

## Every Man's Work to be Tried with Fire

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Evening, July 21, 1867

"Now if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." 1 Cor. 3:12, 13

What a deadly foe is Satan to the truth of God, and what an ally has he in the human heart. Indeed, without this alliance he would be utterly powerless. If we could say what the Lord said, "The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me," we should have no reason to fear any of Satan's devices. But alas! he finds everything in us. This gives him his standing ground; here is the fulcrum for his long lever; this is the weak place in the fortress against which he shoots, often too effectually, his infernal artillery. In fact, all the errors which have well nigh deluged the church in all ages from without, and all the evils which have broken in upon it from all quarters within; all the long and dreary catalogue of personal, individual sins which have tarnished men's lives, ruined their characters, broken up their homes, injured their families and brought them down to the grave before they had lived half the usual term of human life, have all sprung from the inward corruption of our nature as wrought upon by the foe of God and man. The Scripture is very plain and express here. Addressing himself to the saints of God at Ephesus, the apostle thus reminds them of their former state by nature and practice: "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:" (Eph. 2:1, 2.)

How plainly do we see from this testimony that those who "walk according to the course of this world" are under the influence of Satan, here called "the prince of the power of the air," and declared to be "the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience." Similarly, speaking of those that oppose themselves, that is to God's truth when plainly set before them, the apostle says: "If God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will." (2 Tim. 2:25, 26.) And would he assign a reason why the gospel is hid, and why it is hid to them that are lost, he says: "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." (2 Cor. 4:4.) We see then from these testimonies of the word of truth, and there are many others of similar import, that the power and influence of Satan on the minds of men, though hidden from view, are fearfully energetic and extensive.

This power and this influence have a connection with the words of our text, which in a few simple words I will endeavour now to trace.

In the exercise of his ministry, the Lord having especially sent him to the Gentiles, Paul comes to Corinth, where he finds Christian brethren in Aquila and Priscilla. At first, as was his wont, he preached in the synagogue; but when the unbelieving Jews opposed themselves and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles." This ministry among the Gentiles the Lord abundantly blessed; for "many of the Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptised." The Lord also most graciously encouraged him in the work by speaking to him in the night

by a vision: "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace; for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee, for I have much people in this city." Referring, then, to his labours amongst them, in his first Epistle to this church, he says: "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation." (1 Cor. 3:10.) Though he continued amongst them a year and six months, yet he was not the permanent pastor of the church, but an apostle, whose work and office it was to go from place to place. Having then laid the foundation, which, as he tells us, was Jesus Christ and he alone, for that is the only foundation which God himself has laid in Zion, and the only foundation therefore which a servant of his can ministerially lay, he left to other labourers to rear the superstructure. Now, here came in the subtlety of Satan. When he had left Corinth, and the supervision of his eye was withdrawn, false teachers sprang up, some of whom were under the instigation and influence of Satan, as he testifies in his second Epistle: "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works." (2 Cor. 11:13, 14, 15.) Now I will not say that all the teachers who built upon Paul's foundation were ungodly men, or under the influence of Satan, for he himself in the words following our text says: "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." (1 Cor. 3:14, 15.) The words of the apostle, "But he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire," would certainly imply that some of these builders were good men, and as such, would be saved; but all their rubbish with which they had built up the superstructure, as well as a

good part of their own religion, would be so burnt up that they would have to escape out of the conflagration like a man from a house in flames with the loss of all his goods, and his very life saved as if by miracle at the last gasp.

In opening up the words of our text this evening, I shall,

I.—*First*, direct your thoughts to the *foundation*: "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

II.—*Secondly*, to the *superstructure*, which may consist either of valuable or of worthless materials: "Gold, silver, precious stones," or "wood, hay, and stubble."

III.—*Thirdly*, *how every man's work* shall be made *manifest*; for "the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is."

I.—God himself has laid the foundation on which the church of Christ is built. His own words are, "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation." (Isa. 28:16.) This foundation is his dear Son. No other foundation was sufficiently strong or stable to bear the weight of the church. According to the eternal purposes of infinite grace, wisdom, and truth, a glorious building was to be erected, in which God himself should dwell; a holy temple, which should shine through all ages, illuminated with the glory of God. The apostle, therefore, addressing himself to the saints of God at Ephesus, says: "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple of the Lord: in whom ye also are builded

together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." (Eph. 2:19, 20, 21, 22.) He therefore specially urges this point upon the Corinthians as involving the necessity of separation from all idolatry: "And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." (2 Cor. 6:16.), This temple or heavenly building consists of elect saints, a multitude which no man can number, gathered from all quarters, and yet compacted by the wisdom and skill of the divine Architect together, so as to form one glorious, harmonious temple.

