

A Kingdom Which Cannot Be Moved

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"And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." Heb. 12:27, 28

In reading the pages of the New Testament, I have been sometimes struck with these two notable things: 1, *first*, the extreme *respect*, I may say *veneration*, which our Lord and his apostles paid to the Scriptures of the Old Testament. In all their quotations from them, there is an evident assumption that every part of the Old Testament Scriptures is fully, immediately, and authoritatively inspired—that the whole is the sure word of God which cannot be broken. Let me give you two or three instances by way of impressing this fact more clearly upon your mind and memory—a precaution all the more needed in the present day when such subtle and yet violent attacks are made on the full inspiration of the Old Testament Scriptures. Our Lord himself, in what is commonly called the "Sermon on the Mount," uses this striking expression, "Verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." By the word "law," there we must understand more than the law of the ten commandments, for in the preceding verse the Lord had said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the *prophets*; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." (Matt. 5:17.) The word "*jot*" is the name of the Hebrew vowel *I*, marked in that language by a small dot only; and the expression "*tittle*" refers to the shape

of the Hebrew consonants, which are frequently only distinguished by a slight turn of the pen. Thus neither vowel nor consonant should suffer loss or alteration, but the whole stand as the authoritative word of God, until the whole should be fulfilled. The perfect inviolability of the word of God is asserted in almost similar terms by the Lord in Luke, "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass than one tittle of the law to fail." (Luke 16:17.) With similar decision and authority he says, "If he called them gods unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken," (John 10:35), plainly declaring that every word of the Old Testament scriptures was so unalterably the word of God that it could not possibly be violated by nonfulfilment.

But, as another instance, take the way in which the Lord himself met and broke Satan's temptations in the wilderness. He used one weapon, and one only, to beat back the foul adversary and quell the force of his subtle attacks: "It is written." That was the only sword or shield which our blessed Lord wielded to foil every assault of the tempter. Now if the words quoted by our Lord at three several times under three several attacks had not been the sure and actual word of God, why should Satan have given back? Had each passage not been inspired by the breath of the Almighty, and as firm as God's own eternal throne, why should Satan have been defeated when he brought against our Lord those severe temptations? But that arch-fiend knew what some of our clerical and dissenting divines have got to learn, and that to their eternal shame and confusion of face, that "every word of God is pure," and that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God." (Prov. 30:5; 2 Tim. 3:16.) But take another instance. When Peter drew his sword in defence of his blessed Master, our Lord said, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the

scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be?" (Matt. 26:53, 54.) There was a positive, an overwhelming necessity that the scriptures should be fulfilled, which over-ruled and over-bore every other consideration, for God "magnifies his word above all his name" (Psalm 138: 2), that is, faithfulness to his word stands at the head of all his other attributes.

To impress this still more deeply on your mind, let me add one more instance from the lips of the blessed Redeemer. In his last agony, "Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scriptures might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst." (John 19:28.) The Holy Ghost had declared of him, "They gave me also gall for my meat and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." (Psalm 69:21.) Jesus could not die till these words were fulfilled. What a proof of the inspiration and fulfilment of that word at which infidels mock and which Essayists and Reviewers seek to undermine! I think I need not further enlarge upon this point. I have confined myself to the Lord's own testimony; but you will see all through the New Testament what respect is paid in a similar manner by all the inspired apostles to the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures.

2. The other notable thing which I have observed in reading the New Testament is this: that the Holy Ghost gives an *interpretation* of many passages of the Old Testament which strikes us, at least at first sight, as somewhat *singular*; by which I mean that it is not obvious, or such as we should have thought of. This of course is from our ignorance. The Holy Ghost has given us in the New Testament the interpretation which was his mind when he revealed the passage in the Old. I will give you one or two instances of this interpretation given by the Holy Ghost in the New Testament of Old Testament Scriptures which seem singular at first sight. In Hebrews 1 we find this passage quoted as

proof of the divine Sonship of Jesus: "I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son." Now if we refer to the place where that word was spoken, it was a part of the message sent by the Lord through Nathan to David, and had in the first instance respect to Solomon. But a greater than Solomon was there. Under that promise given to David on behalf of Solomon there was a promise made to Jesus as the glorious and eternal Son of God. So again: "Out of Egypt have I called my son," is applied by Matthew to the return of Jesus from Egypt, though in the passage itself, in the prophet Hosea 11:1, it seems to refer to the children of Israel. But the Holy Ghost had a deeper meaning than the simple and obvious one, and had reference to the calling of Jesus out of Egypt, when he returned with his mother to Judea.

But, not to prolong this part of our subject, though I believe a most instructive work might be written on the point had I time and abilities, let me now show you what bearing it has upon the words before us. If you look closely at the passage, you will find that the apostle gives us in it an interpretation of a passage in Haggai, which we should not certainly have considered to be the meaning of the passage had not the Holy Ghost so interpreted it by the pen of Paul. Look at the verse before our text: "Whose voice then shook the earth [this refers to the shaking of the earth at Mount Sinai]: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven." If we refer to the passage thus quoted from Haggai 2:6, we shall find that it refers to the building of the second temple, which was erected upon the ruins of the first: "Yet once it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts." But what vague, indefinite, and probably erroneous views should we have formed of the meaning of God's

shaking the heavens and the earth, as prior to the coming of the Messiah, "the desire of all nations," had not the Holy Ghost put the right key into the hand of the apostle!

