

## Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Thursday Evening, August 15, 1844

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." 2 Cor. 4:7

How different is the estimate that faith makes of riches, honours, and comforts from that made by the world and the flesh! The world has no idea of riches but such as consist in gold and silver, in houses, lands, or other tangible property; no thought of honour, but such as man has to bestow; and no notion of comfort, except in "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind." But the soul that is anointed by an "unction from the Holy One," takes a different estimate of these matters, and feels that the only true riches are those of God's grace in the heart, that the only real honour is that which cometh from God, and that the only solid comfort is that which is imparted by the Holy Ghost to a broken and contrite spirit. Now, just in proportion as we have the Spirit of God, shall we take faith's estimate of riches, honour, and comfort; and just so much as we are imbued with the spirit of the world, shall we take the flesh's estimate of these things.

When the eye of the world looked on the Apostles, it viewed them as a company of poor ignorant men, a set of wild enthusiasts, that travelled about the country preaching concerning one Jesus, who they said, had been crucified, and was risen from the dead. The natural eye saw no beauty, no power, no glory in the truths they brought forth: nor did it see that the poor perishing tabernacles of these outcast men contained in them a heavenly treasure; and that they would

one day shine as the stars for ever and ever, whilst those who despised their word would sink into endless woe.

The spirit of the world, and the views that the flesh takes are not altered now. Nature ever remains the same, and can never understand or love the things of eternity; it can only look to, and can only rest upon the poor perishing things of time and sense. By this test, therefore, we may in a measure try our state. What, for instance, are our daily and hourly feelings about the things of time and sense, and what about the things of eternity? Which of the two press with more power on our minds, which occupy more of our thoughts, which are laid up more warmly in our affections? And just in proportion as the solemn things of eternity, or the things of time and sense, occupy our mind; just so much as our hearts are fixed upon heaven or earth; just so much as we are living to God, or to ourselves, in the same degree is the strength of our faith, and the depth of the work of grace upon our conscience.

The Apostle, in the text, speaks of "*a Treasure;*" and he tells where this treasure was lodged, "*in Earthen Vessels.*" And he gives us also the Reason why it was lodged there, "*that the excellency of the power might be of God, and not of us.*"

If, then, we look at the text in these three points of view, and consider—1. What *the treasure* is.—2. In what *vessel* it is lodged.—and 3. *Why* it is lodged there, we shall, if God enable us, perhaps see something of the mind of the Spirit in the passage before us.

I.—Our first business, then, is to examine—*What this treasure is.* For the Apostle says expressly, "*We have this treasure.*" But in order to understand what he means by the expression, we must look back a little to what he had been

speaking of in the preceding verses. He says (4:6), "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. *But we have this treasure.*" This, then, is the treasure—*God shining into the heart to give the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ.* Wherever, therefore, he has so shined into the heart as to give that light, to bestow that knowledge, to communicate that grace, *there* is the treasure: and where "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" has never so shined, *there* this treasure is altogether wanting.

But to understand the expression, "*treasure,*" we must bear in mind, that, in ancient times, money was for the most part hoarded: it was not, as in our day, invested, and put out to interest; but generally locked up and carefully preserved, as jewels, coin, or bullion. Thus, we read of "the treasures of the king's house, which Shishak took away, (1 Kings 14:26); and of "the treasuries" which King Hezekiah made. "And Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honour: and he made himself treasuries for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of pleasant jewels." (2 Chr. 32:27.)

1. Treasure *makes a man rich.* This is the leading idea connected with the word. So spiritually, the man who possesses this inward light shining into his heart is rich indeed; and in the possession of it his wealth consists.

2. But there is another idea connected with the word "treasure." Treasure was often *hidden.* We read, for instance, of "treasures hid in the sand." (Deut. 33:19); and the Lord compares the kingdom of heaven to "treasure hid in a field." (Matt. 13:44.) It was the custom of wealthy men in ancient times, through fear of robbery and violence, to conceal their

treasures by burying them in the earth. The Apostle seems to have an allusion to this in the text, "We have this treasure *in earthen vessels*;" it being the custom to put the treasure, when thus buried, into earthen vessels, in order to keep it safely, and prevent the gold and silver from being scattered about.