Now consider what an enormous weight, so to speak, must rest upon the foundation that God has laid in Zion. If we merely view them as forming a number exceeding the stars in the sky or the sand by the seashore, we must consider that they would require a strong and ample foundation to bear them up; for we know that in a literal building the foundation must be strong in proportion to the size and weight of the superstructure. But when we bear in mind that the saints of God, though redeemed by precious blood and sanctified by the operation and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, are in themselves fallen sinners, and that though saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation, they still continue such in themselves to their dying day, what an additional weight seems to rest upon the foundation, and how strong it must be to bear the superstructure up so as not to sink under its weight. Take for instance the sins in thought, word, and deed which one man commits in his lifetime, and multiply them by the whole number of the redeemed so as to form a universal aggregate. Now view those sins resting like so many huge mountains, with all their crushing weight, upon the heads of this vast multitude. Next view them as all heaped upon the head of one Person able to bear them

without sinking under their load; for all those sins must be taken off the actual transgressors and transferred to one who can support their crushing weight if their guilt and punishment are not to be visited upon the actual committers of them. Who could bear the crushing load of his own sins and transgressions if they were visited upon him with all that penal wrath which is their due? What shall we say then of all those sins, each deserving eternal wrath and condemnation, when we view them in all their ponderous mass, in all their accumulated weight? If ever you have felt the weight and burden, I will not say of *all* your sins, but of any one particular sin which has been laid with distressing guilt upon your conscience, you may well imagine what a load all the sins of God's people, with all their dreadful aggravations, must have been when laid upon the head of their great Surety. What a need, then, there is for a strong and solid foundation to bear up under this crushing burden. It is when we get a view by faith of the Person and work of the glorious Son of God that we see what a foundation God has laid in Zion. It is this which draws forth and encourages the hope and expectation of every coming sinner; as Peter speaks: "To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, ye also are built up." Let us look round to any and to every quarter for help and hope when sin burdens and distresses our conscience. Where can we find any foundation on which to rest the weight of our weary, burdened soul but this? If the Lord has indeed quickened us into spiritual life, made us to see and feel what we are by nature and practice, rooted us up from our old foundation of sin or self-righteousness, and planted in our breast that godly fear of his great name, which is the beginning of wisdom, what we want is something to stand upon in life and death, time and eternity; something from which we can never be moved; something which will bear up our souls in every trying hour, will not leave us at the last to

despair, but support us on a dying bed, and eventually land us before the throne of God, to dwell for ever in his blissful presence. If really and deeply penetrated with a sense of what ruin and misery must befall us if left to stand upon our own performances, good or bad, we look round for a foundation on which to build our hopes, and the more we look round to find it in ourselves or others the less we see anything able to bear us up. For it is not man that we have to deal with but God. If it were a mere matter between man and man, mere natural or temporal concern which simply affected the body, or the family, or the property, or the various duties and relationships of this life, we might soon find or fancy a sufficient remedy. But when we have to do with God who searches the heart, with him who is of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look on iniquity, then the matter is completely altered; then it is not what we think but what God has spoken; and by his decision and by his judgment we must abide and not our own. What a vast amount of ignorance, pride, and self-righteousness is rolled away from the mind of a convinced sinner when the justice and holiness, heart-searching presence, and terrible Majesty of God are revealed to his conscience; and what a preparation it is for him to hear the words of the gospel that he may believe in the Son of God, and that believing he might have life through his name.

Now God has laid a foundation in Zion, on which such a poor guilty sinner, as I have attempted to describe, may rest his hope, his soul, his all. And what a foundation is this when we view it simply and believingly as God has revealed it in the word of his grace; when the clouds of error, darkness, ignorance, and confusion which gather over this foundation by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive are dispersed, and we can see light in God's light. How blessed it then is under the teaching and

testimony of the Holy Ghost, as the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, for the eyes of our understanding to be enlightened and to have a view given us by faith of the foundation which God hath laid in Zion. Then it is that we see and believe in the glorious Sonship and eternal Deity of our blessed Redeemer. Then we behold his pure and spotless humanity in connection with his Deity, and see what he is as Immanuel, God with us. It is then that we see what he has done and suffered in the flesh; how he has borne our sins in his own body on the tree, made a full atonement for our transgressions, reconciled us to God by his precious blood, harmonised every apparently jarring attribute of Jehovah, for ever pleased God and for ever saved man. There is no other foundation on which to build for eternity but this; and when we have a view by faith of it, how suitable it is to every want of our soul; for I may observe that the very first thing we see in it is its *suitability*. We want blood to purge away our sins, and cleanse our conscience; we want righteousness to justify our needy, naked soul; we want acceptance with God, and a testimony of our personal salvation. Look where we will, we see those deep and pressing wants met and satisfied by One and One only: the Son of God and the Son of man in one glorious Immanuel.

