condescend to clear up every difficulty and give us that satisfaction, which in our present state of ignorance and weakness, we are incapable of receiving. Shall mortal man be more just, or can he be more merciful, than God? It is a false compassion, founded in a blameable disregard of what is due to the glory of His great name, that prompts us to form a wish, that His unerringly wise appointments could be otherwise than they are. Yet it is a comfort to think that His mercy, in which He delights, in which He is peculiarly said to be rich, and which is higher than the heavens, will, in its exercise, far exceed the bounds which some

fallible mortals would peremptorily assign to it. We must not indulge conjecture and hypothesis farther than the Scripture will warrant; but while we humbly depend upon this infallible light, we need not be afraid to follow it, though it should, in some particulars, lead us a little beyond the outlines of some long-received and, in the main, very valuable human systems of divinity.

I have repeatedly expressed my belief, that many prophecies, respecting the spread and glory of the Kingdom of MESSIAH upon earth, have not yet received their full accomplishment, and that a time is coming when many (perhaps the greater part of mankind), of all nations, and people, and languages, shall know the joyful sound of the Gospel, and walk in the light of the Redeemer's countenance. At present, I would confine myself to consider, what ground the Scripture affords us to hope that there are many of every nation, people and tongue, even now, singing this song before His Throne.

The Revelations vouchsafed [graciously granted] to the beloved Disciple in Patmos, exhibit a succession of great events, extending (I suppose) from the spotless days, to the end of time. But while only the learned can so much as attempt to ascertain, from history, the dates and facts to which the prophecies already fulfilled refer; or to offer probable conjectures concerning the events, as yet future (in which the most judicious commentators are far from being agreed); there are passages, interspersed, which seem designed to administer consolation to plain believers, by representations suited to raise their thoughts to the state of the Church triumphant. Though they are unable to explain the particulars of what they read, there is a glory resulting from the whole, which animates their hope and awakens their joy. Of this kind I think is that vision—Revelation 7:9 *ad finem*, in which the Apostle saw the servants of God, who were sealed in their foreheads, in number a hundred and forty four thousand. And besides these, a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands, and cried with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God, which sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb," etc. I confess myself unable to expound this sublime passage, and to give full, or even the principal sense of it, with certainty. But that it has some reference to what is now passing,

within the veil, which hides the unseen world from our view, I cannot doubt. I propose my thoughts upon it with caution and diffidence. I dare not speak with that certainty, which I feel myself warranted to use when I set before you, from Scripture, the great truths which are essential to a life of faith in the Son of God. Yet, I hope to advance nothing that is contrary to Scripture, or, to any deductions fairly and justly drawn from it.

Having premised this acknowledgment of my incompetence to decide positively, I venture to say, that by the hundred and forty four thousand sealed in their foreheads (a definite for an indefinite number, which is frequent in Scripture language) I understand, those, who, living to mature age and where the Gospel is afforded, are enabled to make a public and visible profession of religion, and are marked, as it were, in their foreheads, and known to whom they belong, by their open and habitual separation, from the spirit and customs of the world which lies in wickedness. And the exceeding great multitude, contradistinguished from these, I conceive to be those, who are elsewhere styled the Lord's "hidden ones;" and that these, are a great multitude indeed, gathered by Him, who knows them that are His, out of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples and tongues. I may distribute them into the following classes:

(1). Infants. I think it, at least highly probable, that when our Lord says, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14), He does not only intimate the necessity of our becoming like little children, in simplicity, as a qualification without which (as He expressly declares in other places) we cannot enter into His Kingdom; but informs us of a fact that the number of infants, who are effectually redeemed to God by His blood, so greatly exceeds the aggregate of adult believers, that, comparatively speaking, His Kingdom may be said to consist of little children. The Apostle speaks of them as having "sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression" (Romans 5:14), that is, with the consent of their understanding and will. And when he says, "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ," he adds, "that every man may give an account of what he has done in the body, whether it be good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). But children who die in their infancy have not done anything in the body, either good or bad. It is true,

they are by nature evil, and must, if saved, be the subjects of a supernatural change. And though we cannot conceive how this change is to be wrought, yet, I suppose, few are so rash as to imagine it impossible that any infants can be saved. The same power that produces this change in some, can produce it in all. And therefore I am willing to believe, till the Scripture forbids me, that infants of all nations and kindreds, without exception, who die before they are capable of sinning after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who have done nothing in the body of which they can give an account, are included in the election of grace. They are born for a better world than this. They just enter this state of tribulation, they quickly pass through it, "their robes are washed white in the blood of the Lamb," and they are admitted, for His sake, before the Throne. Should I be asked to draw the line, to assign the age at which children begin to be accountable for actual sin, it would give me no pain to confess my ignorance. "The Lord knoweth."

(2). A people hidden among the most degenerate communities, civil or ecclesiastical, that bear the name of Christian; where ignorance and superstition, or errors, which, though more refined, are no less contrary to the Gospel, have prevailing dominion and influence. What can be more deplorable, in the view of an enlightened and benevolent mind, than the general state of the Roman and Greek churches! Where the traditions, inventions and doctrines of men, a train of pompous and burdensome ceremonies, a dependence upon masses, penance and pilgrimages, upon legends and fictitious saints, form the principal features of the public religion. Many nations are involved in this gross darkness, but they are not wholly destitute of the Scripture; some portions of it, are interwoven with their authorized forms of worship; and we cannot, with reason, doubt, but a succession of individuals among them, have been acquainted with the life and power of true godliness, notwithstanding the disadvantages and prejudices of their education. There are likewise amongst Protestants, schemes of doctrine supported by learning, and by numbers, which are not more conformable to the standard of the New Testament, than the grossest errors of Popery; and yet, here and there, persons may be met with, who, by the agency of the Holy Spirit enabling them to understand the Scriptures, are made wiser than their teachers; and

who, though still fettered by some mistakes and prejudices, give evidence in the main, that their hopes are fixed upon the only Atonement, that they are redeemed to God, and are partakers of that faith which works by love, purifies the heart, and overcomes the world.