Approach, then, with me his interpretation of the passage, and observe in it the four following particulars. The apostle takes Haggai's text and builds upon it a spiritual interpretation, which I shall, with God's blessing, lay before you this morning, and, in so doing, view,

I.—*First, the basis of the apostle's argument, that whatever things can be shaken may be, and are to be removed;*

II.—*Secondly, that things shaken are to be removed, for this purpose, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain;*

III.—*Thirdly, how this becomes a part of the experience of the family of God: that they "receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken," as the word may be read, and should have been translated;*

IV.—*The effect of their receiving this kingdom which cannot be shaken: that they should have or rather hold grace, "whereby they may serve God acceptably with reverence and holy fear."*

I.—You will observe that the apostle lays this down as the basis of all he afterwards brings forward, which we may therefore call, in military language, the key of his position, or, in simpler words, the foundation of his argument, the whole substance of which I will give you in the compass of a very short sentence: *Whatever is shaken, or can be shaken, may be and is to be removed.*

i. Let us look, then, at this "divine sentence in the lips of the King," this heavenly principle, this broad and sweeping assertion; for it is of amazing weight and power, and as a mighty lever in the hands of the Spirit, such as the ancient mathematician asked for, moves the solid earth itself from its place.

And first view it *naturally* and literally, to get a clear conception of its meaning and bearing. It is true then in a *literal* sense. I have sometimes seen, to use a scriptural figure, in the street "a bowing wall," that is, a wall which from age or loose foundation, is leaning out of the perpendicular, so that, as the prophet speaks, it is "ready to fall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant." (Psalm 62:3; Isaiah 30:13.) This wall is unsafe. Can you build a house upon it? Why, the first gale may blow it all down, or it may drop down suddenly of itself. It is a thing which "can be shaken," and must therefore be removed, if you mean to put any firm, permanent building on it or in its place.

Take another example. Suppose, as I look up to the ceiling of this building, I were to see a large crack running across it; or, casting my eye upon the wall, I should see a rent from top to bottom; pieces of mortar falling from the roof, or a loose stone jutting out of the wall. Should we be safe in it? Might not the roof fall upon us and crush us? Some countries, as parts of South America, are subject to earthquakes. Scarcely any building there is not at times shaken. I have read of the roof of a house opening and the blue sky seen through the crack, and then closing again. How should you like to live in such a country, or such a house? If, then, such a house would not do for time, how would a building equally tottering do for eternity? This, then, is the apostle's argument, that if we are to have a building which is to last for eternity, it must be of such a nature as is not capable of

being shaken. And observe the force of it, especially if we adopt the marginal reading, which I think far preferable to the text: "And this word Yet once more signifieth the removing of those things that may be shaken." But, you may say, the Lord in the passage in the prophet Haggai has not fully and clearly declared, "I will remove the things which may be shaken." "O, but he has," replies the apostle, "for when he declares that he will shake the heavens and the earth," he thereby means that as they can be shaken they are virtually condemned as unable to stand, and must therefore be taken out of the way to make room for something better. This is the interpretation which he gives to the prophecy of Haggai; singular, I grant you, and such as we should never have thought of, still full of wisdom and power when rightly understood. Let me, then, carrying this interpretation with me, unfold a little more fully and clearly the words of the prophet.

1. First, then, look at God's voice as shaking *the earth*. When did God's voice, in an especial manner, shake the earth? When the law was given at Mount Sinai; for God gave the law with very terrific accompaniments, in order to impress more deeply upon the mind of the people the force and authority of the Law and the dread Majesty of the Lawgiver, that he was indeed in it "a consuming fire." "And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly." The whole mount is here represented as quaking or trembling before

the Lord greatly. To this quaking of the mount the apostle alludes when he says, "Whose voice then shook the earth" (Heb. 12:26); for this quaking of Mount Sinai seems to have been typical and emblematic of three things:—I, First, of the *trembling of the earth* generally, for the trembling of the mount was a type and figure of the trembling of the earth before the majesty of its Maker. This is frequently represented in Scripture as the effect of his power and of his presence. Thus, we read, "Lord, when thou wentest out of Seir, the earth trembled and the heavens dropped" (Judges 5:4); and again, "Then the earth shook and trembled" (2 Sam. 22:8); and again, "Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob." (Psalm 116:7.)

2. But again, the quaking of Mount Sinai was intended also to intimate the majesty of God *in a broken law*, and, by shaking the solid ground under the feet of the people, to represent the giving way of everything earthly, however apparently firm and stable, before the indignation of a sin-avenging God. Hereby was it shown that the law was of that terrific nature, that, like a volcano, it would shake to its very foundation all human righteousness, and leave nothing that stood upon earth remaining upon its own base.

