

## The Reign of Grace

### Chapter 13

By [Abraham Booth](#)

As Divine grace is glorious in itself, and infinitely superior to all that is denominated free favour among men; as the way in which it reigns is absolutely without a parallel, and such as will render it forever dear to all the disciples of Christ; so the end of its benign government is equally glorious: for it is eternal life. Reviving, ravishing thought! This, in subordination to his own glory, is the great design of God in every gracious dispensation towards his people. The emphatical phrase is shed in Scripture to signify, *An everlasting state of complete holiness and consummate happiness, in the presence and fruition of God, in all his persons and perfections.* To this blissful state, grace, as a sovereign, infallibly brings her subjects, through the person and work of Immanuel.

To assist our feeble and contracted minds in forming some faint ideas of celestial blessedness, and to inform us by whom it shall be enjoyed; it is compared by sacred writers to the most delightful and glorious things that come under our notice in the present world. For instance: To denote its superabounding delights, it is called *paradise*, in allusion to the garden of Eden: for at God's *right hand are pleasures forevermore.* To signify its grandeur, magnificence, and glory, it is called a *crown* and a *kingdom.* As a crown, it is unfading and incorruptible. To intimate that none shall enjoy it, except in virtue of the Redeemer's obedience, it is denominated a *crown of righteousness.* It is also called a *crown of life* and a *crown of glory.* As a kingdom, it was prepared for believers *before the foundation of the world,* and is the kingdom of their Father; who bestows it upon them here, in right to possess; hereafter, in perfect enjoyment. To ascertain its perpetuity, it is called an *everlasting* kingdom: and those that enjoy it are called *kings,* are said to *sit upon thrones,* and to *reign in life.* To inform us who shall possess it, and on what ground, it is called an *inheritance.* Plainly denoting, that none but the children of God shall enjoy it: for a servant, considered as such, cannot inherit. We must, therefore, be the sons of the Highest, by adoption and regeneration, before we can justly hope to enjoy the heavenly patrimony. For however diligent the sons of God may be in keeping his commands, and in performing his will; they shall not possess it under the notion of a reward of duty, or as wages for work; but under the idea of a testamentary gift. Yes; it is a gift by way of legacy, and is bequeathed to them in the everlasting testament of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to those words; *I appoint, by testament, unto you a kingdom.\**

\*Luke 22:29. Thus the celebrated WITSIUS renders and interprets the passage, (Econ. 1. iii. c. x. ? 28. To the same effect, BEZA and CASTALIO translate the words.

The kingdom is most glorious, the inheritance most free to the children of God, and absolutely unalienable.

Nor are the heirs of this boundless bliss without some joyful foretastes of it in this life. Faith being, as the apostle, defines it, *the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen*; they anticipate, in some degree, the joys of the upper world. In the present state, they receive the earnest of their future inheritance, and rejoice in hope of the full fruition. Nay, at some bright intervals, they *rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory. For he that believeth hath everlasting "life*, in the promise, and in the earnest of it. *Having fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them*; those *two immutable things*, the promise and the oath of God, in either of which *it is impossible for him to lie*, afford *them strong consolation* respecting their final preservation and eternal happiness. Living by faith on the dying, the ascended Redeemer, as their surety and sacrifice, their righteousness and advocate; and viewing the stability of the promise, the covenant, the oath of Jehovah; they have the greatest assurance that, *when Christ who is their life shall appear, they also shall appear with him in glory*.

The future happiness of believers may be considered, either as it is enjoyed by the *separate spirit*, before the resurrection and the last judgment; or by the *soul and body united*, after that awful period is come, and those grand events have taken place. That the separate spirits of the saints are possessed of thought and consciousness, and that they enjoy ineffable bliss in communion with Jesus their exalted Head; are truths manifestly contained in the unerring word. Soon as that mysterious union, which subsists between soul and body in the present state, is dissolved by death; the soul, being made perfectly free from the being of sin, immediately enters into glory. Death, to the saints, far from being a penal evil, is numbered among their privileges, and makes one article their comprehensive inventory of Divine blessings. (I Cor. 3:22) Death is the gate by which they enter those heavenly mansions prepared for them; in the possession of which they enjoy delights that could not be experienced in this mortal state. The knowledge of that sublime blessedness, and of an interest in it, made Paul *desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better*; infinitely preferable to all that can be enjoyed in this world.

The same incomparable man and infallible teacher says; *Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord*: at the same time declaring, that it was far more eligible to him and his pious contemporaries, to be *absent from the body and present with the Lord*. Now, if the apostle's words have any sense, and if their meaning be at all intelligible, we cannot suppose him to have imagined, that his immortal soul, when separated from the body, would lie in a sleepy, unconscious, inactive state, till the sound of the archangel's trumpet should awaken it; which notion is by some warmly espoused. For in such a state of absolute insensibility he could not, with any propriety, be said to *be with Christ*, or to enjoy the presence of *God*. Before the dissolution of his body, he rejoiced in the light of Jehovah's countenance and had much communion with his God; was indulged with bright manifestations of Divine favour, and exulted in the certain prospect of a blissful immortality; all which, according to the sleeping scheme,

he instantly lost by death. Under the deprivation of which he must continue for a long series of years; even till the voice of the Omnipotent, and the alarming crash of a falling *world*, shall rally his dissipated, and awaken his drowsy powers into act; and so bring him into a second enjoyment of himself, and of his God. How uncomfortable such an idea to the real Christian!