(3). I will go one step farther. The inferences that have been made, by some persons, from the Apostle Peter's words, "That God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation, he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him" (Acts 10:34, 35), are, undoubtedly, rash and unscriptural. They would conclude from this verse, that it is of little importance what people believe, provided they are sincere in their way. That the idolatrous heathens, even the most savage of them, whose devotion is cruelty, who pollute their worship with human blood and live in the practice of vices disgraceful to humanity, are in a very safe state because they act, as it is supposed, according to their light. "But if the light which is in them be darkness, how great is that darkness!" Such a lax candour as this tends to make the Gospel unnecessary; if they who have it not, are therefore excusable, though they neither love nor fear God, and live in open violation of the law of their nature. The declaration, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14), holds universally, and without a single exception. But if we suppose a heathen, destitute of the means of grace by which conversion is usually wrought, to be brought to a sense of his misery, of the emptiness and vanity of worldly things, to a conviction that he cannot be happy without the favour of the great Lord of the world, to a feeling of guilt, and a desire of mercy; and that though he has no explicit knowledge of a Saviour, he directs the cry of his heart to the unknown Supreme, to this purport, *Ensentium, miserere mei*—Father, and Source of beings, have mercy upon me! who will prove, that such views and desires can arise in the heart of a sinner, without the energy of that Spirit, which Jesus is exalted to bestow? Who will take upon him to say, that His blood has not sufficient efficacy to redeem to God a sinner who is thus disposed, though he has never heard of His name? Or who has a warrant to affirm that the supposition I have made is, in the nature of things, impossible to be realized? But I stop—I do not often amuse you with conjecture. And though, for want of express

warrant from Scripture, I dare not give the sentiments I have now offered, a stronger name than, probable or conjectural, I hope I do not propose them for your amusement. They will prove to your advantage and my own, if they are helpful to guard us against a narrow, harsh, and dogmatic spirit; and if, without abating our reverent submission to the revealed will of God, they have a tendency to confirm our views of His goodness, and the power and compassions of the great Redeemer.

49. The Chorus of Angels

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour and glory, and blessing!” Revelation 5:12.

It was a good report which the queen of Sheba heard, in her own land, of the wisdom and glory of Solomon. It lessened her attachment to home, and prompted her to undertake a long journey to visit this greater King, of whom she had heard so much. She went, and she was not disappointed. Great as the expectations were, which she had formed from the relation made her by others, they fell short of what she saw and heard herself when she was admitted into his presence. Good, likewise, is the report of the Gospel. It has a powerful effect upon those who receive it by faith. It is abundantly sufficient to convince them of the comparative insignificance of all that they most admired and esteemed in this world. From that hour, they become strangers and pilgrims upon earth. They set out in the way which God has prescribed, in hopes of seeing Him who is greater than Solomon; and the report they have heard of Him is their subject, their song, and their joy, while they are on their journey, and their great support, under the difficulties they meet with on the road. What then will it be to see Him as He is? As yet, the one half is not told them. Or, at least, they are not yet capable of conceiving the half, or the thousandth part, of what they read in the Scripture, concerning His wisdom, His glory, and His grace. We weaken, rather than enlarge, the sense of such a passage as this, by our feeble comments. We must die before we can understand it. To the bulk of mankind, * “Wait the great teacher, Death,” is cold, is dangerous advice. If they are not taught by the Gospel while they live, the

teaching of death will be too late. Dreadful will be the condition of those who cannot be convinced of their mistakes, till repentance and amendment will be impracticable. But death will be a great teacher, indeed, to a believer; he will then know more by a glance, and in a moment, of the happiness he is now expecting, than by all he could collect, from the enquiry and experience of a long course of years, in this world.

* From "Essay on Man" by Alexander Pope.

The scenery of this chapter, if attentively considered, is sufficient to snatch our thoughts from the little concerns of time, and to give us some anticipation of the employments and enjoyments of heaven. Come, all ye that are wearied and burdened with afflictions and temptations, look up, and for a while, at least, forget your sorrows! The Lamb is upon His Throne, surrounded by a multitude of His redeemed people, who once were afflicted and burdened like yourselves; but now all tears are wiped from their eyes. They have a song, peculiarly their own, and are represented as taking the first and leading part in worship and praise. The angels cannot sing their song, they were not redeemed to God by His blood; but they are interested in the subject. Their highest views, of the manifold wisdom of God, are derived from the wonders of redemption. Therefore they join in the chorus, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." If you have a humble hope of bearing a part in this immortal song, will you hang down your heads like a bulrush, because you have the honour of following your Lord, through many tribulations, to His Kingdom?