3. The third reason why the earth was shaken at the presence of the Lord upon Mount Sinai was, to show the *passing away of everything earthly*. This is the grand argument of the apostle, which I shall hope presently more fully to unfold. Suffice it for the moment to show its peculiar bearing on everything of an earthly nature. As, then, the Lord shook the earth when he appeared in majesty upon Sinai's blazing top, from this we infer that everything of an earthly nature is shattered by the anger of God in a broken Law. The first shock was at the fall, for man was shattered in

Paradise: all his faculties there fell into ruin by the first act of disobedience, and body and soul alike became a wreck. As sin entered, happiness fled; for in Paradise man was happy. Then was he pure and innocent; he could serve God according to the measure of his faculties, and have communion with him as his beneficent and benevolent Creator. He had too all the delights of nature and of sense—a garden to walk in full of sweet flowers and of pleasant fruits, watered by streams and cooled by the evening breeze, with a fond wife to love and cherish, and everything in him and around to delight his eye and gratify his heart, without sin, guilt, or fear. But all this purity and happiness, as resting on a creature basis, was capable of being shaken and removed; for innocence and happiness received at the same moment a fatal shock: sin broke up both by one blow. Yet unconvinced and unbelieving, man is still always seeking happiness in some shape or other upon earth. He does not see or feel that out of God happiness is impossible, and that to seek it in the creature is to add sin to sin. But look at this vain attempt in a variety of instances.

1. Look at people *young in life*. What romantic prospects dance before their eyes!

"What dreams
Of love and home by mazy streams!"

But what a rude shock do these earthly dreams of happiness usually experience! This is true of most if not all who build their hopes of happiness on the creature; but particularly so in the case of the *family of God*. How jealous is he of all such schemes of earthly bliss; and how he shatters all sooner or later by his mighty hand!

2. Look, for instance, at *health*, that indispensable element of

all earthly happiness! What a rude shock many of the dear family of God have experienced in their earthly tabernacle, even in their youthful days, by accident or disease, so as to mar all earthly happiness almost before the race of life was begun.

3. Look again at *wedded happiness*—that

"Perpetual fountain of domestic sweets"—

how bitter a drop often falls from the hands of God into that honeyed cup! Why sighs that mourning widow? Why does her heart swell and her eye run over? What means that scalding drop on her cheek? But even if the root be spared, is no branch ever lopped off? How many a blooming daughter has faded away in consumption before a mother's eye! How many a fine strong youth has been cut down by fever, or sudden inflammation has borne him away to the cold grave, in the very pride and prospect of life!

4. But apart from these elements of creature happiness shattered and broken, what *disappointment*, what vexation, what sorrow and care we find in everything we put our hands to! Even with health and home unbroken, wife and child untouched by death's cold hand, there is sin and misery enough in a man's own bosom to fill his heart with continual sorrow. Thus wisely and mercifully all our attempts to grasp human happiness fail and come to nought. "The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness; the Lord shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh" (Psa. 29:8); and his voice having once shaken the earth, that voice shook with it all the foundations of creature happiness. Child of grace, murmur not at the voice of the Lord which has broken thy cedars, for the Lord breaketh the cedars of Lebanon. (Psa. 29:5.) He does not mean that thou shouldst have thy heaven below the sky, nor live after the

fashion of this world, and thus die under the displeasure of the Almighty. It is a kind hand, though a rude one, which blasts all thy schemes of creature happiness, that breaks thy body into pieces with sickness, blights all thy prospects of wealth, and fame, and reputation, and ambition, and pours bitter gall into each honeyed cup. The passer-by who saw Lazarus full of sores and the rich man at his sumptuous feast would have envied the feaster and pitied the pauper. But the scene was altered when the beggar lay in Abraham's bosom and the reveller cried for the cooling drop. Better be a Lazarus in rags than a Dives in purple.

ii. But take God's shaking the earth in another sense. When Mount Sinai quaked to its very base, it was typical of the shaking of *the hearts and consciences* of God's people under a *fiery law*.

1. See how this shakes to pieces all a man's *own righteousness*. Have you not sought in times past to build that up? What attempts you made to conciliate the favour of God by deeds of righteousness, by countless acts of self-imposed obedience! But how this building of yours, which you were rearing up like another Babel, fancying you could by it climb up to heaven, was rudely shaken by the curse of a broken law! God's purpose is to remove everything which can be shaken; and therefore the law comes with killing power into the sinner's conscience to shake him and it all to pieces; to make him quake and tremble before the Lord, as the children of Israel quaked at Sinai's burning mount; to shatter his Babel, confound his speech, and make him cease from building his tower.

2. But see too how all a man's strength is shaken and broken when the Law comes home with power and conviction to the sinner's breast. He once fondly thought how strong he was to

keep God's law, to do his will, and to conciliate his favour. But he now finds that will and power and strength he has none to keep the Law with a perfect heart. It was because we were "without strength" to serve or please God that "Christ died for the ungodly." (Rom. 5:6.) Thus a sinner truly convinced of his weakness falls before God, slaughtered in his inmost conscience as to any ability to keep that law which God has commanded, and to which he has attached so awful a penalty.

3. But the same shattering stroke shakes to pieces all his *wisdom*. We all of us, though born like the wild ass's colt, think ourselves wise enough to find unaided our way to the city; wise enough to please both God and man, serve the flesh, enjoy the world, and at last manage to win heaven. But this fool's dream is rudely broken up when a man begins, under strokes of heavenly tuition, to learn the real truth of the matter. Then the inquiry is not how to serve God and the devil at the same time and almost in the same way; but which way should he turn, or what shall he do to gain God's favour? How shall he avoid sin; how obtain holiness; how live to the glory of God, and walk in all things unblameable before God and man? Here all his wisdom is baffled; it is shattered by the same shock that broke to pieces his self-righteousness and legal strength.

iii. But I intimated that the shaking of the earth at Mount Sinai was typical and figurative of the *removing* of what could be thus shaken. Now apply this to all that I have shown you can be and actually is shaken by the voice of the Almighty. Why are all schemes of earthly happiness shaken; goods, health, family, name, fame, prospects; why are all thrown down as an earthquake buries a city in ruin? That they may all be *removed* out of our hearts' affections. And why does the Law curse and condemn all the righteousness, strength,

and wisdom of man? That all may be *removed* out of the way, and a place prepared in the heart for Christ to be "made of God unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption."

iv. But the apostle here, as interpreting the prophecy of Haggai, gives us an intimation that there was to be a shaking, not of earth only, but also of *heaven*. There is some little difficulty at first sight in his meaning here, but I hope, with God's help and blessing, to give you the mind of the Spirit in it. "Whose voice then shook the earth, but now he hath promised, saying Yet once more, I shake not the earth only but also heaven." You see that *heaven* was to be shaken as well as earth; and not only to be shaken but to be *removed*.