That the departing spirits of the children of God enter immediately into happiness, might be proved from a great variety of Divine testimonies. Among which there are few more apposite, than that which contains the remarkable and gracious answer of Jesus to the converted thief, when they were both on the verge of the unseen world. *Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.* These words include a particular answer to the request of the expiring penitent, who prayed that Christ would *remember* him. As if our Lord had said; "I will not only remember thee, as absent; for, verily, thou shalt be with me in the everlasting mansions, to behold my glory." As the dying petitioner desired his request might be granted, when the bleeding Jesus should enter into his kingdom; the suffering Saviour certified him, not only of the place where he was to reign, which he calls *paradise*, but also of the *time* when he was to enter on the possession of his kingdom, signified by *to-day*. Nor is it unworthy of notice, that when this promise was made, the day was half elapsed; for *it was about the sixth hour*, yet Christ promised him the joys of paradise before that very day concluded, knowing that, in the interim, they should both make their exit. As the gracious promise to this thief was very extraordinary, and as the person to whom it was made was in such circumstances, and bore such an infamous character; Jesus confirmed it with the asseveration, verily. As if he had said, "I, the Amen, who am truth itself, solemnly declare that what I have promised shall certainly be fulfilled this day."

The different punctuation and sense of the text, that are given by those who adopt the sleeping scheme, appear farfetched, strained, and jejune. They contend, that the words ought thus to be pointed; *I say unto thee to-day, thou shalt be with me in paradise.* As if our Lord had not the least intention to fix the time, when the converted malefactor should behold his glory; but only declared, by the expression *to-day*, the certainty of what he promised. To which forced, unnatural, and insipid interpretation of the passage, it may be justly objected, that as the thief could not be ignorant of the time when the gracious promise was made; so he had no occasion to have that particular distinguished and confirmed in so solemn a manner. Nor is it the expression *to-day*, but the word *verily*, which indicates the truth of what was affirmed, and the certainty of enjoying the promised blessing. For as *to-day*, in our Lord's answer, denotes a precisely limited time; so it evidently corresponds to the adverb *when*, in the thief's petition.

This hypothesis appears not only uncomfortable to the real Christian, and antisciptural to the impartial examiner of the sacred records, hut also unphilosophical. For as the soul is a thinking being, if, when the animal frame is dissolved, it were to be entirely deprived of thought and consciousness; it must, for aught appears to the contrary, lose its existence. But if so, instead of a resurrection at the last day, there must be a new creation; which is contrary to the analogy of faith, and to the hope of saints in every age. A mind without thought and consciousness, and matter without solidity and extension,

being equally absurd ideas.

The separate spirits of saints, therefore, being lodged in eternal mansions, and abiding at the source of all felicity, enjoy inconceivable pleasures. They are completely released from all troubles of every kind; from all sins and sufferings; from all temptations and sorrows. Moral evil, with all its attendants, is eternally banished from those bright abodes: for the people that dwell there are all perfectly righteous; nor shall any of the inhabitants of that land say, *I am sick*. Their garments are always white; their harps are always tuned. Being with Christ, according to his promise, they behold his glory, and are delighted with his beauty. The infinite excellencies of Jesus, the incarnate JEHOVAH, are illustriously displayed in that exalted state. Those Divine and mediatorial perfections, of which, while here below, we have but very low conceptions; beam forth on the holy and happy spirits in a blaze of glory. With adoring gratitude and pleasing astonishment they reflect; This is HE that once raised a feeble cry in the stable at Bethlehem! This is HE that spent his life in one continued series of beneficent actions, when surrounded with meanness and poverty, with reproaches and sorrows! This is HE?but, O how changed!?who made his exit on Calvary, under every mark of infamy, under the severest sensations of pain, both in body and soul; and all this to accomplish our salvation!?To view HIM eye to eye, who was once a man of sorrows and sufferings to the highest degree; to behold HIM who is their husband and head, after, all the abasement and misery to which he submitted on their account, thus exalted and glorified, must fill their souls with ecstatic bliss. Nor are they mere spectators of his glorious exaltation. They not only behold their beloved, and have intercourse with him, as loyal subjects with an exalted sovereign; but he entertains and rejoices over them as his friends and brethren, as his bride and portion. This we may learn from the friendly freedom he used with his disciples while here on earth. For though, as their sovereign Lord, he required supreme respect, and accepted profound adoration; yet he did not keep them at an awful distance, but conversed with them in the most familiar manner. Doubtless, then, he does not behave with less freedom, or keep them at a greater distance, because of his exalted state; but rather takes them into a state of exaltation with himself. For though he is exalted above all blessing and praise, yet not as a private person, nor merely for his own sake; but as the head of his numerous family, and as the Saviour of all his people. The advancement of him, the head, could not be intended to remove the members to a greater distance: for there is the same relation, and the same union, subsisting between him and them. Consequently, they must be honoured and exalted with him. Beholding his infinite glory, their adoring regards are heightened; but this is far from diminishing their nearness to him, or their delight in him. It only serves to increase their astonishment and joy, as they find him still condescending to admit them into such a familiarity with him, and so liberally communicating his glory to them. When in this lower world, they discerned the signatures of Deity in the works of creation and of providence. They beheld yet brighter displays of Jehovah's glory in the operations of grace, and the amazing effects of his love; in the gift of a Saviour, and in his death on the cross. But now, having their intellectual powers abundantly strengthened, they have manifestations of his infinite excellence, compared with which, all their previous discoveries of Divine perfection, by the material creation, and all the happiness they enjoyed in the church militant, were poor and mean, were low and languid beyond