The number of angels is expressed, indefinitely, ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; myriads and millions; to intimate to us that, with respect to our capacities and conceptions, they are innumerable. Their number is known to Him who "tellethe the number of the stars, and calleth them all by their names" (Psalm 147:4); and to Him only. The Scripture intimates a diversity of ranks and orders among them, "Thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers;" but as to particulars, there is little said that might gratify our curiosity. It is enough for us to know that the highest of them, and that all of them, worship Him who is clothed in our nature. My text expressly informs us that the object of their

worship “is the Lamb that was slain.” Not that the humanity of Christ, which is but a creature, is simply and formally the object of their worship. But they worship Him who has assumed the human nature into personal union with Himself—“God manifest in the flesh”—God in Christ. Though the world censure or despise us for “honouring the Son as we honour the Father” (John 5:23), we have here a good precedent, as we have the warrant of an express command in many places of Scripture. Whether men are pleased or not, we will, we must, worship the Lamb that was slain. To animate our devotion, let us thankfully consider: Why He was slain, and How He was slain.

1. WHY HE WAS SLAIN. The redeemed say, “For us.” “He loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood” (Revelation 1:5). They were sinners and enemies. They were slaves to sin and Satan, yet He loved them and died to redeem them. It is by virtue of His blood and death that they are now before the Throne. Nothing less than His death could have made them duly sensible of their misery; nothing less could have relieved them from it. He was lifted up upon the cross, that by the powerful magnetism of His dying love, He might, in the hour of His grace, draw their hearts to Himself (John 12:32). This was the design. This was the effect of His sufferings. A crucified Saviour, though a stumbling-block to the self-righteous, and foolishness to vain reasoners, was to them the power and the wisdom of God for salvation. They looked unto Him and were enlightened, they trusted in Him and were not ashamed. By faith in His name they obtained peace with God, they renounced the ways of sin, they waged the good warfare, they overcame the world, and were at length made more than conquerors. For His sake they endured the cross and despised the shame. They met with bad treatment from the world, but it was from the world that crucified Him. While they were here, their characters were obscured by their own imperfections, and by the misrepresentations and reproaches of their enemies. But now their reproach is removed, and “they shine, each one like the sun, in the Kingdom of their Father” (Matthew 13:43). What an immense constellation of suns! This, their full salvation, was the joy set before Him, for the sake of which He became obedient unto death,

even the death of the cross. And now they see Him as He is, they ascribe all their victories and honours to Him, and unite in one song of endless praise to the Lamb that was slain.

2. Their praises are heightened when they consider, HOW HE WAS SLAIN. He did not die a natural death. "He was slain." Nor did He fall, like a hero, by an honourable wound in the field of battle. The impression which the death of the late General Wolfe made upon the public, is not yet quite forgotten. He conquered for us, but it cost him his life. But he died honourably, and was lamented by his country. Not so, the Lamb of God. He died the death of a slave, of a malefactor. Cruelty, malice, and contempt combined to give His sufferings every possible aggravation. And after He was slain, very few laid it to heart. The world went on as it did before, as though nothing extraordinary had happened. But on this dark ground, the perfections of God were displayed in their fullest lustre. And they are the perfections of the great Redeemer, and therefore distinctly ascribed to Him, by the angels, in the words which follow—"Power, and wisdom, and riches, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

Though each of these words have a distinct sense, a nicety [an exactness] in defining them, and stating their precise meaning, is of less importance than to feel the combined efficacy of them all, to impress our hearts with sentiments of reverence, confidence, and love. The fullness of expression may teach us that every kind of excellence, is the indubitable right and possession of the Lamb that was slain. He is worthy to have them all attributed to Him, in the most absolute sense, and consequently worthy of our adoration, dependence, and praise.

(1). "POWER." It is spoken once, yea twice we have heard the same, that "power belongeth unto God" (Psalm 62:11). It belongs to Him eminently and exclusively. All the power of creatures is derived from Him. Such is the power of the Lamb. He styles Himself Alpha kai omega—Alpha and Omega (Revelation 1:8, 11), the Omnipotent, the Upholder and Possessor of all things. He exerciseth this power in the human nature (Matthew 28:18). "He doeth what He pleaseth in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth ; and none can stay His hand, or say unto

Him, what doest Thou” (Daniel 4:35)? He has, therefore, all-sufficiency, and uncontrollable authority, for the discharge of His office, as the Mediator and Head of His Church. The divine perfections, being infinite, are not distinct in themselves, though the Scripture, in condescension to our weakness, authorizes us to speak of them as distinguishable. God is One. And the Power which can preserve and govern the world involves, in the idea of it, every other excellence, which are separately mentioned in this passage.

(2). “WISDOM.” He is “the only wise God, and our Saviour” (Jude 25). His knowledge is perfect, His plan is perfect. In Himself He is essentially the wisdom of God (Proverbs 8:23), and He is our wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:30). It is “life eternal to know the only true God” (John 17:3), and, therefore, it is life eternal to “know Jesus Christ whom He has sent.” For He is the only way, and the only door to this knowledge; no one can come unto God, or attain to any just conceptions of Him, but in and by the Son of His love, who so perfectly represents God to us, is so completely the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, that whoso hath seen Him “hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). By Him is opened to us, the unsearchable wisdom of the divine counsels, particularly, in the great work of redemption. “No one hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath revealed Him” (John 1:18; 15:15). It is by wisdom communicated from Him that His people are made wise unto salvation. Though there are few scholars and philosophers among them, and many of them are despised for their ignorance and weakness, yet in truth, they have all a good understanding, for they know the Lord and His will; they know wherein their proper happiness consists, and how it is to be obtained. They are instructed how to walk and to please God, how to bear afflictions with patience, and to meet death with composure. This wisdom is far superior to that of the schools. But He bestows and maintains it. The eyes of their mind are opened, and they see by His light, but they have no light of their own, or in themselves. They wait upon Him for direction in every difficulty, for the solution of every hard question which perplexes their spirits; and He makes the crooked strait, teaches them to avoid the snares that are laid for them, and extricates them when entangled. Therefore in time, and to eternity,

they will admire and adore His wisdom.