Now, as the Lord the Spirit is pleased to bring this foundation which God has thus laid in Zion before the eyes of our enlightened understanding, to reveal the Son of God in us, and draw forth faith thus to embrace him, hope thus to hang upon him, and love thus to cling round him, there is a getting upon the foundation. Under the drawing influences and secret though powerful operations of the blessed Spirit upon the heart, there is a bringing off of the soul from the old foundation of self on which it once stood and a placing it upon the foundation which God himself has laid. This is coming to Jesus under the drawing of the Father, as our Lord



graciously said, "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." (John 6: 45.) And how blessedly has the Lord promised, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37.) How sure then is this foundation, and how sure it is that the soul that stands here, stands safe for eternity. How simple all this is; how glorifying to God, how suitable to man, how in perfect harmony with every type, figure, and sacrifice given in the Old Testament, and how consistent with the revelation which God has given in both the moral and ceremonial law.

But ungodly men and erroneous characters in all ages have sought to dig up and destroy, or darken when they could not overthrow it, this only foundation of all a sinner's hopes; they have brought their pickaxes and spades, seeking, if they can, to dig up this blessed Rock. Some have quarrelled with his Deity, some with his true and proper Sonship, some with his pure humanity. Thus they are trying to dig up the foundation, introducing all manners of errors to confuse the judgment, to perplex the mind, and harass the conscience. Satan too is continually darkening the judgment, filling us with thousands of groundless apprehensions, instilling into our minds carnal suggestions, and breathing, it may be, a cloud of unbelief and infidelity to darken the foundation and obscure our view of it. Yet how blessed it is, when those clouds are dispersed by a beam of the Sun of Righteousness, or wafted away by a gale of free grace from the everlasting mountains, to see once more the foundation, and that all the errors and heresies of ungodly men leave it unarmed. God has laid it in Zion, and all man's attempts for ages to remove it have been as ineffectual as if he had tried to move the earth from its place. We find it at times good standing ground. And O, how thousands of God's saints, on a sick bed, or when the cold

sweats of death have been trickling down their forehead and eternity has been in view, have found this foundation good, blessed God for a precious Christ, and a manifestation of his love and blood and grace to their souls, and died in sweet peace. What a host of undeniable witnesses have again and again proved that God himself has laid this foundation on which a poor sinner may build for eternity, and stand upon it without fear or doubt or shame.

II.—But I pass on from an examination of the foundation to consider the *superstructure*.

Now, it seems obvious at the very first sight that this superstructure should be suitable to and worthy of the foundation. What a glorious foundation it is. Nothing less than the eternal Son of God; nothing less than God's co-equal, co-eternal Son in our nature, Immanuel God with us. Could the heart of men or angels have ever conceived such a foundation as this had not God specially revealed it first in the open manifestation of Christ in the flesh, and secondly in the sacred record of his inspired word? If, then, such be the foundation, the superstructure ought beyond all doubt or controversy to correspond to it. But is it so as a matter of general observation when the various buildings around us are scanned with a discerning eye? Have the builders, even the most of those who consider themselves master builders, brought materials for the superstructure such as the foundation merited and required? Alas! No. Through ignorance, unbelief, prejudice, self-righteousness, and even from baser motives in all ages, even those who have not sought to dig up or darken the foundation, have endeavoured to rear upon it a superstructure incompatible with, and unsuitable to its glorious and unspeakable worth.

i. They have brought materials—I shall handle this part of the

subject first—which the apostle designates as "*wood, hay, stubble*;" meaning thereby materials not only comparatively *worthless*, and thus unsuitable to the foundation, but of that *combustible* nature which the fire of God's indignation will, when effectually roused, utterly destroy.