expression. For they are surrounded with the opulence of God, and eternally enriched with his munificence. If Paul, ravished with the more obscure appearances of Divine wisdom, could not forbear exclaiming; O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! what holy transports of wonder must it afford the spirits of the just made perfect, to have the counsels of Heaven laid open to their view? The contemplation of Divine power, under the conduct of infinite wisdom, and leagued with boundless goodness, must heighten their pleasure. How delightful to behold, in the light of glory, that power which raised the vast frame of nature, and from the beginning sustained all things? That power, which turned the mighty wheels of providence in every age of the world, through all the revolutions of time? That uncontrollable power, which restrained legions of malignant spirits and accursed fiends, in ten thousand different instances, from perpetrating their malicious designs and from filling the world with mischief; which wrought upon the obdurate hearts of rebellious creatures, caused them to acknowledge Divine sovereignty, and made them willing to accept salvation in the appointed way? That power, which, having formed their souls anew, preserved them in the midst of innumerable dangers that continually lay in their way to the regions of happiness: nor ever intermitted its guardian agency, till it brought them safe to glory!

If the power of God, as beheld by the saints in light, be so delightful a subject of contemplation, what exuberant joy must the views of his love afford! For as love is the noblest passion of the human breast, so it is the brightest beam of Divinity that ever irradiated the wide creation. Love is a pleasing theme, and the meaning of that divine sentence, GOD IS LOVE, is there unfolded to the very life. The happy spirits are no longer obliged to learn Jehovah's love from his names and works; for they now behold it as essential to his Being. The day they had long expected, that happy day which is appropriated to the full-discovery of Divine love, having dawned upon them, they take their *fill of loves*. Now the immortal spirit is invigorated in all its powers, enlarged in all its faculties, on purpose to render it capable of taking in more copious views, and of receiving abundantly larger emanations of Divine love, than it could possibly before enjoy. They have now traced up the streams to the eternal fountain; the beams, to the very sun of love. The bosom of their Father, where the thoughts of love were lodged from everlasting, and where its noble designs were formed, is laid open to their view. Now they clearly see why the Son of God became incarnate, undertook the redemption of man, and, in order to accomplish the arduous work, obeyed, and suffered, and died the most painful and infamous death? Died, a sacrifice, an atonement for sin; a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. The wondering soul penetrates the vast design, and sees, with warmest gratitude, why itself was not made an everlasting monument of Divine justice; why its native enmity against God was completely subdued, and why its enormous crimes were pardoned. All which is resolved into the free, distinguishing love of God. The adoring soul beholds, with ecstasies of delight, how well the admirable effects correspond to their grand, original cause. Certainly, nothing short of heaven itself, which gives the experience, can give an adequate idea of such exalted bliss.

Nor will their views of Divine justice; no, not in its awful effects considered as vindictive, and manifested in the damnation of innumerable myriads of apostate angels and sinful

men, in the least allay their joys, or damp their pleasures. For, however infidels may now object against an eternal punishment being inflicted for transient crimes; and arraign the Book of God itself, which asserts that so it shall be; to them it appears, in the clearest light, that sin is an infinite evil, and therefore, justly deserving of perpetual misery. Their holy wills, being perfectly conformed to the pleasure of God, fully acquiesce in the sentence pronounced upon offenders, and rejoice in the execution of it on all the daring sons of rebellion, whether angels or men. They now more fully discover, how holiness in the Lawgiver, the demands of his law, and rite rights of his justice, were all displayed and perfectly satisfied, in the redemption of their souls by the blood of the cross. The remembrance and views of which are a scene of wonders, and an inexhaustible source of joy. Divine holiness they contemplate with supreme delight. God is *glorious in holiness*. This perfection of the God-head has frequently been celebrated in lofty strains of devotion, by saints on earth. (Exod. 15:11. I Sam. 2: 8. Ps. 30:4; 67:12) Now, if those who dwell in houses of clay; whose views, at the best, are so feeble and partial, have been so affected by meditating on it; what thoughts must they have who behold it in all its glory I with adoring hearts and ravished eyes, with inflamed devotion and notes divinely sweet, they join the heavenly choir in that seraphic hymn: *Holy! holy! holly! is the Lord of hosts! Heaven and earth are full of his glory!* How inconceivable the pleasure! how divine the joy! and may I not venture to add, the views of this glorious holiness must have such a transforming efficacy on the happy spirits, as to produce in them a perpetually advancing conformity to God in holiness and in glory?