But what is the *heaven* which God here declares he would shake, and by implication remove as a scroll? Not surely the heaven of heavens, in which he himself dwells; not his own eternal throne. Can we suppose for a moment that heaven itself, in which the Almighty dwells in all his grandeur and glory, can tremble and fall, and be removed like a shepherd's tent? Surely not. The throne of Jehovah is as unshaken as his own eternal Being. It is not, then, that heaven which was to be shaken, but the *Jewish heaven*. Let me explain my meaning, and with it, I hope, the mind of the Spirit.

After the Lord had, in terrible majesty, given the people the Law of the ten commandments, he called Moses up into the mount, and there gave him what is usually called "The Ceremonial Law." I cannot say I much admire the term, as it almost seems to imply that it was merely a law of ceremonies; whereas the whole of it was a divine revelation which under type and figure preached a precious gospel, and was so understood and received by the Old Testament

believers. The believing Israelite did not rest upon the blood of the daily sacrifice, nor the incense offered within the veil by the high Priest, when he took and sprinkled the blood of the bullock and the goat on and before the mercy-seat, on the solemn day of atonement. He looked through these figures, these types and shadows, and fixed his eye by faith on the atoning blood of Messiah yet to come. But the carnal worshipper, whose mind was unenlightened by the Spirit of God, looked merely to the type, not to the thing typified. He rested on the blood of the sacrifice, as if the blood of bullocks could take away sin. By this, and keeping strictly the fasts and feasts of the Levitical law, and by an attentive observance of every ceremonial institution, he expected at death to pass into the presence of God. Now this ceremonial law is called "heaven" here, because its types and figures were "patterns," as the apostle speaks of "things in the heavens." You will recollect that the apostle draws a distinction between the "patterns of heavenly things" and "the heavenly things" themselves. "It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these." And you will observe that he calls the tabernacle and the vessels of the ministry which were sprinkled with blood by Moses "patterns of things in the heavens." The most holy place, for instance, was a pattern or representation of the immediate presence of God in heaven; the veil between the holy and the most holy place represented the flesh of Jesus through which alone we pass into the presence of God; the burning of the incense within the most holy place was typical of the intercession of our blessed High Priest at the right hand of the Father; and the bringing in of the blood of the atonement within the veil was typical of Jesus entering into the presence of God by virtue of his own blood. Thus the apostle in the text speaks of the whole of this ceremonial law as "heaven;" not that he means

by it the heaven of heavens in which God dwells, but a representation of heavenly things to the Old Testament Church as their guide to heaven. It was what God himself gave to the Israelite to represent to his mind in type and figure, those heavenly realities of which the Lord of life and glory is now the substance. This, then, was the "heaven" which God by the mouth of Haggai promised to shake, and as capable of being shaken and to be shaken, it was a prophetic warning that it should be removed. When our blessed Lord hung and died on the cross, there were three remarkable occurrences, which seem to have each a typical meaning.

1. First there was "*darkness* over all the land." By this was intimated not only the anger of God against sin in that stormy hour of Jesus' sufferings, but the lowering wrath of the Almighty over the Jewish people.

2. There was an *earthquake*, which was to show there was a shaking of the very earth on which guilty man and especially that guilty people stood.

And 3, thirdly, there was a *shaking of the temple* itself, for the veil was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. Thus there was not only the shaking of the earth, the earthly Jerusalem, by the earthquake which heralded the Lord's death, but the very temple itself in a spiritual sense was shaken; for the same shock that rent the veil asunder typically shook the temple in which the veil was. There was a voice in all these occurrences; and thus the veil of the temple being rent in twain and the disclosing to view of the holy of holies behind the veil, and the general shock which took place, all implied that the Jewish heaven, as prophesied, was now shaken by the voice of God; that therefore the ceremonial law was to pass out of sight, and that there was to be established upon the base of that which was thus

shaken, and thus to be removed, a kingdom, which, as in **David's [?? perhaps, Daniel's]** interpretation of the image, should "stand for ever." (Dan. 2:44.)