But let us look a little closer at these worthless and combustible materials. How unseemly it would be, if a foundation had been laid for some noble structure of the strongest and most admirable materials, to place upon it a pile of wood, fill up the gaps with a stuffing of hay, and thatch the whole with a covering of rough stubble. Such a building would be ridiculous in the eyes of men, and draw down universal indignation and contempt. The deeper, the wider, the stronger, the more beautiful the foundation, the more would appear the discrepancy between it and the superstructure; and the more would men point their finger with scorn at a building so nobly begun and so ignobly finished. If the Queen, for instance, were with great pomp and splendour, attended by her ministers and a large assemblage of nobility, to lay the foundation of some noble building, say that magnificent structure which is to be reared as a memorial of her lamented husband, the Prince Consort, and upon the foundation thus laid a superstructure were erected partly of wood, partly of hay, and partly of stubble, what an outcry there would be, even were it a mere temporary provision; and if such a building were to take fire and be burnt to the ground it would be rather a matter of universal rejoicing than of lamentation. So in grace: to bring materials which are inharmonious and discordant with the foundation which God has laid in Zion is not merely an anomaly, a soleism, an inconsistency, but an error of the first magnitude, a mistake, if such a term may be applied to it, involving the most important consequences. In the solemn matters of God's truth, where his honour and glory and the

salvation of immortal souls are concerned, such an inconsistency is not a mere matter of such scorn and ridicule as we might bestow upon an earthly building so constructed, but a matter for the anger of God, the scorn of angels, and the reprobation as well as the contempt of all godly men.

But let me now direct your thoughts to this wood, hay, and stubble, that we may gather up its spiritual meaning. What is the general idea conveyed by the expression? The first thought is its *want of value* as compared with solid stone and rock, especially when viewed as materials brought together to form a building. We have seen that the foundation is a stone or rock, beautifully called by the prophet the "Rock of ages," (Isaiah 26:4, *margin*); and this rock being the Lord himself, we may say of every other foundation, in the language of Moses, "their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges" (Deut.32:31); for none of them would presume to say that God himself is their rock any more than the heathen of old claimed the God of Israel to be their God. Wood, hay, and stubble suit their foundation, for their foundation is self; and as a hovel in a field is not built upon a rock but stands on the bare earth, foundation and superstructure well according with each other, so it is with the wood, hay, and stubble brought by Babel builders.

1. But the expression takes a wide range. *Wood* is almost of an unlimited variety; and some species are more valuable and scarce than others. Elm, oak, ash, deal, beech, these we apply to common purposes; mahogany, rosewood, sandal wood, ebony are used for works of ornament and beauty. Thus you have a vast variety of wood, for I have named but a few; and of these some are naturally more beautiful than others, or take a higher polish. But observe how they all unite in two points, *destructibility* and *combustibility*. The builders who bring the wood to build a temple of God may

select with much care wood that may seem to them alike durable and valuable; as the idol maker in Isaiah took care to choose "a tree that would not rot;" but choose what wood they may, they cannot make it proof against decay or against fire. We know that just now there is a wonderful ambition to build churches of beautiful architecture without, and adorned with all the refinements of art and skill within. Even those who boast of being descendants of the Puritans are rearing chapels, or as they are now called churches, very different from the quiet buildings in which their fathers were content to worship; and we may soon see them following the example of the Ritualists, with their painted windows, decorated altars, priestly vestments, and other borrowings, such as our plain spoken fathers used to call with much truth if not much reverence, "the rags of Popery." Wood in all its natural roughness; the gnarled oak, coarse grained elm, mean looking deal, twisted yew, soft poplar, bending willow, and such coarse and common wood would not suit the refined and expensive taste of the Ritualists. Under the pleasing and plausible idea that nothing is too costly or beautiful for the house of God, they are bringing us back to those Athenian superstitions which the apostle so beautifully exposed: "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing that he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things." (Acts 17:24, 25.) Just see what, under this specious pretence, these Ritualists are fast introducing into this land, and taking possession of so many churches. Look at their bowings, their genuflexions, their vestments, their crucifixes, their banners and processions, their surpliced choristers, and intoning priests, and their paltry imitation of popish rites and ceremonies, under cover of which they are secretly introducing Popery itself with all its craft and cruelty, with all its errors and