If the face of Moses shone with peculiar brightness, after he had been admitted to familiar converse with Jehovah on the mount; how much greater must that effulgence be, which God communicates to those who constantly behold him without any interposing veil! The transcendent amiableness of Jehovah greatly consisting in his immaculate holiness, (for holiness is nothing but intellectual beauty,) and he presenting himself to beatified saints as the Infinite Beauty; they must perpetually rest in him as the proper object of their love, and as the centre of their delight. Nor can they cease to admire the equity of that command, which requires the most perfect love to God, on account of his own infinite loveliness and all-surpassing excellence.

Being favoured with a more perfect knowledge of God, and more intimate communion with him, their love to him is proportionally heightened. That grace which reigned in their whole salvation, being discerned by them in a stronger light, inflames them with the most ardent love to its adorable Author, and to Jesus, by whom it reigned. All the amiable and infinite perfections of Deity, shining upon them in the light of glory, their holy bosoms cannot but glow with the utmost fervour. They cannot but make returns of love, and in such a manner, as are suited to their happy and exalted state. Their supreme love to God causes them to contemplate his Divine perfections and astonishing operations with evernew delight; by which they are more and more assimilated to his Divine image, Hence that sublime delight, which, in the sacred page, is called *the joy of their Lord*.

Absolutely free from that pride and selfishness which tarnish our best services while here, and quite remote from all those imperfections which attended them in a militant

state, songs of sincerest gratitude and hymns of holy wonder, the profoundest acknowledgments of multiplied obligations to reigning grace, and the loftiest strains of thanksgiving to God and the Lamb, are their uninterrupted and sweet employ: Ever free to declare, that the only cause of their enjoying the beatific vision, and being seated on thrones of glory, is that grace which, as a mighty, magnificent, and bountiful sovereign, reigned through the person and work of Immanuel. Hence it is that grace, as it appears, and shines, and triumphs, in rescuing them out of the hands of Satan?in preserving them through all dangers?in supporting them under the severest trials?in bringing them safe to glory, and in crowning them with unutterable bliss?is the grand and unvaried burden of their songs. To the GOD OF ALL GRACE, the triune God, they address all possible praise with divine delight.

Peculiarly great and glorious is that sublime blessedness which is possessed by the separate spirits of saints in heaven; it, nevertheless, comes far short of that happiness which shall be enjoyed in their *whole persons*, and which belongs to the consummation of that celestial state. For the oracles of God frequently intimate that the bliss of the saints will not be absolutely complete, till the general judgment is past, and the end of the world is come. (Col. 3:4. 2 Tim. 1:12; 4:8. 1 Pet. 5:4) We may, therefore, take notice of some things, by which their blessedness will then be enhanced.

Their bodies being raised in glory, and reunited to their immortal spirits, will not only be a demonstration of Divine power, and a display of Divine goodness, very wonderful in their eyes, but also an addition to their blessedness. For, so long as any of the children of God continue in this perplexing, miserable world, and so long as the bodies of saints departed are confined in the grave, the happy spirits in glory cannot be ignorant, that the power which sin obtained over man is not yet entirely abolished; and, consequently, that something must be wanting to the consummation of their joy. But by the resurrection, death itself, which is the last enemy, shall be destroyed, never more to have the least power, but over the enemies of God, and of his people.

That the dead shall be raised, is a fundamental article of the Christian creed. That the same bodies shall be raised, which fell by death, the justice of God and the comfort of believers apparently require, is clear from the Scriptures, and is implied in the word *resurrection*. But though, as to their substance, they shall be the same; so far at least as to support the identity of them; yet as to their qualities, the alteration will be so great, that we cannot form suitable ideas concerning them. That surprising change, which shall pass upon them, is absolutely necessary to fit them for the exalted state into which they shall be introduced, when reanimated by their immortal spirits. Hence those words: *Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*. The present constitution of our bodies renders them incapable of bearing the splendour of the heavenly world; and, consequently, of partaking in the joys of that state. The glory of it would be insupportably bright; too dazzling for them to sustain. Like herbs and flowers of the most delicate kind, exposed to the scorching glare of the meridian sun, they would faint under it. But when that which was *sown in corruption* shall be *raised in incorruption* when that which was *sown in dishonour and weakness*, shall *be raised in glory and power*; when this *corruptible shall put on incorruption*, and this *mortal shall put on immortality*? in a