II.—But I pass on to show you that the predicted removing of those things which are shaken as of things that are made, was preparatory and preliminary to the establishing of those *things which cannot be shaken*.

i. What we want is something that can last for eternity. For eternity we were born. We carry immortal souls in our mortal bodies, and we shall exist, when this life comes to a close, in a state either of eternal happiness or eternal misery. Now every saint of God upon whose conscience eternal realities have been laid with any degree of weight and power, wants to have that which will secure his eternal happiness. God shakes therefore both his earth and his heaven, and for this purpose, that those things which cannot be shaken, and of which he is afterwards put into possession may remain, yea, endure for ever and ever. Why does the Lord shake all earthly schemes of human happiness? To give you who fear his name happiness which shall endure for ever and ever. Why does he blight all your prospects, your plans of ambition and of success in life, your romantic dreams of pleasure and earthly joy? To take them out of the way, that he may give you in their room the peace of God which passeth understanding. Why shake your conscience with the earthquake of his Law? Why remove your fancied heaven built up by your own righteousness and exertions? Why was that legal and ceremonial heaven of yours, in which you would have fallen asleep until you sank into hell, shaken to pieces? Why was your self-righteousness, your creature strength, your vain resolutions of being better and of doing better, and all your expectations of going to heaven by praying, reading, fasting, &c., shaken to pieces by the anger

of the Almighty, by the discovery of the evils of your heart, by the flashing in of his wrath against sin, and doubts and fears and tremblings seizing hold of your conscience? Why, that this legal, false, and fallacious heaven might fall into ruin, and the whole building be utterly removed. If a nobleman bought a piece of ground on which to erect a stately mansion, and it was occupied by hovels and miserable abodes of poverty and crime, what would his first course be? To make a clear sweep; remove the whole, take away every stick and stone. Every trace and vestige of the haunts of filth and misery must be removed, that there may be a clear and proper site on which to erect his palace. So in the things of God. There can be no union between nature and grace; no junction of works of the creature and of the Creator. There must be a clear sweep. The old hovel, the wretched ruins into which we sank at the fall, must be swept away, that there may be a clear and open site on which the temple of grace may rise. The things thus shaken are to be removed as things which are made by human hands, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

ii. We are thus brought to that part of our subject in which we have to consider the things *which cannot be shaken*. These things are to remain when the things shaken are removed like a cloud. What are those things? Is it not of great importance to know what they are, that we may have some evidence how far we possess them? Let us look, then, at some of them.

1. The *eternal purposes* of God, what the Almighty in his Trinity of Persons and Unity of essence has determined in his own bosom,—these counsels are as firm as Jehovah's eternal throne: they can no more be shaken than Jehovah himself can cease to be. Do we not read, "The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever; the thoughts of his heart to all

generations?"

2. Again, the *everlasting covenant*, ordered in all things and sure, in which the people of God were chosen in the Lord Jesus Christ, as their covenant head, can never be shaken or removed. It is, therefore, called "the everlasting covenant" (Heb. 13:20), as enduring for ever and ever. It is the solemn ratification of the counsel of God's mind and will, and therefore fixed and unalterable.

3. But again, *God's word and God's oath*; those "two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie," are things also that cannot be shaken. God's *word* shall stand; for "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever." And God's *oath* which he sware to Abraham, that in blessing he would bless him, must surely be as firm and as valid as his word, as the apostle argues; "For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath."

4. *The finished work* of the Son of God upon the cross, that full and entire accomplishment of the Father's will, when Jesus said with expiring breath, "It is finished," is a thing that cannot be shaken. His own dying words sufficiently shew that he had accomplished the work which the Father gave him to do; that he had put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; that he had obeyed God's righteous law in every particular; that he had reconciled the Church to God by his own blood; had washed away all her sins in that precious fountain then and there opened for all uncleanness; had clothed her with his own spotless righteousness, and brought her nigh to God perfumed by the merit of his own intercession. That work,

therefore, must stand for ever: the gates of hell shall never prevail against it.

5. *The resurrection* of the blessed Lord from the dead, with every benefit and blessing for the Church of God contained therein and ratified thereby, is also one of "the things which remain." He was thereby "declared to be the Son of God with power;" and life and immortality were most fully and clearly brought to light. No convulsion of nature, no violence, no wickedness of man, no unbelief or infidelity, can ever alter that blessed fact, that Jesus is risen from the dead, yea, rose for our justification, triumphed over death and hell, and went up on high to the glory of the Father, to sit down at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens.

6. So also the *present power* of Jesus, and his *regal authority*, as holding the keys of hell and death; the sceptre which he sways; the grace he gives; the sins he subdues; and the execution of his eternal purposes which he lives to accomplish in the salvation of all his people, and the putting down of all who rise up against him and them: these too are things that cannot be shaken.

7. And I may add that his *coming again* a second time without sin unto salvation to judge the world and take his people unto himself, is another thing which cannot be shaken by all the powers of earth and hell.

The earth at Mount Sinai was shaken. This was typical of the law of the ten commandments being removed out of the way, which it was when Jesus fulfilled it and endured its penalty; for "he took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." (Col. 2:14.) So also, was the Jewish heaven shaken and removed by the same obedience and death. Ever, then, bear in mind the distinction between things that can be shaken

and removed, and things which cannot be shaken and remain. Carry this distinction firmly in eye and heart, and then you may divide all things in nature and in grace, all things here and hereafter into two classes. And the question may then rise to your lips as a thousand varied circumstances come before you. "Can this thing be shaken? It can; then it may be removed. Can my health be shaken? It can; this, then, is an indication that my body must one day be laid in the grave. Do I meet with losses in providence, bad debts, reverses, and many disappointments? These shakings in my temporal affairs clearly warn me that all I hold in providence I hold with a trembling hand: for all of it may be shaken; and if so, it must be removed from me or I from it. My family, your families, may they be shaken? May death come in and take away a beloved son or daughter? May a wife be torn from the arms of her husband, a husband snatched from a loving wife? May rude shocks thus invade the happiness of a family? Like a crack in a building, this indicates that the closest family bonds, as thus shaken, must also be eventually removed. Can name, fame, or reputation be shaken? Yes; even by slander's breath. That base, then, is not sufficiently strong to build upon it earthly happiness."

