

New Years' Address

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How wide, how unspeakably wide, is the difference, how great, how infinitely great, is the contrast, between the spiritually-minded child of God, whose portion is above and whose heart and affections are in heaven; and the carnally-minded worldling, whose portion is below and whose heart and affections are on earth! This difference between them, both in its cause and in its effects, in its source and in its streams, is from God himself; and that is the reason why it is so wide, deep, and permanent. Its foundation was laid in his own fixed purposes, in the eternal good pleasure of his will, before the foundation of the world, was brought to light in time in the first promise given after the fall, and has had its manifestation and fulfillment in a greater or less degree in the experience and life of every believer from that day to this.

Innumerable are the inhabitants of the earth; almost equally numerous and diversified are the classes, ranks, pursuits, and occupations of society; but amid these crowds of men and this diversity of station, there are really two and but two different families, two and but two distinct seeds, who are as separate now in the mind and sight of God as ever they will be when time shall be swallowed up in eternity. It is true that this separation of the church from the world, of the clean from the unclean, of the living from the dead, of the children of God from the children of the wicked one, is often not so distinct and clear to our eyes as it is in the eyes of God, and as it should be in accordance with his revealed will.

And yet we may say that to reveal this eternal line of separation as a vital truth in doctrine, to bring it forth in its various fruits and consequences into living experience in the heart, and to produce as well as enforce it in all godly practice in the life and conduct of all the saints of God, is the grand aim and object of that Holy Spirit under whose divine inspiration the Scriptures were written, and by whose gracious operations and influences they are made effectual unto our salvation and sanctification.

And contrariwise to confuse, to obliterate, to nullify, and, if possible, to dig down and remove this divine barrier between the church and the world, either in doctrine by the denial of truth and the promulgation of error, or in experience by slighting, despising, or misrepresenting the work of God upon the soul, or in practice by setting aside the precepts of God and substituting the ordinances of man, has ever been the aim and object of Satan and his agents from the day on

which the first stone of this eternal wall of separation was manifestly laid on earth. Cain and Abel, the first murderer and the first martyr, stand in the very front of our Bibles as permanent types and representatives of these two seeds, and if now less prominent than they have been at various stages of the world's long history, they are nevertheless in the mind of God no less distinct. No language can be more plain or express than the testimony of God to this point in his holy word. Hence we learn that it was he himself who put the distinction between the two seeds; and the separation and enmity which were then thus laid and made between them have both existed in all the strength of their original constitution from that day to this, and will exist until the end of time.

It is natural enough, and perfectly consistent with the words of the first promise, that this doctrine should provoke the enmity of the carnal mind; but to those who know and understand the Scriptures by divine teaching, to those who have received the love of the truth that they may be saved thereby, it is a point beyond all dispute or question, not only from the testimony of the word, but from the witness of the Spirit in their own consciences, and the verdict of their own long and well-tryed experience, both in its pains and in its pleasures. They know that it was the special grace of God which quickened them when dead in sin, and that it was his word spoken to their hearts with a divine power which called them out of the world that they might be a peculiar and separate people. To this point tended all their convictions, anxiety, and distress of mind on account of sin; for by this work of the Lord on their consciences, the bands which held them fast to sin and to the world that lies in wickedness were cut asunder, and with them it was, "Escape for your life; look not behind you, neither stay in the plain; escape to the mountain, lest you be consumed." (Gen. 19:17.)

As then, by this divine work on their conscience, and as in obedience to this call they came out of the world and became separate from it, they found him faithful to his promise, that he would receive them and manifest them as the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. Under the shinings in of his blessed presence when his love was first shed abroad in their heart, they knew what it was to set their affections on things above, where Jesus sits at the right hand of God. The world was dead to them and they to the world; the power and dominion of sin were broken; lust and covetousness were under their feet, and they could run the way of God's commandments with an enlarged heart.