word, when that which was *sown a natural body* shall be *raised a spiritual body*; it will then be capable of partaking in the employment and bliss of heaven. When the bodies of believers shall be raised by almighty power, and fashioned by infinite wisdom, like to the glorious body of Christ, (Phil. 3:21) they will be fit companions for their souls to all eternity. *Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun*, both in body and soul, *in the kingdom of their Father*. (Matt. 13:43) Then shall the body, which partook in the sorrows and sufferings of this present world; which suffered various hardships and acts of violence, from the enemies of Christ; and which assisted the intellectual powers in performing religious duties, be a partaker of the joys of that triumphant state. Yes, the earthly tabernacle, being the purchase of redeeming blood, and the temple of the Holy Ghost, even when surrounded with imperfections, shall then be bright as the sun, vigorous with celestial youth, and undecaying as the power that shall support it. We may, therefore, conclude, that the bodies of the saints being raised from the dust of death, will contribute much to augment their bliss. But who can form adequate ideas of the nature and excellence of a *spiritual body*? Who can declare the power and grace that shall be exercised and manifested toward the children of men, in raising their sleeping dust, and in forming their bodies afresh for an eternal world, after so dignified an exemplar as the glorious body of Christ? Here we must leave them, till we behold the glorified body of our exalted Redeemer, or experience the happy transformation. For the beloved disciple himself declares, *It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*. (1 John 3:2) To which I may add, in allusion to the words of the psalmist, we shall certainly be *satisfied* with the amazing alteration, when we awake from the sleep of death, in the likeness of our adorable Saviour. (Ps. 17:15)

Another thing which will add to the blessedness of saints at that day, is their public acquittal by Jesus the judge, when standing before his tribunal. *Behold he cometh with clouds and every eye shall see him!* Infinitely grand and awfully amiable he now appears. Innumerable angels attend his approach, and pour around his chariot. The brightness of ten thousand suns is lost in the blaze of his glory, and in the lustre of his countenance. Behold! A great white throne is erected; (Rev. 20:11) clear as light, and fiery as flame. The Judge, inflexibly just and immensely glorious, ascends the tribunal; and before his presence *the heavens and the earth flee away*. Those innumerable millions of rational creatures that people the universe are now assembled. The books are opened. Myriads of adoring seraphs, and countless multitudes of anxious spectators, await the grand result. The wicked, with trembling hands and throbbing hearts, with horror in their aspect and damnation in view, would be glad to lose their being; but the righteous are bold and intrepid: for the Judge is their friend, and their Saviour. The righteousness in which they appear, was performed by Him. the plea which they make, he cannot reject. For it is the blood which he shed to atone for their sins, and the promise he made to comfort their souls, under the expectation of this important event. They there stand, not to have any fresh indictment brought against them; nor to have any thing laid to their charge, by Satan, or the law, or justice; but to be honourably acquitted in the presence of angels, and of the whole assembled world. The sentence of justification, long before pronounced in the court of heaven, and in the court of conscience, at the time of their conversion, is now recognised in the most

solemn and public manner. The works of faith and labours of love performed by them, in the time of their pilgrimage here below, toward their needy fellow-christians, are now produced by the omniscient Judge, as fruits and evidences of their union with him, of their faith in him, and of their love to him.\*

\* Matt. 25:34-40. It is very observable how different the conduct of saints will be, at this awful and glorious time, from that of nominal professors, as represented by our Lord in Matt 7:22. Here we find the Judge taking notice of his people's works, when they make no mention of them. Not only so, but when he is pleased to mention their labours of love, with high approbation, they seem to have forgotten them. A plain proof they did not expect salvation by them, nor ever thought of any such thing. No; Christ was their righteousness, and that was sufficient. The works they performed were designed to glorify him, and to express their gratitude to God for his benefits. But, so conscious were they of the imperfections cleaving to their performances, that they were ashamed to mention them. Whereas, when our Lord represents the reason of hope in self-righteous persons, he tells us that they will say, with great importunity; *Lord! Lord! have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in my name done many wonderful works?* But he will answer, *I never knew you? Depart from me, ye that work iniquity.* They plead their own works, religious duties, and great usefulness, as a sufficient reason why they should be admitted into the kingdom of glory. Not that they pretend to have done these things by their own strength, or natural abilities. No; they acknowledge that all was done in *the name of Christ*, by his authority, and his assistance. For which reason, we may suppose, they would be the more confident of acceptance with him. Hence, *we have done this, and we have done the other*, is their cry and their plea. They thought of coming to heaven by their own works. They did them for that end, and were loath to be disappointed. But what is the issue? Why, truly, these mighty workers and very useful persons are branded as the workers of iniquity; not acknowledged as the people of God. They are thrust down into hell, with all their fine recommendations and imaginary goodness; and notwithstanding all their pleas and promising hopes founded upon them. While the *poor in spirit*, those who are sensible of their own unworthiness; who live by righteousness imputed, making that the only ground of their hope; and who, from love to the truth, and to Christ, as revealed by it, perform good works with a view to the glory of God, not in the least expecting admission into the eternal kingdom for the sake of their pious performances? these, who say not a word about any thing which they have done, are accepted by the Judge of all, into everlasting honour and joy. Let the legalist be cautioned by this, not to trust in his own duties, though of the most splendid kind; and let all who love the truth be encouraged to abound in every instance of duty to God; especially in that of communicating to the indigent members of Christ. For the Judge will say to them on his right hand; *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.* Matt. 25:40. What condescension is here! Christ is not ashamed to own the meanest of his people under the character of *brethren*.