Or can anything you can do to gain heaven by your own exertions be shaken? If so, the very circumstance of its being shaken shows it will not stand for eternity; it is to be removed. So look round; view earth's fairest pageant; and as in this wide panorama object after object rises to view, still the same thought surges up to the weary eye, sinking heart, and quivering lip, "This thing can be shaken. Even now it trembles as I look at it. Like an illumination it is but a show; lamp after lamp flickers and is gone."

iv. But let me now look at what *cannot be shaken*; let me lift my eyes from earth to heaven. What do I see when I look up

in faith to Jesus on his throne of grace and glory? I see the firm purposes of God, and the unalterable counsels of his eternal wisdom and love, established in the Person of his dear Son; I see the "everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure;" I see the election of God's people to eternal glory; I see the Son of God at his right hand, having finished the work which his Father gave him to do; I see him waiting till all his enemies are made his footstool, and he himself to appear in the clouds of heaven. These I see are things that must remain. And if I am to remain too, I must have an interest in them. My affections must be fixed on things above and I be one in heart and spirit with those things which remain, so that I may stand in them and with them now and to all eternity.

III.—But this leads us to our next point, the "*receiving the kingdom which cannot be moved.*" I rarely like to find fault with our admirable translators. We have reason to bless God every day of our lives for the translation of the scriptures into our own language. But I wish that instead of using the word "moved," they had used the word "shaken," for it is precisely the same word in the original; and I think that by the change of the term we have lost some of the clearness and almost essence of the passage. Let me read it then as I think they should have translated it:—"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken." The apostle had been speaking in the preceding verse of things which could be shaken and things which could not be shaken; and then applying the subject in a personal manner, says, "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken." You see how he thus brings the whole subject into the very focus of individual experience, takes as it were in his hand a thing which cannot be shaken, and lodges it in the believer's breast. Thus you see there is "a kingdom which *cannot* be shaken." What is it? The kingdom of grace as preparatory to

the kingdom of glory. And by receiving this kingdom, we receive into the bosom as a firm, inward possession those things which flow out of the purposes of God and stand connected with the finished work of his dear Son.

i. The work of God upon the soul is often spoken of in scripture as "the *kingdom of God*" or the "*kingdom of heaven*;" and the reason is, because by virtue of God's grace, we are made subjects of the glorious King now sitting at the right hand of the Father. Thus we read "The kingdom of God is within you;" "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." This, then, is "the kingdom" spoken of in our text, and called "a kingdom which cannot be shaken" as standing on the same immoveable basis as the word and oath of God.

But the word "receiving" implies an embracing of it in vital experience. Thus, we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken when we embrace by faith those divine and heavenly realities which stand firmly fixed in the Person and work of the Son of God, for by receiving them into our heart we come into a manifested possession of them. In this way a union is created and cemented by the blessed Spirit between a believing heart and the things which cannot be shaken at the right hand of God; for so far as we are concerned, they are of no use to us, nor indeed do they seem to have any real existence for us, unless they are brought into experimental possession; for "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." What will the death of Christ avail you unless you believe in him by a living faith? Or what will his blood avail you as a fountain opened for sin and uncleanness if not received into a believing heart? Just look, then, at this; for it has a deep, personal, individual meaning, and a most truly experimental bearing on all the family of God.

1. There is, for instance, *the pardon of sin*. This flows only through atoning blood, because it is through the blood of the Lamb alone that all sin is pardoned. When Jesus said, "It is finished," sin was cast behind God's back, thrown into the depths of the sea, and washed away for ever in his most precious blood. But we have to receive it as our own, for it is a most precious part of the kingdom of grace. When the Lord, then, is pleased to manifest a sense of his pardoning love to the soul, it is a receiving of that which cannot be moved, for it is God's own revealing and sealing of the blood of his dear Son upon the heart and conscience.

2. Thus also the *justification of the person* before the throne of God by the imputation of Christ's obedience is a most blessed truth. But this can only be received by faith, for only as "being justified by faith we have peace with God." (Rom. 5:1.) You thus receive in justification a kingdom which cannot be shaken. How do you expect to stand before the throne of God at the great day? In your own righteousness or Christ's? If you stand in your own, God has already shaken it when he shook Mount Sinai with his mighty voice; and as thus shaken it must be removed, and you too with it. But if you stand before the throne clothed in Christ's righteousness, you will hear the welcome words, "Come ye blessed of my Father."

3. But there is also a receiving of the *spirit of adoption*, whereby we cry, "Abba, Father," and receive the witness of the Spirit to our spirit that we are God's children. He who receives this receives what cannot be shaken, for it is a part, and a most blessed part of the inward kingdom of heaven.

4. So again, any *clear testimony* that God is your Father and Friend; any intimation of his love to your soul; any whisper

of his Spirit to your heart; any application of the blood of the atonement to your conscience; any unexpected yet gladly welcomed breaking in of light, life, liberty, and power—the receiving of these manifestations of mercy and grace is receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved.