(3). "RICHES." All the stores of mercy, grace, and comfort, are in Him, as light in the sun, or water in the ocean. The Apostle, speaking "of the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8), gives us the idea of a mine, the height, length, depth, and breadth of which cannot be investigated, nor the immense wealth it contains exhausted. Of this fullness the poor are invited to receive freely, and multitudes from age to age have been enriched, and the treasure is still undiminished. None are sent away empty. And when all have been supplied, it will be as full as at first.

(4). "STRENGTH." That energy and efficacy of His power, by which He accomplishes His holy purposes. Who can conceive of this? How just is the Psalmist's reasoning: "He that formed the eye, shall not He see? He that planted the ear, shall not He hear?" (Psalm 94:9). So we may say: How strong is He, from whom all created strength is derived, and before whom the strength of all creatures, if collected into one effort, would be as chaff before the whirlwind! The Lord of all power and might speaks, and it is done. He commands and it stands fast. Though the waves of the stormy sea toss themselves, they cannot prevail (Psalm 93:3, 4); He checks them in the height of their rage, setting bounds to their violence which they cannot pass, saying "Hitherto shalt thou come and no farther, and here shall thy proud billows be stayed" (Job 38:10, 11). With equal sovereignty, certainty, and ease, He rules over moral agents. He formed the heart of man, and He can fill it with terror or with comfort in a moment, in any assignable circumstances. He can make it happy in a dungeon (Acts 16:25), or impress it with dismay and despair upon a throne (Daniel 5:5, 6). All hearts are thus incessantly under His influence. And the hedge of His promise and protection surrounds those who trust in Him, as with mountains and walls of brass and fire, impenetrable to the assaults of the powers of darkness, unless so far as He, for wise and holy ends, is pleased to give permission. With the arm of His strength "He upholdeth them that are falling, and raiseth up them that are bowed down" (Psalm 145:14), and, is, in one and the same instant, a present and immediate help in trouble to all who call upon Him (Psalm 46:4). Therefore they that abide under His shadow are safe; they pass, unhurt, through floods and flames, because their Redeemer is

strong. And when, in defiance of all their enemies, He has brought them together in His heavenly Kingdom, they will, with one consent, ascribe unto the Lord glory and strength.

(5). "HONOUR." He is the fountain of it. All the honour of His creatures, and of His people, is from Him; as the sun beautifies and gilds the objects he shines upon, which, without him, are opaque and obscure. Because His people are precious in His sight, they are honourable. "He clothes them with garments of salvation, covers them with a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, as a bride adorneth herself with jewels" (Isaiah 61:10); but who can speak of His own inherent honour, as God-man and Mediator! We must wait till we see Him without a cloud or veil, receiving the homage and adoration of angels and men. For, as yet, the one half cannot be told us! Then, however, it will be universally known, that He who possesses the fullness of wisdom and power, riches, and strength, is worthy to receive all honour. Ah! how different will He then appear, from that humble form He once assumed, when, for our sakes, He was a man of sorrows, despised, rejected, and nailed to the ignominious cross!

(6). "GLORY." The manifestation of God, that by which He is known and magnified, in the view of finite intelligence; the result, the combined effulgence of His holiness, grace, wisdom, truth, and love: this is His glory, and this glory is revealed and displayed in Christ. He is glorious in His works of Creation and Providence, but these do not fully exhibit His character. But in the Lamb upon the throne, His glory shines, full-orbed. And all in heaven, and all in earth, who behold it, take up "the song of Moses and the Lamb" (Exodus 15:11), "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord? Who is like unto Thee? Glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders! Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints!" (Revelation 15:3).

(7). "BLESSING." He is the author of all blessings, of all the happiness and good which His people receive, and He is the deserved object of their universal praise. The different senses in which we use the word "blessing," taken together, may express that intercourse or communion which is between the Head and the mystical members of His Body. He blesses them effectually, with

the light of His countenance, with liberty, grace, and peace. He blesses them daily. His mercies are renewed to them every morning. He will bless them eternally. “Blessed are the people who have this Lord for their God.” They can make Him no suitable returns, yet, in their way, they bless Him. They admire, adore, and praise Him. They call upon all the powers of their souls to bless Him. They proclaim His goodness, and that He is worthy to receive the ascription of power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory and blessing. In proportion to their attainments in this delightful exercise of worship, love, and gratitude, they enjoy a heaven upon earth; and to stand before Him continually to behold His glory, to live under the unclouded beams of His favour, and to be able to bless and praise Him as they ought, without weariness, abatement, interruption, or end, is what they mean, when they speak of the heaven they hope for hereafter. Such is the blessedness of those who have already died in the Lord. They see His face, they drink of the rivers of pleasure which are at His right hand, they cast down their crowns before Him, and say, Thou art worthy—“Let us not be slothful, but followers of them, who through faith and patience” (Hebrews 6:12), have finished their course, and are entered into the joy of their Lord.