There is reason to fear that many professors, whose situation in life is a little more elevated than that of their neighbours, are almost above looking at the *poor brethren* of Christ; and would be extremely offended, if one of those indigent disciples were to address any of them, under the character of a *brother*. But who art thou, reptile of the

earth! that thou shouldst be ashamed of them whom Jesus, the Lord of glory and Judge of the world, will acknowledge as HIS *brethren*? What! shall a little shining dust, or worldly honour, so elate thy ignoble mind and swell thy contracted heart, that the poor members of Jesus Christ shall have no place in thy affections! Beware, lest after all thy profession, thou shouldst go down to hell with a lie in thy right hand; and all thy expectations of eternal happiness prove no better than "the baseless fabric of a vision!"

The nature and quality of their works; the principle from which they proceed, and the end for which they were done, together with the character of those that were benefited by them, will afford sufficient evidence to whom the performers of them belong. These expressions of love and fruits of holiness being remembered by Christ, though forgotten by the saints, he will avow them for his own; he will number them among his jewels; he will confess them before his Father and all the holy angels. Then shall their characters, which, in the time of their sojourning here below, were aspersed with every foul reproach, be fully vindicated to their everlasting honour, and to the eternal confusion of all their adversaries. For, with a smile of Divine complacency, the Judge will say, *Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.* Reviving words! Having long desired to be near the Lord, they are invited to come, and to be with him forever. Now the painful fears which they once had are eternally removed; for they are pronounced *blessed of the Father*, by a voice which the whole assembled world shall hear. They were all poor in spirit, and the generality of them poor in temporals; how agreeably, then, must they be surprised, to hear that they are called to possess a kingdom; called to inherit it, as princes of the blood royal, who are born to thrones and crowns! Lost, they will be, in pleasing astonishment, to find that, before they had a being, or the foundations of the world were laid, the eternal God had prepared this kingdom for them; and every reflection upon the way in which they came to possess it must heighten their amazement and joy. Then shall they be admitted, in their whole persona, into the fulness of bliss; into a nearer and more perfect fruition of God than they ever before enjoyed.

Their blessedness thus heightened shall be eternal. It is eternity stamped on their enjoyments that gives them their infinite worth. For could they, who are so high in bliss, be apprehensive of an end of their happiness, however remote; "that ghastly thought would drink up all their joy." But their inheritance is unalienable, their crown unfading, and their kingdom everlasting. Jehovah himself is *their light*, and the Most High *their glory*. Yes, the infinite God is their portion, and their exceeding *great reward*. (Isa. 110:19. Gen. 15:10) Their felicity, therefore, is permanent as the Divine perfections they adore and enjoy; and made certain to their own comprehensive minds beyond the possibility of a doubt. This makes their state supremely glorious. This constitutes it heaven indeed. Nay, what if the limits of their capacities should be forever enlarging, and forever receiving greater measures of glory? For the Deity is an infinite source of blessedness; and finite vessels may be forever expanding, and forever filling, in that ocean of All-sufficiency. What an amazing state of evergrowing pleasure! and what an astonishing scale of bliss! Jehovah shall open inexhaustible stores of blessings, as yet unknown to angels, and feast their souls with joys that are ever new. Nothing equal to this can be conceived by mortals; nothing superior can be enjoyed by mere creatures.

Yet this?hear it, O ye nations! And listen, ye isles from afar! while the millions of beatified saints dwell on the stupendous truth! this is the END of the victorious reign of grace. Grace reigned in the eternal counsels, when contriving the way to this glorious end. Grace reigned in providing the means, and in bestowing the blessings, that were necessary to its accomplishment. Grace reigned to the complete execution of the noble, the astonishing design, from first to last. Surely, then, reigning grace should have the unrivalled honour of all the blessings enjoyed by believers on earth, or by saints in light. Yes, and it shall have the glory, in all the churches of Christ below, and in all the triumphant hosts above. For when the last stone of the spiritual temple shall be laid, it will be *with shoutings*, GRACE, GRACE UNTO IT!

In these respects the blessedness of saints, in their entire persons, after the resurrection and the general judgment, will exceed that of their separate spirits: and in how many other particulars the proceedings of that day will add to their happiness, I neither affirm nor presume to inquire. It is quite sufficient for us to know, while in the present state, that we are heirs of this blessedness, and that it is inconceivably great. We should rest contented with what is revealed concerning it, without indulging a curious imagination, in searching after those particulars of which the Spirit of wisdom has given us no intimations, or those that are very obscure; for such inquiries are sure to be attended with vanity, rather than edification.