But as they are still in the body; as they are encompassed by many, and some of them new and peculiar temptations; as snares of various kinds, and many of them very suitable and attractive to the flesh, are ever spread for their feet, they did not for the most part continue long in this blessed state. Sin began gradually to revive, being only stunned and not killed, and grace in proportion to decline. They had not yet learned how to fight the great battle, and knew little of either the necessity or the use of spiritual weapons and of putting on the whole armor of God. The craft and strength of Satan as an angel of light, and the weakness of the flesh against the subtlety and power of his temptations, were much hidden

from them. Need we wonder, then, that they were soon drawn aside and went, if not outwardly, yet inwardly astray; left their first love, and with it lost the spirituality of their mind, the tenderness of their conscience, and the warmth and fervor of their gracious affections?

Now, what was the consequence of this declension? That they gradually sank more and more into carnality, barrenness, and death. And this was often much helped by surrounding circumstances and the peculiar position in which they were placed. With some, the increasing cares and anxieties of life in this day of incessant struggle and competition in every trade and profession, in order to obtain an honest livelihood; with others, the daily pressure of a large and engrossing business; with others, the domestic ties of a young and growing family, taxing well-near all their time and strength, and absorbing too much of their thoughts and affections; with others, the complying too readily with the worldliness of their own relations, some of them, perhaps, very near and dear in nature's bonds, or immediate members of their own family.

To these frequent and more obvious snares which entangle the feet of so many, we may add neglect in constantly reading the Scriptures and giving themselves to continual prayer and meditation; slackness in waiting upon the Lord in the ordinances of his house; or accustoming themselves to sit under the ministry of the word as a mere exercise of the intellect or approbation of the judgment, without personal, diligent self-examination, and a spirit of prayerfulness before, in, or after the time of hearing, or anxious earnestness to profit by it either by falling under its keen edge when used as a sword, or embracing the truth in faith and affection as commended to the conscience.

Many and various, indeed, are the means whereby the soul gets robbed of its spiritual strength, and loses the warmth and fervor of the divine life; but no one cause is more dangerous than the lack of self-denial in the hour of temptation, and of strength to resist, even unto blood, striving against sin. How many have been gradually entangled in evil by not resisting the first approaches and allurements of sin, and have either brought a reproach upon the cause by some outward fall, or if preserved from that fearful disaster, have sadly destroyed their own peace and brought death and bondage into their souls. And even where there has been much outward circumspectness of life, in how many cases has a spirit of slumber come over the soul, bringing with it numbness of conscience, coldness of affection, and a general deadness, stupidity, and lethargy of mind!

We have long marked and observed these things, as well as have had some experience of them in our own bosom; and as in water face answers to face, so the heart of man to man, so we doubt not many of our readers see eye to eye and feel heart to heart with us in what we have thus far laid before them.

It has, therefore, struck our mind that we might do our spiritual readers, to whom we as usual, address ourselves at the opening of the year, some useful and

acceptable service if we took up this subject at greater length, and availed ourselves of the present opportunity to bring before them some such word of free and friendly counsel, admonition, reproof, or encouragement as the Lord might enable us to communicate and they might feel disposed to receive from us in his name and fear. In so doing we may have to touch upon some sore spots, to probe some deep and painful wounds, to use language that to some may seem harsh and severe, and to draw so narrow a line of separation between the living and the dead as may cause some to fear on which side they stand for time and eternity. But we shall endeavor, we hope, in the fear and as in the sight of God, to keep closely to his inspired word, tread, as far as we see and know them, in the footsteps of the flock, and bring forth nothing but what has been not only well weighed in the balances of the sanctuary, but also been tried and proved in the faith and experience of our own heart.

Good men in all ages have had to lament and lift up their voice against the evil to which we have alluded in our opening sentences— the breaking down of the barrier which God has set up between the church and the world; but never, perhaps, was the warning voice more needed than now; and glad should we be if it were more frequently and loudly sounded by those who stand on the battlements of Zion. The setting up of this barrier by the hand of God in his eternal counsels was not only an act of infinite grace but also of infinite wisdom. It was intended not only to rescue his chosen family from the depths of the fall, that they might be eternal trophies of his super-abounding grace, but also as a means to preserve them in their time state from the path of the destroyer. He knew to what temptations they would be exposed in their pilgrimage through life, what snares would be laid on every side for their feet; he knew all the strength of sin and all the weakness of the flesh. He, therefore, cast up in his word a highway, a way of grace and truth, of faith and love; a way of holiness, in which the redeemed should walk, and on which no lion or unclean animal should be found. By his grace he sets their feet in this way, and they find it to be, though a strait and narrow path in which there is no room for the flesh, a way of light and life, of union and communion, of love and godly fear; for it is the kindness of their youth, the love of their espousals when Israel is holiness unto the Lord, and the first fruits of his increase. (Jer. 2:2, 3.) Now as long as they are walking on the king's highway they are safe, for he is their sun and shield, giving them present grace and the prospect of future glory. (Ps. 84:11.) But immediately that they are drawn off it, they get upon unholy ground, the permitted domain of sin, Satan, and the flesh, and thus losing the felt presence and guidance of the Lord, often stray further and further until they wander on the dark mountains as lost sheep without a shepherd.