abominations, with all its proud pretensions, to be, perhaps, one day carried out into positive acts. But apart from this, may we not justly call the whole of their system wood, hay, stubble? See how they would lead poor, guilty man, with all the weight of his sins, to rest his soul for eternity upon a bow, a genuflexion, a sprinkling of holy water, a piece of bread and a drop of wine. See also how the putting of this wood, hay, and stubble upon the foundation hides, obscures, and darkens it. They admit the great verities of our most holy faith, such as the Deity, Sonship, incarnation, and sacrifice of Christ; but they confuse them all by representing the Lord's supper as a sacrifice of little inferior efficacy to the sacrifice offered on Calvary, and that they as offering it are actual priests. But are we much behind them who profess to hold a purer creed and to protest against both the doctrines and practices of the church of Rome and the church of England? Look at the errors of the present day held and advocated by leading advocates of the great dissenting body. Do not some, if they do not actually deny the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, yet attempt as far as they can to throw doubt upon it by qualifying it with a variety of reservations and explanations? Do not others deny the everlasting punishment of the wicked, making it to consist in a sort of annihilation and a death which is not everlasting punishment, but destruction of body and soul from the presence of the Almighty; thus emboldening sinners to continue in their sins and hardening men's consciences against the fears of hell? What a whole heap too of legality and self-righteousness, free will and creature strength, are men, who call themselves builders, introducing as a superstructure upon the foundation that God has laid in Zion. O this wood! Carved into a variety of forms, gilded and decorated with every degree of skill and art, nicely veneered and beautifully polished, it may look pleasing to the eyes of men; but what will it be in the day of the Lord's appearing?

Or even before that great and terrible day, how will it stand when God sends his fire in the various dispensations of his providence and his grace to try of what sort it is?

2. The next material named by the apostle as employed by these false and vain builders, who would fain rear a superstructure of their own upon the foundation laid in Zion, is *hay*. This seems a more unsuitable building material than wood. Good for horses, well suited to build up the frame and clothe with flesh and fat the bones of the stalled ox, nothing can well be less suited for a building material. It can only, at best be used to stuff into the unfinished doors and windows to keep out the wet.

But there is something, perhaps, symbolical in the word distinct from the idea of worthlessness and combustibility. Hay was once tender, juicy grass; but laid low by the scythe of the mower, and exposed to the heat of the sun, it has become dry and withered. So circumcision, sacrifice, the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic law, were green and tender when revealed from Mount Sinai, and suitable to an elementary dispensation, and so far beautiful, as is the grass of the field, when typically representing the blessings of the new Covenant. But when the old Covenant passed away, when, as the apostle speaks, it "decayed and waxed old," and became a matter of mere "beggarly elements," it resembled hay as dead and withered grass. When, then, the builders, as in the case of the Galatian teachers, sought to "build again the things which were destroyed," to reintroduce the works of the law, and build them up upon Christ the foundation, it was using hay as a superstructure. Similarly dry and dead forms of prayer, dry and dead rites and ceremonies, dry and dead rounds of legal service, are all but hay, withered, and without juice, sap or moisture. "Our bed," says the Bride in the Canticles, "is green." "He maketh me,"

said David, "to lie down in green pastures." There is a freshness and a verdure even now in the ordinances of God's house; but dry forms, dry ceremonies, and we may add, dry doctrines, are but withered hay! Yet how many builders are now seeking to build up the church of God, some upon dead and dry forms, others upon dead and dry doctrines.

3. But I pass on to the last material mentioned by the apostle as used by these false builders—*stubble*. This, which is raked up from the harvest field when the crop is gathered off, may serve as the coarse covering of a hayrick, to thatch a hovel in a field, to enclose a sheep-yard, or to be thrown out to make manure for a dunghill, but is utterly unsuited for a building. And yet we see men take the very sweepings of the field, and with this coarse material seek to thatch souls against the thunderbolts of the Almighty. But as the forked lightning, if it fall upon it, will set a stack on fire and burn up the stubble, so will the fire of the last day burn up this coarse stubble with which men would fain thatch the temple of God, and leave the whole superstructure a heap of ashes.

ii. But now look at a superstructure of a different character; called by the apostle, "*gold, silver, precious stones*." Here is a superstructure worthy of the foundation. What a beautiful superstructure it must be as viewed from far, or seen nigh at hand, all bright and glistening with the sheen of gold and silver, and decked here and there with precious stones. Of course this is a figure, as was that of wood, hay, and stubble; for gold, silver, and precious stones are as little suitable literally on the one hand for a building as wood, hay, and stubble are on the other. They are meant both of them to convey to our mind clear and vivid ideas, one denoting worthlessness, destructibility, and combustibility, and the other materials highly valuable, intrinsically precious, and such as fire cannot consume or destroy.



But what may we understand by gold, silver, and precious stones spiritually viewed, taking a general view of them collectively? Without trying to force the passage, I take them to symbolise generally the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart, in all its various branches and divine fruits. But let me endeavour to open this, and thus to show the suitability of those materials as a superstructure upon Christ the foundation, by dwelling upon them individually and particularly.

There is a beautiful harmony between the work of Christ upon the cross and the work of the Holy Ghost upon the soul. Both are the work of an omnipotent Person; both spring from omnipotent power; and both are holy—the one as being the work of the holy Son of God, and the other as the work of the Holy Ghost. This spiritual and heavenly harmony gives a beautiful consistency between the superstructure wrought by the power of the Holy Ghost and the foundation laid in Zion in the Person and work of the Son of God. But now view these materials separately.