Nor will the angelic hosts be unaffected spectators, when that grandest of all Divine works, REDEMPTION, shall be completed. For as they had often been charged with offices of great importance to the church of God, and to its particular members, while in this lower world; so they had seen with astonishment the incarnation of their Sovereign, his feeble appearance in the manger, his life of poverty, of reproaches, and of suffering. They saw his agony in the garden, and heard his cries and complaints. They saw him extended on the cross, and beheld him laid in the grave. They were witnesses of his victorious resurrection, and they attended his triumphant ascension into the realms of glory. They beheld, and often reflected on these things, with amazement. They diligently looked into these works of Divine contrivance, these mysteries of infinite love, (1 Pet. 1:12. Eph. 3:10) wondering what would be the grand result. They had long desired the evolution of the mysterious plan, and now they have it.

"Now they are struck with deep amaze,  
Each with his wing conceals his face;  
Now clap their sounding plumes, and cry  
*The glories of the DEITY.*"

If those first-born sons of light and love could not forbear *shouting for joy* when they beheld the material world rise into existence, and saw its finished form, (Job 38:7) how much greater reason will they have to rejoice, when they behold all the redeemed world brought safe to glory and confirmed in bliss? Those morning stars, those children of ardour and sons of God must exult with joy, when they view the spotless perfection and ravishing beauty of the whole church, considered as the bride, the wife of the Lamb. (Eph. 5:27. Rev. 21:9) Nor can any thing short of transport seize their breasts when they

reflect, that all this immaculate innocence and matchless beauty arose from reigning grace, through the person and work of their incarnate Sovereign; her own original being base and miserable.

And now, reader, what are your thoughts of this blessedness? Very probably you are one of those that hope to go to heaven when they die. If so, what is your hope? Is it a mere wish, or a well-grounded expectation? Remember, that the word of God requires you, as a Christian professor, to *be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you*. Have you ever seriously inquired, why you hope to be happy, when so many millions will be eternally miserable; when it is certain from the Scripture, that there are comparatively very few that find the way to life? You have, perhaps, never thought much about these interesting subjects. But why, then, do you call yourself a Christian? Why hope to go to heaven? For if this be your condition, you are *in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity*. You are? may God enlighten your mind to see it! may reigning grace deliver you from it! you are at present, a child of wrath, and an heir of destruction.

But why hope for heaven, when you have no delight in God; no pleasure in his ways; no love to his people; in a word, possessed of no holiness: and, without holiness, intellectual happiness is impossible. Heaven, were you there, would be no heaven to you; nor, as an unregenerate sinner, can you desire it for the sake of its enjoyments. For they are contrary to the prevailing inclination of your will. You do not love heaven, but are afraid of hell. The inhabitants of the celestial world would be no companions for you. Their business would be a toil, and their language unknown; their sweetest hosannas would afford you no pleasure, and the symphony of their golden harps would be discord in your ears. Nay, the fruition of God, their highest joy, would be your greatest uneasiness, were you to be admitted into those mansions of purity in an unregenerate state. For happiness consists in the enjoyment of an object that is completely suitable and satisfying to our desires. A holy God, therefore, cannot be our happiness, without partaking of his holiness. Remember, sinner, that if you leave the world in an unsanctified state, as you cannot be fit for heaven, so you must not enter those abodes of blissful purity, or taste their sublime pleasures; but your state will be eternally fixed, where there is *weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth*.

Are you a serious person, and a strict professor? Be it so; yet it behooves you to consider what is the foundation of your hope. For *there is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death*. (Prov. 16:25) A man may be zealous for God, and, in many respects, exemplary in his conversation; yet, after all, perish forever. (Rom. 9:31, 32; 10:2, 3) What then is the reason of your hope? Is it that grace which reigns through the person and work of Christ! Can you say with the primitive Christians, *We believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved*? Are you come to a point about that most interesting and solemn affair, the salvation of your immortal soul? Is your hope of glory lively and bright, or languid and obscure? Is it such as is attended with rejoicing, as purifies the heart and conduct? (Rom. 5:2. I Pet. 1:3, 5. I John 3:3) Has it Christ and his finished work, together with the promise of him that cannot lie, for its everlasting support? O, professor! seek for

certainty and satisfaction: they are to be had in the knowledge of Christ, and in the belief of his truth. If you love your soul, rest not in uncertainty about an affair of infinite consequence. You are building for eternity; be cautious, therefore, with what materials you build, and upon what foundation. A mistake in the ground of your trust will ruin your soul. Read your bible, meditate, and pray that the Spirit of truth may direct you in the momentous concern.