Many, very many, are here, and among them no small number who neither see nor feel where they are, nor what they are; for it is a part of the very nature of the malady, like a heavy sleep or a bodily lethargy, to blind the eyes, stupefy the senses, and benumb the conscience. It was so with Ephraim of old. He was "broken in judgment" (Hosea 5:11) and, therefore, could not form a right

judgment of his own state or standing. "Strangers devoured his strength and he knew it not; yes, grey hairs were here and there upon him, yet he knew it not." (Hosea 7:9.) No, even when at last he saw his sickness and felt his wound, he took wrong courses to have it healed, going to those who could not heal him nor cure him of his wound. (Hosea 5:13.) He had joined himself to idols; and as his punishment God had said, "Let him alone." (Hosea 4:17.)

One of the worst features of the Laodicean church was that she said she was "rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing; and knew not that she was wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." (Rev. 3:17.) We shall not be surprised, then, nor discouraged if our words meet with little or no acceptance in the eyes of those who do not see into what a state they have been brought by the subtlety of Satan, the power of sin, and the weakness of the flesh. Yet in the hope that the Lord may bless a word of admonition to those who have ears to hear, we shall, with all boldness, and yet, we trust, in a spirit of tenderness, love, and affection, speak freely the thoughts of our heart upon a point which has often exercised, and still almost daily exercises, our own spirit.

The communication of divine life to the soul is the greatest of all blessings, as containing in its bosom every other blessing. Thus it is the fruit of election— "Whom he predestinated, them he also called," the sure pledge of justification— "Whom he called, them he also justified," and the anticipation of eternal glory— "Whom he justified, them he also glorified." It is sovereign in its first communication— "The Son quickens whom he will;" free in its reception— "Freely you have received, freely give;" unquenchable in its nature— "Many waters cannot quench love," eternal in its duration— "I give unto my sheep eternal life;" and unalienable in its possession— "I will never leave them nor forsake them." But it is subject to change and sometimes sinks very low— "You have laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps;" sometimes mounts very high— "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name." But all its changes depend upon the movements of the Lord upon the soul— "Lord, by your favor you have made my mountain to stand strong, you hid your face, and I was troubled" (Ps. 30:7)— and, therefore, whether it be high or low, must be resolved into the sovereign good pleasure of God.

But our present object is rather to treat of the life of God in the soul in its declension and decay; and to make the subject more clear, as well as to restrain our own pen from wandering, we shall consider it under three heads—

- I. *Its causes.*
- II. *Its symptoms.*
- III. *Its cure.*

I. In considering its CAUSES,

we may observe that we have already pointed out some of the more prevalent, and it is, therefore, needless to repeat them. But there are others of scarcely less magnitude, on which we have not yet touched.

Among them, we feel compelled to name the prevailing ministry of the day.

Looking, then, at it without naming people, or without wishing to give needless offence, there are two features in it which have much struck our mind as showing a lamentable deficiency. These two features are, 1, *a lack of power*, and, 2, *a lack of searching discrimination*.

1. Nothing in the ministry can make up for lack of power.

It may be perfectly consistent with truth. It may be unexceptionably clear in doctrine, sound in experience, and not defective in enforcing consistent practice. But, with all this, it may have the fatal defect of lack of power; it may lack that peculiar savor and blessed influence, that indescribable life, penetrating authority, and heavenly weight, which rest upon the ministry of the word, when the Lord the Spirit speaks in and by it through his sent servants. It is said of the first preaching of the word— "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus." And what was the blessed effect? "Great grace was upon them all." (Acts 4:33.) They preached with great power, and great grace flowed from it and through it. Of his own ministry, Paul thus testifies— "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." (1 Cor. 2:4.) And, to what end and effect? That "the faith of his hearers should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." He elsewhere testifies that the gospel which he preached "came to his hearers, not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance." (1 Thess. 1:5.) And the effect was that those who received the word of God which they heard of him, "received it not as the word of men, but as the word of God, which effectually works in those that believe." (1 Thess. 2:13.)