1. Take gold as representing that *faith* which is of the operation of the Holy Spirit, for we know that faith is compared to gold in the word of God. "I counsel thee," said the Lord to the Laodicean church, "to buy of me gold tried in the fire" (Rev. 3:18); and Peter tells us that "the trial of our faith is much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire." As being of God's giving, as the special portion of the elect, as communicated and maintained by the Lord himself, who is called "the Author and Finisher of our faith," it is a grace of the Spirit, fitted to be a superstructure for the foundation that God has laid in Zion. For the faith of God's elect is as much the work of God the Holy Ghost, as the work of Christ upon the cross is the work

of God the Son. There is, therefore, a suitability, a harmony between the faith of God's elect and the foundation that God has laid in Zion. Jude speaks of "building ourselves up on our most holy faith." As then "by grace we are saved through faith;" as it is that whereby Christ himself dwells in the heart, and is formed there the hope of glory; as it is the means whereby every blessing is received and brought into personal, experimental enjoyment, it is a blessed material for a builder to handle and use in seeking to edify the church of God. By faith as a building material we may also understand every heavenly doctrine, every holy instruction, every sweet promise, and every gracious precept by which the Church is built up; for these are means of her edification, so as to be a habitation of God through the Spirit.

2. Following the same analogy of faith, and viewing hope as occupying the second place, may we not call it the silvery grace of *hope*? Hope does not occupy the first place in graces, as silver does not occupy the first place in metals. It is not so weighty, so solid, so valuable, so enduring, or admitting so bright a polish as golden faith; but a good hope through grace, communicated and maintained by the power of God, is inferior in worth, solidity, polish, and indestructibility only to gold tried in the fire. This good hope through grace, has a harmony with the foundation. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. There is therefore a consistency between it and the foundation on which it rests; and every builder such as God approves of will bring in hope as a fitting material for the superstructure of the temple of the Lord.

3. But what are "precious stones?" You will observe they are spoken of in the plural, and therefore are more than one. What, then, shall we say of *love*, for as I have named faith and hope as building materials, must I leave out love, the greatest of the three graces? No! I will call it a precious

stone. How precious is Christ to those that love him; and what a precious stone it is to have the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost. But every thing which raises up and draws forth this love may be called a precious stone also. Therefore the visitations of God's presence, the smiles of his countenance, the droppings in of his favour, the blessed whispers of his goodness and mercy; O what precious stones are these. What are diamonds, pearls, sapphires, and emeralds, compared with one blessed visit from the King of kings, one manifestation of his love, one token of his presence, or one word dropped from his gracious lips! How ladies of wealth and grandeur value and admire their diamond necklaces, emerald rings, bracelets of sapphire and amethyst. What pride they take in adorning themselves with all their jewellery, and how in their ballroom and assemblies their diamonds shine before the eyes of the spectators, raising admiration in some and envy in others. But their diamond necklaces will not lie upon their necks in the coffin; their shroud will not be clasped with emerald bracelets, nor their fingers be adorned with sapphires. Compare with these brilliant ornaments which their fair wearers must soon part with, the precious visits bestowed upon the children of God. The proudest peeress would not wear her diamond necklace upon a dying bed. All its beauty and value to her are gone. But then it is that the precious stones of a child of God are worn more closely, shine most brightly, and are most valued and valuable. Nor will they leave him at death to be transferred to another possessor; but will deck and adorn his soul after death; and especially when the bridegroom comes forth to claim his Bride in the day of his appearing.

Or even now look at the child of God with his ornaments on. Look at our daughters of Zion, having on the ornaments of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great

price. The adorning of the wives and daughters of godly men, and especially if themselves professing godliness, is not "the outward adorning of plaiting the hair, of wearing gold, or of putting on apparel, but the hidden man of the heart in that which is not corruptible." And what is this "hidden man of the heart" but that humility and meekness, that quietness and gentleness, that brokenness of heart, contrition of spirit, humility of mind, and tenderness of conscience, which become the saints, whether male or female? A meek and quiet spirit is a woman's best ornament. As to other gay and unbecoming ornaments, let those wear them who wish to serve and to enjoy "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." Let the daughters of Zion manifest they have other ornaments than what the world admires and approves. Let them covet the teachings of God, the smiles of his love, the whispers of his favour; and the more they have of this the less will they care for the adornments which the daughters of Canaan run so madly after; by which too they often impoverish themselves, and by opening a way for admiration too often open a way for seduction and ruin.