But you may say, "I am often moved. I have felt all this, or a measure of this; but am often much shaken about it." Yes, so you are. But *you* may be moved and *the thing* itself not be moved. These are two very different things. Look at it in this point of view: You may be moved about the Scripture being true, for we have infidel doubts as well as unbelieving fears. But your doubts do not shake the inspiration of God's word. You may have a doubt about Christ being the Son of God, though I trust only a passing one; but were you even a bold denier of that vital truth, your doubts or your denial would not alter the blessed fact that he is the Son of the Father in truth and love; else you make man's unbelief stronger than God's veracity. So it is as regards the work of God upon your soul. You may be and are much tried about it, but your being shaken about it does not alter the blessed reality, if indeed you possess it.

"If Jesus once upon me shine,
Then Jesus is for ever mine."

The sun is now shining in the sky: we see it; we know it by the evidence of his bright beams. But suppose the day were obscured with cloud, would that sweep the sun out of the sky? So it is in grace. If the Sun of Righteousness has risen upon you with healing in his wings, and shed a beam of sacred light into your soul, it may be afterwards long and deeply veiled in clouds; God may hide his face, and you may sink into darkness; but that does not destroy the blessed fact, that the Sun did once shine into your heart.

ii. But as this is an important point, let me show how it bears equally upon *every grace of the Spirit*. If the Lord has given us a living *faith*, that faith is never shaken; if a *good hope* through grace, that good hope is never shaken; if *love* to his dear name, that love is never shaken. But you say, "You fairly astonish me; for you contradict all my feelings, and not only so, but a good deal of your own preaching and experience." Yes, I do, if you make your feelings to be the judge, or if you misunderstand my preaching. Let me then clear up this point. Is it your *faith* that is shaken, or *you* about your faith? Are not these two things different? Apply it to the grace of hope by way of proof. You may be shaken about your hope. But if "a good hope through grace," it stands firm, whether you doubt about it or not. When the anchor is down deep in the sea, the pilot may be shaken as to whether it will hold fast. But his fears have no effect upon the anchor itself: if the anchor be good and if it be firmly fixed in the sand, it will hold whatever the pilot thinks of it. His fears of being tossed upon the rocks will not toss him there; if the anchor is good, the anchor will hold the ship, whether he fear or not. So it is in grace. If you have a good hope through grace, and that is anchored within the veil, your doubts and fears will no more destroy that hope than the doubts and fears of the pilot will snap the cable or break the anchor. Don't you know that the faith of all true believers "stands not in the wisdom of men but in the power of God?" Then how can true faith be shaken; I mean shaken by the voice and power of God so as to be removed by him? Faith can be tried, as gold is tried in the fire; but the trial no more destroys faith than the furnace destroys the gold. So with *love*; if shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost, it is a precious part of the kingdom of God; and if so, it cannot be shaken by the voice of God so as to be removed and pass away, like the veil of the temple when rent in twain. If it

were so, the graces of the Spirit would have no more permanence than the blood of bullocks and goats. It is true that we are shaken, I am sure I am, as to the reality of our graces; but the graces themselves are not shaken by the terrible voice of an angry God, or else he would contradict himself. He is not like us, ever changing, ever changeable. We do not serve a God like that. That would be Baal, to be moved by cutting the flesh with lancets. But we serve a God who is "in one mind and none can turn him;" unchanging, unchangeable, in all his glorious perfections. Whom he loves, he loves for ever. And thus though we are shaken as to the reality of our faith, hope, and love, those doubts and fears, to which all are more or less subject, do not destroy the work of God upon the soul. Does this contradict my preaching? Have I not always contended for the permanence of grace, and that the Spirit never quenches the light of his own temple? In fact, where else is our security? You may have money in a bank, and you may say sometimes to yourself, in an anxious moment, "Is it safe?" But your fears do not affect the real stability of the bank. That does not depend upon either your hopes or your fears, but upon its own solid foundation and its own real capital. So you may have fears about the heavenly bank, or rather about your interest in it; but all your doubts and fears do not break the heavenly bank any more than they do Coutts's. You see we must not let our ever-fluctuating feelings, our darkness, unbelief, doubt, and fear be our deciding guides as to our interest in heavenly realities. If the Lord has begun a work of grace upon your soul, he has begun it; if he is carrying on, he is carrying it on and will complete it, and that work will stand. I may be shaken and am shaken nearly every day of my life about many things, but God's work will remain the same whether I am shaken or not.

But when the apostle speaks of the kingdom not being shaken, he means so as to be *removed*. Now certainly these things differ. Look at the oaks in the neighbouring park: they may rock to the base in a strong wind, but, if firmly rooted in the soil, they will stand every storm. To be shaken is not the same thing as to be cut down or torn up. In fact, this is the chief blessedness of receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, that your faith does not rest upon mutabilities. If it rested on your own good works, your present or future attainments in the flesh, your due cultivation of creature holiness, of what you would do upon a deathbed, how you were to repent when sickness came; if your hope of heaven rested upon so false and fickle a foundation, it might be and certainly would be awfully shaken, and removed like a dream. But if our faith and hope and love enter within the veil, and take fast hold of the Son of God, we, as creatures of a day, may fluctuate in our feelings as the sea moves up and down under the influence of the wind; but those fluctuations of feeling do not alter the solemn facts of regeneration, and justification, and acceptance, and adoption into the family of God. In fact, if these things could be swept away out of the heart by the gusts of unbelief, there would be no stability for any one, and I might say, no salvation. But this is the blessedness of gospel grace, that in receiving the Spirit we thereby receive a heavenly kingdom—a kingdom which cannot be shaken; a kingdom of which Christ himself is the glorious Sovereign, "whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him." (Dan. 7:27.)