Where this blessed power attends the word, there for the most part the life of God in the soul grows and thrives; for in it there is milk for babes and meat for men— in it there is instruction for those who are seeking the way Zionward, reproof for the disobedient, admonition to the simple and sincere, encouragement to the poor and needy, healing balm for the broken in spirit, consolation to the afflicted, and a word in season to the soul that is weary. But where this indescribable life, savor, and power are deficient in the ministry, a spirit of slumber creeps gradually over the hearers; deadness and barrenness in the pulpit produce deadness and barrenness in the pew; the souls of God's people are starved for lack of food; and the necessary consequence is that a general sickliness and languor spread themselves over the church and congregation, attended with the decline and decay of every grace.

One of the worst features of this prevailing disease is, that those who are most deeply affected with it see and feel it least. It creeps for the most part over the soul so insensibly, and its influence is so slow and gradual, that, to use a strong expression, it paralyzes as it spreads. The Scripture, therefore, compares it to a deep sleep, which we know comes gradually on and gets heavier and heavier, until every sense is locked up in forgetfulness and insensibility. "The Lord has poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes." And upon whom was this deep sleep come? "The prophets and your rulers, the seers has he covered." They who should have kept the people awake had fallen asleep themselves— and the watchmen on the walls slumbered with the inhabitants of the city. And this with the enemy at the gates. (Isa. 29:10.) It is also compared to the insensibility of the drunkard, who keeps drinking on until buried in drunken sleep. He does not feel when he is struck or hurt; and even when for a moment roused from his drunken fit, seeks again his cups and drowsy intoxication. "They have stricken me, shall you say, and I was not hurt— they have beaten me, and I felt it not. When shall I awake? I will seek it yet again." (Prov. 23:35.)

2. But there is another no less lamentable lack, as it seems to us, in the ministry of the day. It is not as separating, searching, and discriminating as it should be.

There is a close connection between a powerful and a searching ministry, though they do not always meet in the same man and the same ministry. But, as a rule, wherever there is power in the preached word there is separation in it; for nothing so takes forth the precious from the vile, nothing so separates the living from the dead, nothing so blows away the chaff from the wheat as a ministry attended with the power of God. And as a separating ministry must needs try the living family of God (for the dead feel it not), so it will be ever to them a separating, penetrating, and often keenly-piercing word, especially if they have tender spots and sore places. What a description does the Holy Spirit give us of the word of God in the hands of the Spirit, as searching the heart to its lowest depths and most secret corners and recesses! It is a "living," not a dead word, but a word full of, and, as such, ministering life; and "powerful," for the power of God attends it; and "sharper than any two-edged sword," for that can only pierce the body, but this goes further, for it "pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit," thus discriminating between what is natural and what is spiritual; no, more, penetrating through and dividing joint from joint, and, by breaking the bones, reaching their inmost "marrow," and thus becoming "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Heb. 4:12.)

Now, may we not be allowed, with all simplicity and godly sincerity, not wishing to give needless offence, and yet not shrinking from the cross, to compare this description of a powerful, searching, separating ministry with the ministry of the day, and to ask ourselves, be we minister or no minister, whether one resembles the other? We are not any man's judge. To his own master he stands or falls. But these are weighty matters, and if the general deadness and lethargy of the

churches be at all traceable to the lack of power in the pulpit and of a searching ministry, it, behooves those who would be right before God to examine how far they stand clear in this matter. Our dear friend, the late W. Tiptaft, was very strong on this point in his last illness, and used often to quote the words, "The blood of souls stains deep."