The Scripture declares the Lamb that was slain, to be worthy of all this glory and honour. Wisdom, riches, and strength are His. His power is infinite, His authority supreme. He is the Author and Giver of all good. He has life in Himself, and He is the life of all that live; the Lord and Head of the Church, and of the Universe. Can language express, or can heart conceive, a higher ascription and acknowledgement than this? Can all this be due to a creature, to one of a derived and dependent character? Then surely the Scripture would have a direct tendency to promote idolatry. Far be the thought from us! The Scripture teaches us the knowledge of the true God, and the worship due to Him. Therefore MESSIAH, the Lamb that was slain, is the true God, the proper and immediate object of the worship of angels and men.

Let us, therefore, take up a lamentation for those who slight the glorious Redeemer, and refuse Him the honour due to His name. Their mistake should excite our pity and prayers, not our anger or scorn. Are there any such amongst us? Alas, my fellow-sinners, you

know not what you do! Alas, you know Him not, nor do you know yourselves. I am well aware that a thousand arguments of mine will not persuade you. But I can simply tell you what would soon make you, at least, desirous of adopting our sentiments upon this subject. If He, who has that power over the heart which I have been speaking of, was pleased to give you, this moment, a sense of the holiness and authority of God, and of your conduct towards Him, as His creatures; your strongest objections to the high honours we attribute to the Saviour, would, this moment, fall to the ground. And you would be immediately convinced, that either Jesus Christ is the true God and eternal life, or that you must perish. You would no longer expect mercy; but in a way perfectly consonant with the righteousness and truth of God, declared in His Word, and with the honour and purity of His moral government. This would lead you to perceive the necessity of an atonement, and the insufficiency of any atonement, but that, which the Lamb of God has made by the sacrifice of Himself (Hebrews 9:26), and that the efficacy even of His mediation depends upon His divine character. The scriptural doctrines of the depravity of man, the malignity of sin, the eternal power and Godhead of the Saviour, the necessity and efficacy of His mediation, and the inevitable, extreme, and endless misery of those who finally reject Him, are so closely connected, that if the first be rightly understood, it will open the mind to the reception of the rest. But till the first be known and felt, the importance and certainty of the others will be suspected, if not openly denied.

Though the doctrines I have enumerated, are, in these sceptical days, too generally disputed and contradicted, I am fully confident that it is impossible to demonstrate them to be false. Upon the lowest supposition, therefore, they possibly may be true; and the consequences, depending upon them, if they should be found true at last, are so vastly momentous, that even the peradventure, the possibility of their truth, render them deserving of your most serious consideration. Trifle with yourselves no longer. If they be truths, they are the truths of God. Upon the same authority stands the truth of that gracious promise, that He will give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. Let me entreat you to make the experiment. This is the proper point to begin with. Instead of indulging reasonings and speculations, humble yourselves before the Lord, and pray for the

light and influence, which He has said He will afford to them who are willing to be taught. Read the Scripture with deliberation, and do not labour to fortify yourselves against conviction. Break off from those practices which your own consciences admonish you, cannot be pleasing to Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. “Then shall you know, if you will sincerely follow on to know the Lord” (Hosea 6:3). But if not, if you will, in a spirit of levity, presume to decide upon points which you will not allow yourselves seriously to examine, should you, at last, perish in your obstinacy and unbelief, your ruin will be of yourselves. You have been faithfully warned, and we shall be clear of your blood.

50. The Universal Chorus

“And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever” Revelation 5:13.

Men have generally agreed to dignify their presumptuous and arrogant * disquisitions on the works and ways of God, with the name of wisdom; though the principles upon which they proceed, and the conclusions which they draw from them, are, for the most part, evident proofs of their depravity and folly. Instead of admiring the effects of His wisdom and power in the creation, they have rashly endeavoured to investigate the manner of its production. A variety of hypotheses have been invented, to account for the formation of the world, and to state the laws by which the frame of nature is governed; and these different and inconsistent accounts have been defended, with a magisterial tone of certainty, and an air of demonstration by their respective authors, as though they had been bystanders and spectators when God spoke all things into being, and produced order out of confusion by the Word of His power. They have, however, been much more successful in showing the absurdity of the schemes proposed by others, than in reconciling their own, to the sober dictates of plain, common sense.

* disquisition - an elaborate analytical or explanatory essay or discussion.

But, if by indulging their speculations on the creation of the world, the causes of the deluge, and similar subjects, their employment has been no better than “weaving spiders webs,” the result of their reasoning on morals has been much worse. Here they have, with much industry, “hatched cockatrice eggs” (Isaiah 59:5); and their labours have been not only fallacious, but mischievous. Their metaphysical researches, while they refuse the guidance of revelation, if pursued to their just consequences, will always lead into the labyrinths of scepticism, weaken the sense of moral obligation, rob the mind of the most powerful motives of right conduct, and of the only consolations which can afford it solid support, in an hour of trouble. One insuperable difficulty which they will undertake to solve, though it does not properly lie in their way, is concerning the origin of evil. That evil is in the world, is felt and confessed universally. The Gospel points out an effectual method of deliverance from it; but, alas, the simple and infallible remedy is neglected, and men weary themselves with vain enquiries, “and find no end, in wand’ring mazes lost” [Milton].

The more they reason, the more they involve themselves in uncertainty and error, till at last they make lies their refuge, and adopt, with implicit credulity, as so many undoubted axioms, opinions which are equally dishonourable to God, and contradictory to truth and experience (2 Thessalonians 2:11). Thus much is certain, that by the occasion of evil, the character of God is manifested with superior glory, to the view of angels and men, who are in a state of holiness and allegiance, and an higher accent is thereby given to their praises. For now His justice and His mercy, which could not have been otherwise known, are revealed in the strongest light; and the redemption of sinners, affords the brightest display of His wisdom and love.