But let me pass on to consider how this servant of God should build this superstructure so as to correspond with the foundation. Ministerially, he lays the one and builds up the other; and therefore should be equally clear in both. First, he must lay the foundation broad and plain by setting forth the Deity and humanity, blood and righteousness of the Son of God; and then when he has laid the foundation broad and clear he must go on to raise up a superstructure agreeable thereto; allowing of no religion but the religion of the Holy Ghost, no faith but the faith of God's elect, no hope but a good hope through grace, no repentance but that which Christ was exalted to give, no humility but what is produced by the Spirit, nor any love but that which is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost; no, nor any fruits of

righteousness, or any good words or works but those which are wrought by the power of God and spring out of his grace. Here is harmony; here is consistency; here is a religion approved of by God, and commended to the conscience of his people. View the child of grace, both as regards the foundation and the superstructure; see him standing upon Christ, as the foundation of his hope; see him adorned and decorated with every grace of the Spirit. View his faith, see his hope, mark his love, observe his repentance, his humility, his brokenness, his contrition, his separation from the world; hear him speak of the secret visitations of God's presence, the gracious whispers of his mercy; and as you hear the pure language of Canaan drop from his lips, take special notice of the jewels with which the Lord the Spirit has enriched his cabinet and adorned his soul. These are the true ornaments of the soul, for they are what Solomon calls "an ornament of grace" which is preparatory to "a crown of glory." (Proverbs 4:9.)

Here you have clear work; but if a minister lay a foundation which has no standing in the word of God, and no standing in the hearts of God's people; and if the superstructure which he raises up upon it is to build men up in rites, forms and ceremonies, legality and self-righteousness, what will be the end of these things? What that end will be the fire will manifest. But this brings me to our last point.

III.—The *manifestation* of the nature of this superstructure.

It is to be made manifest. The apostle says: "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." (1 Cor. 3:13.) Thus there is a day which will bring all to the test; there is a fire which will try every man's work, of what sort it is, whether as

a man or as a minister. Now, "wood, hay, and stubble" will never stand the fire; they are too combustible to endure the flame. They are, therefore, at once burned up. This fire we may consider under two different points of view.

1. There is the fire of God's *penal wrath*. When God displays his wrath against a guilty world, brings his terrible justice to bear upon men's souls, all this wood, hay, and stubble will be burnt up. One glance from his holy eye, one lightning word of his terrible lips, one frown from his indignant countenance, will burn up and consume all the wood, hay, and stubble that men have brought to gain his favour. Holy water, bowings and genuflexions, crosses and crucifixes, and all the trumpery that men are now employing to build up souls for eternity, will be burnt in a moment before the flash of God's indignant eye; and with it all false faith, all creature hope, all vain expectations, and all mere natural love, with all that passionate devotion and idolatrous affection which often take the form of godliness,—all will disappear before the flashes of God's indignant justice; and if the foundation be as faulty as the superstructure, they and the builders will all perish together.

But I draw a distinction between such as these and those of whom the apostle seems specially to speak. There may be some who are right as far as regards the foundation, but wrong as regards the superstructure. These, therefore, will lose the superstructure, but will themselves be saved by fire. We hope there are among general churches living souls who are right as regards the foundation, but have been built up with a wrong superstructure. These will lose everything combustible; all their wood, hay, and stubble; but as their foundation is good, they themselves will stand and be saved, but it will be in such a way as just to escape with their life.

2. But the fire which is to prove every man's work of what sort it is, is not merely God's wrath as manifested at the last day; but his fire as significative of the *fiery trial* which takes place in this life, and which God mercifully brings upon his people to burn up their wood, hay, and stubble. Now it is an inestimable mercy to have all this combustible material burnt up before we come to a death bed. Fiery trials, such as God sends through afflictions, temptations, distressing feelings, and painful soul exercises, will burn up the wood, hay, and stubble, which any of his saints may have gathered up as a superstructure. Guilt pressing upon a man's conscience, the terrors of the Almighty in a fiery law, his arrows deeply fixed in the breast and drying up the spirit, fears of death, hell, and judgment, and the terrible consequences of dying under the wrath of God, all these are a part of the fiery trial which burns up the wood, hay, and stubble, heaped by Babel builders on the foundation. All sink into black ashes before this fire, which proves what they are, and what a vain refuge they afford in the day of trouble.