IV.—But time admonishes me to pass on to our last point, the exhortation, "Let us have" (or, as it is in the margin, "*hold fast*") *grace*, whereby we may serve God acceptably with *reverence and godly fear*."

The apostle here assumes that those to whom he wrote had received a kingdom which could not be moved; that they were local subjects of King Jesus; that they had believed in him to the salvation of their souls. He therefore addresses them as partakers of divine light and life, and exhorts them to "have" (or "hold fast," which is the better rendering) "grace," that they might serve God acceptably.

Several points here demand our close attention, and I am sorry that time will not allow me to press them more fully on your consciences.

1. First, then, see the necessity of *holding grace fast*, for I adopt the marginal reading as preferable to that in the text. Grace is the very foundation of the kingdom which cannot be moved. It is all of grace, from first to last. By grace we are saved; by grace we are called; by grace we are what we are. In order, therefore, to maintain our interest clear in the kingdom which cannot be shaken, we must hold grace fast; for directly we cease to do this, we lose our comfortable prospects of this kingdom, and of our own participation in it and its heavenly blessings. It is a kingdom of present grace and of future glory, therefore built wholly upon grace and not upon merit; wholly upon the favour of God, and not upon the works of the creature. As long then as we hold fast grace, we hold the kingdom; for the kingdom stands in grace.

But why should this exhortation be needed? Is it not very easy to hold fast grace? Yes, very, when there is nothing to try it; and that is the way that most hold it—in the head, not in the heart. But the real partakers of the life of God are tempted on every hand to renounce their hold of grace, through the power of the world, the strength of sin, the subtlety of their unwearied adversary, the unbelief, infidelity, and despondency of their wretched heart. Thus sometimes

we are tempted to look away from the kingdom which cannot be shaken, and descend to lower things; to stand either upon that earth which has been shaken under our feet, or that heaven, that Pharisee's heaven, which has been shaken over our heads, and thus get lost and bewildered among the wreck and ruin of those things which have been shaken and are removed. He exhorts us therefore to hold fast that grace whereby in the first instance we came to have an interest in the kingdom not to be shaken; whereby we were introduced into an experimental knowledge and possession of it; and whereby alone we can maintain a firm hold of it to the end. Whatever you do, then, however low you may sink and fall, never relinquish your firm hold of grace. It will never be more precious than when clasped by a dying hand, and clung to with expiring breath.

2. But the apostle gives us still farther blessed advice: that we should hold fast this grace for a special purpose,—to "*serve God acceptably.*" We cannot be serving God acceptably while we hold fast the world. It is not serving God acceptably to serve the flesh and the devil. We must give up these things if we are to render to the Father an acceptable service. For otherwise he may well say to us, "I hate, I despise your feast days:" "Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs." "What agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" Nor can we serve God acceptably by a broken law, nor by our own righteousness, strength, wisdom, or holiness. We must cast aside all these works of the creature, and hold on with both hands that heavenly grace, whereby alone we serve God acceptably, as living under gracious influences, gracious teachings, and gracious operations.

3. But he adds a blessed caution not to presume upon these privileges or mercies: he bids us serve God "*with reverence.*" Reverence becomes all who name that great and terrible

name of the Lord of hosts. But of all it most becomes those who are saved by the free, unmerited grace of God. View through whom that grace freely flows down to guilty man. Look at what our blessed Lord suffered to save our souls from the bottomless pit; view him in the garden and upon the cross. O what reverence should we entertain towards his heavenly Majesty! And God saves us by his grace not to walk after fleshly lusts, not to serve the world and self, but walk before him with holy reverence, as ever living under his heart-searching eye. There is nothing more unbecoming in one who professes to know the things of God for himself in sweet and gracious experience, than a want of holy reverence in his house and in his presence. Surely, if ever the Lord's power and presence, if ever his grace, mercy, and truth, had been felt in a man's soul, it would beget in him a reverence of the Majesty of heaven. To see, then, men and ministers approach the throne of God without any reverence of that great and glorious Majesty before whom angels veil their faces, clearly shows that they never had the majesty of God impressed upon their conscience. Though saved by grace, it is not to save us into presumption and vain confidence, and to walk before God in lightness and frivolity; but it is to serve him all our days with that holy reverence of his dread Majesty which becomes sinners, and especially saved sinners who have known his anger and felt his love.

4. But the apostle adds, "*And godly fear,*" that fountain of life whereby we depart from the snares of death; not the slavish fear of souls under the law, but the holy, filial fear of those who live under the Gospel, who are blessed with manifestations of grace, and who know the Lord by his own divine teaching and testimony. It is these who fear his great name in the exercise of that filial fear which is one of his most choice covenant blessings.

Thus, you see there is an ample guard against all licentiousness. Men who know not the fear of God in their own hearts, cast their arrows against the saints of God, as if they sanctioned all manner of hypocrisy and ungodliness. But that the doctrines of grace should lead to licentiousness—perish the thought! It is a libel upon God and godliness. The more we know what we are saved from by the free grace of God, the more we shall desire to walk according to the precepts of the Gospel, and serve God acceptably with that reverence and godly fear which becomes our profession, whereby we adorn the doctrine and make it manifest that we are redeemed by the blood of the Lamb that we may live to his glory.