The redeemed are represented as taking the first part in this sublime song, verses 8-10. The angels join in the chorus, verses 11, 12 which now becomes universal. All the angels, all the saints upon the earth, in the state of the dead, or Hades, whether their bodies are buried under the earth, or in the sea, with one heart, aim and voice, unite in worship and praise. In the preceding verse, “Blessing, and honour, and glory and power,” are ascribed unto the Lamb; but here, the ascription is “unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and

unto the Lamb.” I shall not add to what I have already observed to you from the words of the doxology. A few remarks, which offer from this verse, taken in connection with the former, will bring me to a conclusion of the whole subject. And oh! for a coal of fire from the heavenly altar, to warm your hearts and mine; that our love, joy and gratitude may be awakened into lively exercise, and that the close of our meditations on the Messiah may leave us deeply impressed with desires, and well-grounded hopes, of meeting ere long before the Throne, to join with the angels and the redeemed, in singing the praise of God and the Lamb!

1. The Lord Jesus is not only the Head of the Church redeemed from among men, but of the whole intelligent creation, that is in willing subjection to God. It belonged to His great design to “gather together in one” (Ephesians 1:10), (to reduce under one head, as the Greek expression is) even in Himself, “all things that are in heaven, and upon earth.” He is the Lord and the life both of angels, and of men. Mutability and dependence are essential to the state of creatures, however exalted; and the angels in glory owe their preservation and confirmation, in holiness and happiness, to Him. Hence they are styled “the elect angels” (1 Timothy 5:21), in distinction from those who left their first habitation, and sunk into sin and misery. Angels, therefore, constitute a branch of that great family, which is named of Him in heaven and earth. And having made peace by the blood of His cross, He has effected a reconciliation, not only between God and sinners, but also between angels and men. How these inhabitants of light are disposed to sinful men, considered as sinful, we may learn from many passages of Scripture. They are devoted to God, filled with zeal for His honour, and wait but for His command to execute vengeance upon His enemies. When Herod, infatuated by his pride, and by the flattery of the multitude, received their idolatrous compliment with complacency, an “angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory” (Acts 12:23). The pestilence which destroyed the people, towards the end of David’s reign, was under the direction of an angel (2 Samuel 24:16, 17), and David saw him with his arm stretched out against Jerusalem. And in this prophecy, angels are spoken of as employed in pouring forth the vials of

wrath upon the earth. And still they are ready, we may believe, to avenge their Maker's cause upon the wicked, when they are commissioned. And if the history of modern times was written by an inspired pen, and events, as in the Scriptures, were assigned to their proper causes, perhaps the death of many a haughty worm would be recorded in words to this effect—and an “angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory.” But, viewing sinners as the subjects of redemption, the angels copy from their Lord. They regard them with benevolence, and rejoice over every one that repents (Hebrews 1:14). They willingly attend on them, and assist them, in ways beyond our conception. They esteem believers in Jesus as their fellow-servants (Revelation 22:9). We have reason to think that they are present in our worshipping assemblies; and, perhaps, always so present, that they could discover themselves to us in a moment, were it consistent with the rules of the divine government, established in this lower world, suited to the state of those who are to walk by faith, not by sight. Thus far, however differing in other respects, the angels and the redeemed, are united and related in one common Head, and have fellowship in worship and service. When sinners are enabled, by grace, to renounce this world, they are admitted to an honourable alliance, with a better.

2. From hence, we may form some judgment of the true nature and high honour of that spiritual worship, which is the privilege and glory of the Church of God, under the Gospel dispensation [order]. When we meet in the name of Jesus, as His people, and with a due observance of His institutions, we come to the “innumerable company of angels, and to the general assembly and church of the first born” (Hebrews 12:22, 23), the first born ones, (for the expression is plural). We draw nigh, by faith, to the very gate of heaven, to the holiest of all. Men, unacquainted with spirituality, are soon weary even of the form of worship, unless their minds are amused by a splendid ceremonial. The first rise, and subsequent increase, of that pomp and pageantry, which in some countries has quite obscured the simplicity and beauty of Gospel worship, is to be ascribed to this indisposition of the human mind. Our thoughts, while we are in a natural state, are too weak and

wavering, and too gross, to be pleased with a worship in which there is nothing suited to affect the imagination by sensible objects. And, therefore, when men think themselves wise, and profess to despise the pageantry which captivates the vulgar, their wisdom affords them no real advantage, if they have nothing better to substitute, in the room of what they reject as insignificant. The very appearance of devotion will languish, they will grow remiss, and neglect the Sabbath and public assemblies, for want of something to keep up their attention. We have abundant proof of this in our own land, and at this time. Protestants pride themselves in not being Papists, but, when the Protestant religion is understood to mean no more than a renunciation of the superstitious ceremonies of the church of Rome, it is, with respect to individuals, little, if at all better than popery itself. Among us enlightened Protestants, no expedient but preaching the Gospel of Christ, will be found sufficient to retain people in a stated observance of the Lord's day. But true believers, who understand and love the Gospel, do indeed draw nigh to God; and they account "a day in His courts better than a thousand" (Psalm 84:10), because they can take a part in the songs of heaven, and, in spirit and in truth, worship Him "that sitteth upon the throne, and the Lamb who redeemed them to God by His blood." They know by happy experience, that His promise to be in the midst of those who assemble in His name, is truth. Their worship is not a mere bodily service, a lifeless form, a round of observances, which neither warm the heart nor influence the conduct; but they are instructed, comforted and strengthened by waiting upon God. Their spiritual senses are exercised; they behold His glory in the glass of the Gospel, they hear His voice, they feel an impression of His power and presence, they taste His goodness, and the virtue of that name which is as ointment poured forth, perfumes their tempers and conversation.