3. But as we are upon this point, we cannot forbear noticing another feature in the ministry which much fosters the spirit of slumber which has so much come over the churches, and that is, the setting up of a low standard of experience for church membership;

the consequence of which is not only to flood the churches with doubtful characters, but to lay down as positive marks of grace what at best are but feeble symptoms of the life of God. "We must not discourage the weaklings" is the cry; "we must preach, Comfort, comfort my people." But not to discourage the weaklings is often to encourage the hypocrites; and to be always bringing forward comfort may be giving poison instead of medicine. An honest-hearted child of God loves a searching ministry. He does not want smooth things, for he dreads false comfort, and would sooner carry his burden than have it taken off, or go off the wrong way.

Those who are ever calling out for encouragement often want to be encouraged in their sins or, at least, in their carnality and death. What they really need is to be thrown down rather than built up, wounded rather than healed, sent groaning home with an arrow in their conscience to make them roll on their bed in distress and anxiety, rather than cry peace to their souls when there is no peace. It is a false rest when they rest upon the encouraging testimony of the preacher rather than upon the testimony of God in their own consciences.

But we will not further dwell upon this point; we have said enough for those who have ears to hear, and too much for those who would close their ears against any word that might search and condemn them.

II. And now for a few words on the SYMPTOMS of this widespread epidemic,

and let those who desire to fear God search and see whether they find in themselves any prevailing symptoms of this general complaint.

1. Out of numerous others, one of the first marked symptoms is a declension of the spirit of PRAYER in the soul.

When the Lord first pours out the Spirit of grace and of supplication, it usually rises to a greater height than at any subsequent period. It would not be fair, therefore, or even just to ourselves if we measured our present spirit of prayer by

what it was in days gone by. Those early days cannot be recalled. They were the days of our spiritual youth, and can no more return than the springtime of life to those who are advanced into the autumn of their years. But even if not tried by this standard, are we sensible of any manifest or marked decline of the spirit of prayer that has lately come upon us? Is it less earnest than it was? Is less sensible access found to the throne of grace? Is prayer and supplication felt rather as a burden, a task, a duty, a something that ought to be done, than a sweet privilege, a blessed mercy, a wondrous door through which the soul may pour forth its complaints, confessions, desires, longings, and breathings before the Lord? If the spirit of prayer has sensibly declined in our breast, it is a mark of having fallen into a spirit of slumber, or that we are held in some snare of sin or Satan.

2. Again, how is it with us as to reading the word of God?

Is it done as a task, a performance, a duty to which conscience urges, and yet from which inclination draws back? And is this an habitual feeling? for we must not judge by occasional seasons of coldness and deadness, as the most lively Christians are subject to them. But as a general state of things, is the word of God dead, dull, and dry, and as such read with little interest, pleasure, or profit? Then we have fallen asleep, or sunk into carnal security. But contrariwise, is the word of God highly prized as a friend and companion in our secret retirements? Is there every now and then new and sweet light cast upon it? Does it open itself at times to our enlightened understanding as containing fresh teaching, and fresh treasures of heavenly truth? Does it touch our heart with admiration and love to him of whom it so blessedly testifies; soften and melt our spirit into meekness and contrition; raise up our affections to things above; loosen the hold of sin and the world; and bringing before us the things which are not seen as eternal realities, deaden and kill us to the things which are seen as the mere passing shadows of the day?

3. Another symptom of that spiritual declension of which we are now speaking is a growing numbness of conscience,

rendering it less sensitive to the evil of sin, and to the danger of departing from the Lord. The fear of God in a tender conscience is a special new covenant gift and grace (Jer. 32:40), is our choice treasure (Isa. 33:6), and a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death. (Prov. 14:27.) It brings into the heart a holy reverence of God's name and a deep sense of his glory, majesty, presence, and power; it bows down the soul before him in humility and self-abasement; fills it with hatred of sin and earnest longings and desires after holiness— is attended with contrition and godly sorrow, and produces meekness and quietness of spirit, submission, resignation, and patience. It is, therefore, our chief safeguard against the approach of evil; makes us watch our words both to God and man, to be circumspect in our movements, upright in our actions, cautious in our ways, and consistent in our life.

But this grace of the Spirit, like other graces, has its growth and its decrease, its seasons of strength and of weakness, its times of activity and vigor, and of languor and decline. Now, when this grace of the Spirit declines in vigor, it loses in the same proportion its keenness of sight, its sensitiveness of feeling, and its strength of voice; and it is surprising how low it may sink in the soul, until it seems at times almost lost out of sight; its eyes closed, its quickness in hearing the voice of God gone, and its voice reduced to a faint whisper.