Are you a child of God and an heir of the kingdom? endeavour, by a conscientious attendance on all the public means of grace, and by maintaining communion with your heavenly Father in every private duty, to make a swift progress in vital religion, and in real holiness; remembering, that holiness is the health, the beauty, and the glory of your immortal mind. Seek after it, therefore, as a Divine privilege, and as a heavenly blessing. Watch and pray against the insurrections of indwelling sin, the solicitations of worldly pleasure, and the assaults of Satan's temptations. Watch, especially, against spiritual pride and carnal security. As to the former, rejoice not in your knowledge, or gifts, or inherent excellencies; no, nor yet in your Christian experiences. Be thankful for them, but put them not in the place of Christ, or the word of his grace; so as to make them the ground of your present confidence, or the source of your future comfort. For so to do, is not to rely on the promise of God, and to live by faith in Jesus Christ; but to admire your own accomplishments, by which you differ from other men, and to live upon your own frames. The consequence of which most commonly is, either pharisaical pride, imagining ourselves to be better than others; or desponding fears, as if, when our frames are fiat and our spirits languid, there were no salvation for us. The peace and comfort of such professors must be uncertain to the last degree. But as a guilty, perishing sinner, as having no recommendation, nor any encouragement, to believe in Jesus, or to look for salvation by him, but what is contained in the word of grace, depend upon him, live by him. The more you behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, the more will you see of your own vileness. The more you grow in real holiness, the more sensible you will be of the power of your own corruptions, and of the imperfections attending all your duties. You will be more and more convinced that if the gospel did not warrant your dependence on Christ, under the character of a sinner, you could have no hope, even after ever so long and zealous a profession of religion. You should live under a continual remembrance, that you are still an unworthy, a guilty, a damnable creature; but accepted in Christ, and freed from every curse. That will keep you truly humble, and provoke to self-abhorrence: this will make you really happy and excite to praise and duty.

Watch against carnal security and spiritual sloth. Forget not that you have many enemies. *Be sober, therefore, be vigilant.* Time is short and absolutely uncertain. Husband well your precious moments. Lay them out for God. Be careful that the fruits of gratitude to your infinite Benefactor may adorn your whole behaviour. Make the holiness and usefulness of the life of Jesus your fair example: copy after that brightest of patterns. Remember, that the eyes of God, of angels, of accursed spirits, and of men, are all upon you. Both friends and enemies inspect your conduct and mark your steps. How necessary then is watchfulness and circumspection! lest, falling into sin, your spiritual joys be impaired, your friends and allies be grieved, and your adversaries

triumph. Having received the earnest of your future inheritance having had some joyful foretastes of that immense bliss, of which you, O Christian, are an heir; make it your constant business, as it is your indispensable duty, to live above the world, whether your temporal circumstances be affluent or penurious, prosperous or adverse. Let your conversation be in heaven, as becomes a citizen of the new Jerusalem. It is your duty and blessing to live in the prospect of the world to come, and as on the confines of it. Converse much with the Eternal Mind, in prayer, and praise, and holy meditation: so shall you contract a blessed intimacy with that sublime Being whose favour is better than life, whose frown is worse than destruction. By such an intercourse with God, you will taste more exquisite delights than all the pleasures of sin can boast; than all the riches of the world can bestow. Yes, believer, by such converse with God, you shall find your mercies sanctified, and your afflictions alleviated; your holy dispositions invigorated, and your corrupt affections weakened. Be it your constant endeavour that, whenever your fair, your glorious, your heavenly Bridegroom shall come, he may find you ready; having your loins girt, your lamp burning, and waiting for his glorious advent. So shall your soul be peaceful, your life useful, and your death triumphant.

While we soar on the wings of faith and holy meditation, in order to explore the wonders of reigning grace; while we endeavour to sound its depths and to measure its heights, we are elevated, as it were, to the suburbs of heaven. We taste of joys divinely sweet, and savour the entertainments of angels. But, alas! how soon the pinions of divine contemplation flag! How soon are we interrupted by the workings of indwelling sin, or by the impertinencies of a noisy, busy, transient world! Yet, for our comfort, we have to remember, that when a few more of our fleeting days are elapsed, we shall enter on a state unchangeable, to enjoy those infinite delights which are included in the beatific vision; in the fruition of the eternal JEHOVAH.

To conclude: from this imperfect and brief survey of *The Reign of Grace*; from this feeble attempt to illustrate its power and majesty, we may learn, that the free favour of God manifested in our salvation, is a theme so copious and so sublime, that all which can be said by the most evangelical and eloquent preachers; all that can be written by the most accurate and descriptive pens; all that can be conceived by the most excursive and sanctified imagination among the sons of men, must come infinitely short of a full display. Yes, after all that is imagined or can be sung, by angels or men, by seraphs or saints, in the church below, or in the choirs above; the charming subject will remain unexhausted to eternity. For the riches of Christ are unsearchable, and the grace of God is unbounded. Who, then? ?

"Who shall fulfil the boundless song? What vain pretender dares? The theme surmounts an angel's tongue. And Gabriel's harp despairs."

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