3. Though the Lamb is worthy of all blessing, and honour, and glory, and power; there is a distinct ascription of praise to Him that sitteth upon the Throne.

The Scripture, which alone can teach us to form right conceptions of God and to worship Him acceptably, guides us in a medium, between opposite errors and mistakes. Too many persons,

ignorant of their own state as sinners, and of the awful majesty and holiness of the Most High, presume to think of Him, to speak of Him, and, in their way, to speak to Him, without being aware of the necessity of a Mediator. But they who are without Christ, who is the only door and way to the Father, are without God, atheists in the world (Ephesians 2:12). There is a mistake likewise on the other hand, when, though the Deity of the Saviour be acknowledged, yet, what we are taught of the ineffable distinction in the Godhead, is not duly attended to. It is written, “In the beginning, . . . the Word was God” (John 1:1). It is likewise written, “The Word was with God” This latter expression undoubtedly has a meaning, which, though perfectly consistent, is not coincident with the former. The truth contained in it, is proposed, not to our curiosity, as a subject of speculation, but to our faith. I do not attempt to explain it. But, what God expressly declares, we are bound, upon the principles of right reason, to believe. For He is Truth, and cannot deceive us. “There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit” (1 John 5:7). These three are frequently spoken of in the Scripture—to each of them a distinct part in the economy of salvation is ascribed; to each of them the perfections and honours of Deity are attributed. Yet there are not three Gods, but one. Consequently, these three are one God. This doctrine may be above our comprehension, but cannot be contrary to our reason, if it be contained in a revelation from God. If it be simply received, upon the authority of the Revealer, it approves itself to be true, for it is found to be a key to the whole Scripture, which renders the general sense, and scope, everywhere consistent and plain. They who proudly reject it, and yet admit the Bible to be a divine revelation, are involved in difficulties from which all their sagacity and learning cannot free them. In vain they labour by singular interpretations, by the minutiae [minor details] of criticism, and by an appeal to various readings, and ancient versions, which, in a few passages, differ from the copies more generally received—in vain they endeavour, by these refinements, to relieve themselves, when pressed by the obvious and natural sense of a thousand texts, which confirm the faith and hope of plain Christians. The Gospel is designed for the poor. But the poor and unlearned would be at a great disadvantage, if the Scripture could not be rightly understood

without the assistance of such learning and such criticism as we often see pressed into service. But the Holy Spirit graciously leads those who pray for His teaching, into such views of this high subject, as are sufficient to comfort their hearts, and to animate their obedience. The faith of those who are taught of God, is exercised in their approaches to Him, under two different modifications. Both are scriptural, and therefore both are safe, and witnessed to by His gracious acceptance and blessing.

(1). They come to God by Christ. They have access through Him (Ephesians 2:18). Unworthy to speak for themselves, they bow their knees in His name (Philippians 2:10). Christians are sufficiently distinguished and described by saying, “They come to God by Him” (Hebrews 7:25). They come to God, they cannot live without Him in the world, as they once did. They are now conscious of wants and desires, which only God can satisfy. But they are conscious likewise that they are sinners, and therefore they durst not approach Him, if they had not the invitation of His promise, and an assurance of “an Advocate with the Father” (1 John 2:1).

(2). They come to God in Christ. He is the great temple in whom the “all-fullness dwells” (Colossians 1:19 and 2:9); and they are not afraid of idolatry when they worship and honour the Son, even as the Father. This distinct application to God, in the person of the Son of His love, perhaps, becomes more frequent and familiar as they advance in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour (2 Peter 3:18). They, who seek to Him for deliverance from sin and misery, at first, I believe, chiefly consider Him as the Advocate and High Priest, who, by the virtue of His atonement, and the prevalence of His intercession, is able to save to the uttermost. But when the Apostle distributes Christians, according to their growth in grace, into the state of babes, young men, and fathers (1 John 2:13), he speaks of a more distinct and appropriate knowledge of Him, who is from the beginning, as the peculiar privilege, and distinguishing attainment of the fathers. He speaks of Him that is from the beginning, so often, that we can be at no loss to determine whom he intends by the expression. He applies it to Him who was in the beginning with God (John 1:1), and whom he and the other Apostles had heard, had seen with their eyes, and touched with their hands (1 John 1:1-3). An eminent divine (clergyman, John Owen (1616-1683), in his

Christologia) points out some especial seasons in the Christian life, in which, he thinks, the peculiar pressures of the soul may obtain the most sensible and immediate relief, by direct application to the Saviour. But there are some believers who find themselves, almost continually, in one or other of the situations which he marks as occasional. However this may be, I am ready to take it for granted, that they who really and cordially [sincerely] believe the Deity of Christ, do, at least at some seasons, and upon some occasions, expressly direct their prayers to Him. If precedents be required to warrant this practice, the New Testament will furnish them in abundance. I shall select but a few. The Apostle Paul “bowed his knees to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus,” but he often prayed to the Lord Jesus. He prayed to Him in the temple (Acts 22:17-21), and when he obtained that answer, “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2 Corinthians 12:9). The prayer of the Apostles and Disciples was addressed to Him, previous to the lot, which was to determine a successor to Judas (Acts 1:24). And Stephen committed his departing spirit to Him (Acts 7:59), an act of trust and worship of the highest kind, and at the most solemn season. In short, it is a strange inconsistency, of any who acknowledge His Deity question the propriety of praying to Him. What is it, more or less, than to question the propriety of praying to God?