What, then, is the consequence? The snares of death are not departed from, for the fountain is not springing up with its living waters to keep the soul alive unto God and the conscience tender in his fear. This is the very opportunity for which the carnal mind has been looking and longing; for it hates and is weary of the restraints which grace puts upon it, and wants that indulgence and food which it can get only by sin. Now, then, is the time when the watchman has fallen asleep, for the master thief, the besetting sin, to enter in and prowl about the city; and he soon lets in his fellow thieves, until the whole gang of them fall to work to rob and plunder. The mind becomes filled with all manner of evil; secret lusts begin to work and to be indulged rather than resisted; all sorts of worldly schemes and contrivances for self-advancement or self-gratification occupy the thoughts; pride, covetousness, and worldly-mindedness make sad advance, and the man, so to speak, is but a shadow of what he was. His tenderness seems gone, and with it the life and power of his religion; until little is left but the form, except that now and then there are revivings and awakenings just enough to show him where he is and whence he has fallen.

How many, even of those who truly fear God, are here, or have been, for perhaps there are very few of the living family of God who have not had, at some period of their lives since they were called by grace, some personal and experimental knowledge of the path which we have thus traced out. These are the best judges how far our words are words of truth— not mere fancy sketches, but a description of deep and weighty realities, and matters of daily exercise and life-long remembrance. Much that daily passes in our own bosoms, or that has exercised our minds before God we can never speak of or confess to men; but a word from others will sometimes touch the secret spot. And thus those of our spiritual readers who, through grace, have been brought out of this state of slumber in which they were once held into, as it were, a new and revived life of faith in the Son of God, will be best able to set to their seal how far our description is true, or our words contain needful cautions and salutary counsel.

III. But now let us attempt to show the CURE of this prevailing malady, or rather the way in which it is brought about, with its fruits and effects.

1. The usual beginning of a revival of the soul from this deep sleep, as well as the means of its accomplishment, is a stroke of AFFLICTION.

God has a chastening rod laid up in reserve for those of his family who depart from him; and sooner or later he brings it down upon their backs. Thus sometimes he sends a long and painful illness, or a distressing bereavement, or a severe family affliction, or some cutting stroke and heavy reverse in providence; and working, by his Spirit and grace, in and with these stripes of his hand, he awakens the soul out of its sleep.

The eyes are now opened to see, and the ears to hear, the heart to understand, and the conscience to feel. And what a sight meets the astonished view— at times almost more than the soul can bear, for it seems as if the end would be hopeless despair. Now it begins to see where it has been, the sad state into which it had fallen, the snares and temptations in which it had been held fast, and the grievous state of carnality and worldliness into which it had gradually sunk. Nothing wrong might have been observed by man in the outward conduct; but each heart knows its own bitterness. There the root of all backsliding lies and the soul well knows that God looks to the heart, and if that is not right before him, nothing is right. Under, therefore, his afflicting hand it sinks, at times, very low, until its very hope seems almost removed as a tree. But as this is the work of God, and the means whereby he is bringing the soul out of its state of barrenness and death, he most kindly and graciously comes to its help; and the way he does it, for the most part, is this—

2. He revives the spirit of PRAYER which had sunk very low;

and with this revival comes power to confess those sins and backslidings which lie with the chief weight on the conscience. None but those who have passed through such or a similar experience can know how the soul thus dealt with abases itself in humble confession before the Lord; nor can even they describe its self-loathing and self-abhorrence, the low place it takes, the earnest longings and anxious desire for a word of mercy and pardon from his gracious lips, or how it looks up to his gracious Majesty again and again, by night and by day, for a sense of his manifested love and favor.

The soul is not asleep now; its deadness is gone, its coldness and barrenness removed, and it now is truly and really alive unto God. This is a reviving as the grain, when the rain comes after a long season of drought, or a growing of the vine in the spring after the dreary days of winter, when there was nothing visible but the naked stem. (Hos. 14:7.) There is thus almost a returning to the days of its youth, and a renewal of the former life of God in the soul.