So also powerful temptations, fiery darts and all the artillery of hell, the blasts of Satan as a storm against the wall, his injections and diabolical insinuations,—how can wood, hay, and stubble stand before this furnace in which the Lord has chosen his Zion? Dismal apprehensions of not being right at heart; strong fears of all our religion being hypocrisy, all empty profession, and a name to live; a sense of the value of our immortal soul, and a sight of the dreadful, damnable evil of sin, with little manifestation of the pardoning love of God, all which things produce gloomy and distressing thoughts how it may be with us on the bed of death—if such exercises press heavily on the conscience, how they burn up all the combustible material of a faulty superstructure. False faith, deceitful hopes, creature love, feigned humility, legal repentance, an outside profession, the good opinion of men,

rites, ceremonies and observances,—all are too weak to stand before this flame. They are burnt up and reduced to ashes. What then stands the fiery trial? God's work upon the soul, the faith that he implants by his own Spirit. It may be weak; it may be, it must be tried; it may seem at times scarcely to exist; and yet being of God, it stands every storm, and lives at last. A good hope through grace, a hope of God's own communicating and maintaining, like a well tried anchor, this will stand the storm; like gold and silver, this will bear the hottest furnace; lose its dross, but not lose the pure material, but be refined, purified, and manifested all the more as genuine metal. So too these "precious stones," these heavenly visits, sweet manifestations, blessed promises, comforting discoveries, and gracious revelations of the Son of God, with the whispers of his dying, bleeding love,—these heavenly jewels can never be lost and never be burnt up. They may be tried, and that keenly and sharply, but being of God's gift and operation, they are essentially indestructible.

I would appeal to the experience here of any or all of God's exercised family. How tried you have been sometimes about your religion, whether it would stand; whether you have a right faith; whether your hope is a good hope through grace; whether the love you have to the Lord and his people is real. You are tried often as to your interest in the blood and righteousness of Christ. You lose sight of what the Lord has done for your soul in times past. His gracious visits, manifestations, and blessed discoveries, have faded from view; and when they fade from view, you can scarcely believe they were real. Yet when the fire has passed over them, it leaves them untouched. As when the three children were cast into the furnace, the very smell of fire had not passed upon their garments, so it is with this gold, silver, and precious stones. When the fiery trial is over, when the



temptation is passed and the affliction has done its work, faith lifts up its head, hope's anchor is found firm and good within the vail, love is still in the heart, and every grace of the Spirit where it was before. What has disappeared? what has been lost? what has been burnt up in the flame? False faith, false hope, and false love, legality, self-righteousness, pride and self-conceit. These could not abide the touch of the flame; they disappeared and left behind them nothing but ashes.

How careful, then, and anxious we should be to have these two points well secured in our hearts. First, to be right as concerns the foundation. "Do I believe in the Son of God? Have I clear views of the Sonship, the Deity, and the pure humanity of the Christ of God? Have I drunk in no secret error? Am I hiding in my bosom no corrupt doctrine? Is my creed sound? Is the word of God received by me, as God has revealed it, into a believing heart?" How many are wrong as to the foundation itself. Then comes, "Am I upon the foundation? Did God himself put me there? Did I see its suitability to my lost and undone soul? Did the blessed Spirit take of the things of Christ and reveal them to me in the hour of need? Was the Son of God made precious to my soul by an act of faith? Am I looking to him, cleaving to him, longing for him, hanging upon him, and trusting wholly to his Person and work? How stands the foundation? Am I on it?"

The next important question is, "How stands the superstructure? Has the Holy Ghost wrought anything with a divine power in my soul? The faith I profess, is it of God? The hope I enjoy, do I believe it came from the Lord himself to support my soul in the trying storm? My repentance, is it genuine? My profession, is it sincere? My walk, is it consistent? My conscience, is it tender? My desires, are they spiritual? My prayers, are they fervent? My heart, is it

honest? My soul, is it right before God? What am I looking to as the foundation, and what am I looking to as the superstructure? Do I hang all my hopes upon Christ as the rock, and all my religion upon the work of the Holy Ghost in my heart?"

If you can answer these questions as in the sight of God, "Yes, yes, ten times yes;" then you are right, you are right. If you stand upon the foundation that God has laid in Zion, you are right; you are right if God the Spirit has wrought a living faith in your heart. But you are wrong, you are wrong if you stand not upon God's foundation; you are wrong, you are wrong, and that for eternity, unless the Holy Ghost is at work upon your conscience.

Look, then, to these two things, and look at them well. Examine them nicely, and scan them closely, to see what the foundation is and if you are standing on it; then to see what is the superstructure, and whether God the Holy Ghost is the author of it in your soul. I add no more. I have spoken enough if God be pleased to bless it.