4. This solemn worship and praise, is referred, ultimately, to Him who sitteth upon the Throne. To the great and glorious God, thus known and manifested, in and by, and with the Lamb that was slain.

The mediatorial Kingdom of Christ will have a period. He will reign as Mediator until He has subdued all enemies under His feet, and perfected His whole work. Then His Kingdom in this sense will cease; He will deliver it up to the Father, “That God may be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28). This passage is difficult, that is, the subject is too great for our faculties, in their present state of imperfection, fully to comprehend. For the difficulties we meet with in Scripture are, more properly, to be ascribed to our ignorance. The Son, as man, is even now subject to the Father. And God is undoubtedly all in all, at present, and from everlasting to everlasting. But His Kingdom, here, is to be taken figuratively, for

the subjects of His Kingdom, His people whom He received as a trust and a treasure. These He will deliver up, and the form of His administration and government over them will be changed. They will then have no more sins to confess, there will be no more dangers requiring the care and tenderness of a Shepherd, no enemies to be controlled, and the ordinances and means of grace, accommodated to their wants and weakness while in this world, will be no longer necessary. But MESSIAH, the Lamb that was slain, will ever be the Head, and Lord of the creation, the medium of communication of the light and love of God to His people; and God in Him, the object of their eternal adoration and praise.

Then the grand, ultimate, final cause of all the manifestations of God will be completely obtained. The glory of the great Creator and Lawgiver, the splendour of all His perfections, will for ever shine, without a veil or cloud, and with a brightness which could not have been known by creatures, had not the entrance of evil given occasion for a display of His wisdom and love, in overruling it to the praise of His glorious grace.

Thus, according to the measure of my ability and experience, I have endeavoured to point out to you the meaning and importance of the well-chosen series of scriptural passages, which are set to music in the Oratorio of the Messiah. Great is the Lord MESSIAH, and greatly to be praised! I have attempted to set before you a sketch of what the Scripture teaches us, concerning His person, undertakings and success; the misery of those whom He came to save, the happiness to which He raises them, and the wonderful plan and progress of redeeming love. But who is sufficient for these things? Alas! how small a portion of His ways are we able to trace! But I would be thankful, that the desire of attempting this great subject was put into my heart, and that having obtained help of God, I have been preserved and enabled to finish my design. Imperfect as my execution of it has been, I cannot doubt that the various topics I have been led to insist on, are the great truths of God. For what is properly my own, the defects and weaknesses, which mix with my best services, I entreat His forgiveness, and request your candour. But I do not hesitate to say, that the substance of what I have advanced, deserves and demands your

very serious attention.

It is probable, that those of my hearers who admire this Oratorio, and are often present when it is performed, may think me harsh and singular in my opinion: that of all our musical compositions, this is the most improper for a public entertainment. But while it continues to be equally acceptable, whether performed in a church, or in the theatre, and while the greater part of the performers and of the audience, are the same at both places, I can rate it no higher than as one of the many fashionable amusements which mark the character of this age of dissipation. Though the subject be serious and solemn, in the highest sense, yea, for that very reason, and though the music is, in a striking manner, adapted to the subject, yet, if the far greater part of the people who frequent the Oratorio, are evidently unaffected by the Redeemer's love, and uninfluenced by His commands, I am afraid it is no better than a profanation of the name and truths of God, a crucifying of the Son of God afresh. You must judge for yourselves. If you think differently from me, you will act accordingly.—Yet, permit me to hope and to pray, that the next time you hear the Messiah, God may bring something that you have heard in the course of these sermons, nearly connected with the peace and welfare of your souls, effectually to your remembrance.

I would humbly hope, that some persons, who were strangers to the power and grace of MESSIAH when I entered upon this service, are now desirous of seeking Him with their whole hearts. Yes, I trust I have not laboured wholly in vain. The Gospel is “the rod of His strength” (Psalm 110:2), which, when accompanied by the power of His Spirit, produces greater effects than the wonder-working rod of Moses. It causes the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the dead to live. A faithful minister, will account a single instance of success, a rich recompense for the labour of a life. May this joy be mine! May the Lord encourage you to go on seeking Him. Then He will surely be found of you. An open door is set before you (Revelation 3:8), and if you are truly willing to enter, none shall be able to shut it.

But may I not fear, that I am still speaking to others, who, to this hour, have no cordial admiring thoughts of the great Saviour? Alas! should you die in your present frame of mind, let me once more entreat you to consider what your situation and employment will be,

when all His redeemed people, and all His holy angels, shall join in worshipping and praising Him, in the great day of His appearance. Unless you repent, lay down your arms, and submit to His golden sceptre, your doom is already pronounced. Awful are the words of the Lord, by the Prophet, and very applicable to your case, if (which may His mercy prevent!) you should die in your sins. “Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, Behold my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit” (Isaiah 65:13, 14). If the Scribes and Pharisees were filled with envy and grief when the children in the temple sang, Hosanna to the Son of David (Matthew 21:15); what must be their anguish and remorse, their rage and despair, when the “whole creation” shall join in His praise? If your thoughts of Him now, are like theirs, tremble at your danger; for unless you repent, your lot must be with them hereafter.

The twentieth of twenty booklets.