3. Now, coupled with this, as, in answer to prayer, the Lord draws near in the manifestations of his grace, there is also a revival of faith in the Person and work of the Son of God,

and that of a simpler and clearer nature than before. Never does the suitability of

Christ, or the riches of his grace, appear so great as to a soul awakened out of the spirit of slumber again to look unto him. How it wonders at and admires his great patience, his kind and tender forbearance, his wondrous grace in bearing so long with such base returns for all his goodness and mercy! How it admires and adore his glorious Person, sees and feels the efficacy of his most precious blood and righteousness, and the sweet secrets of his dying love! How tender is now the conscience of sinning against such mercy and such love!

What a bitter and evil thing is sin seen and felt to be! What a discovery there too, of the hidden corruption of the heart, of the danger of being entangled in any secret snare, and that a separation of spirit from the world and worldly things! Never until now did the soul seem truly and really to repent of sin with that godly sorrow which needs not to be repented of; never were there more earnest desires after holiness, spirituality of mind, and communion with God and his dear Son. Never was the word of God more open to the enlightened understanding; its inspiration, wisdom and truth more clearly seen, or its power on the heart more deeply felt. Never did eternal realities lie with greater weight and power upon the mind, and never did the things of time and sense appear more light, transitory, and vain.

The soul now says to itself, "Let me never sin again against such goodness and mercy; let me never again drop into carnality, worldliness, and death." But still seeing and feeling more than ever the strength of sin and the weakness of the flesh, and knowing, painfully knowing, what it is to be left to self, it begs of the Lord to keep it as the apple of his eye, to hold it up in every slippery place, that it may not slip or fall; to shine upon it continually with the beams of his love, and ever to water it by his Spirit and grace. It desires ever to walk in his fear and live to his praise, to know his will and do it, and be found fruitful in every good word and work.

But we will not enlarge upon these points, as we have said enough upon them and perhaps too much for the generality of our readers, as we have been describing what may be to them a strange and unknown path. But we write for the spiritual, for those who know divine things by divine teaching, for we seek and desire their profit. It is not often that we can get what we may call a little close talk with our spiritual readers, or press those points home upon their consciences which often press upon our own. It is in writing as it is in conversation. How much of our communion with the people of God in conversation is upon mere external matters and subjects in which there is not much heart and conscience work! What little close talk! What little coming into the real heart of the matter— those bosom secrets of true religion and vital godliness which we most feel before God! How we play upon the surface, skim the mere outside, talk at a distance upon divine matters, without that close getting into each other's hearts and consciences, or coming into those spots where the secret springs of all our spiritual life really lie.

What poor, cold work, for the most part, what is called religious conversation is! How unedifying, disappointing, and deadening, rather than reviving, refreshing, and strengthening the soul by mutual communion, and creative of love and union by having nourishment ministered by the joints and hands of members holding the Head! (Col. 2:19.) In our communion even with the real people of God, how rare are the seasons when we so see eye to eye and feel heart to heart that spirit melts into spirit, and the communion of saints leads up to fresh communion with God! It is with a desire thus to edify and profit the souls of our readers with whom we can converse only by pen and not by mouth, that in this opening year we meet and greet them affectionately with our Address. Receive it, dear friends, in the spirit in which we hope it is written and sent to you. It is meant for your good.

We have, perhaps, touched upon a few sore spots and made some of you wince. But if we have wounded, it is that you might be cleansed of their filth and gore by the application of precious blood— and if we have somewhat crudely or roughly pulled away the veil and shown you your guilty shame, it is that you might see and know more of the robe of righteousness which is put upon those that believe.

We do not, we dare not, write flattering words to please the dead. Our mission, our errand, our ministry is to the living, and especially to those among them who are tried and exercised with temptations and afflictions whereby their soul is kept alive unto God. Let the dead bury their dead. Let the flatterers go on with their flatteries, deceiving and being deceived, building up their walls and daubing them with untempered mortar. We are bidden not to be a partaker of other men's sins, which we should be if we wilfully sanctioned such men and such things. Our desire is to be found faithful to the position in which we are placed, and to edify and profit the living family of God. Commending you, whom grace has made and manifested to be such, to his wise and safe keeping, who alone can bless the writer or reader, and asking for your prayers upon our labors in your service, we are, dear Friends in the Lord

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