But what is this treasure spiritually? 1. One part of it is *light*. The Apostle expressly says, "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give the light of the knowledge* of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." This light springs from the Spirit's inward revelation of the truth of God with power to the conscience. There is always light in a new-born soul, which distinguishes it from those dead in sin. As the Apostle says, "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; 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. 4:3, 4.) When a man is walking in the darkness and death of unregeneracy, he has no true light. He may indeed have a false light, as the light of presumption, delusion, or vain-confidence; but all such borrowed light is worse than darkness; as the Lord says, "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matt. 6:23.) There is very much of this false light abroad in the world. Men's judgments get notionally enlightened, as we read, Heb. 6:4: "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened." This light resides in the carnal mind, and has its seat in the judgment; but there is no unctuous power, no divine feeling attending it. It is not the light of the Holy Ghost in a regenerate heart, but a dry light, floating merely in the brain. It is not the light "sown for the righteous;" nor "the shining light" that beams upon "the path of the just;" nor "the light" that, together with "truth," God "sends out to bring us to his holy hill and to his tabernacles."

(Psa. 43:3.) No conviction of sin, no humility of soul, no meekness of spirit ever accompanies it. This dead and dry light never touches the conscience, never penetrates through the veil spread over the heart, never sinks deep into the soul; it never brings a man upon his knees to cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" It never discovers to its possessor the hypocrisy, pride, presumption, and deceitfulness of his heart; it never shows to him the holy character of God, and gives him in his light to see light.

The only saving light is the light of God shining into the soul, giving us to see and know "the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent." A man may have the clearest light in his judgment, and yet never have the penetrating light of the Spirit producing conviction in his soul; he may have the soundest knowledge of the doctrines of grace, and see the harmonious scheme of salvation; and yet never have seen a holy God by divine teaching, nor have ever felt the spirituality of God's righteous law condemning him as a transgressor.

But "the light of life," as the Lord calls it, is sure to guide its possessor aright. If we have it not, we shall be sure to go astray; we shall be entangled in some error, plunge into some heresy, imbibe some doctrine of devils, drink into some awful delusion, or fall into some dreadful sin, and "concerning faith make shipwreck." A false light is something like the light which Pirates hold up to entrap ships to their destruction; or like the fires, which the "wreckers," those dreadful characters in Cornwall, used to kindle on their iron-bound coast, in order that the mariner might mistake them for some friendly light-house, and run his vessel on the rocks, where those heartless wretches plundered it. A false light can but wreck us on the rocks of presumption or despair. But the light of divine life in the soul is accompanied

with all the graces of the Spirit. It is the light of the glory of God, the light of Jesus' countenance, and the light of the Spirit's teaching, and therefore an infallible Guide and Guard; as the Apostle says, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things." (1 John 2:20.) And this infallible pilot will guide the soul to whom it is given safe into the harbour of endless rest and peace.

2. But the treasure, of which the Apostle speaks, not only consists of light, but of *life* also. Light and life go together. Where light is imparted, life is communicated; and it is in the enjoyment of divine life, as much as in the possession of divine light, that this heavenly treasure consists. A man may have much light in his judgment, and no life in his soul; but if he have life in his soul, he must have a measure of light in his judgment; though he may not be so clear in the doctrinal knowledge of the scheme of salvation as many that have light in the judgment, and no inward, spiritual life.

But, wherever there is life, there will also be *feeling*. This is the sure evidence of life: for just in proportion to the depth and reality of life, will be the depth and reality of feeling. Some condemn all feeling: and say, "Away with your frames and feelings." But what awful language is this to come from the lips of men! For if we have no feeling, what religion have we? We have not a grain more of religion than we have of feeling. For instance; if sin lie upon my conscience, can I know anything of the guilt of it, except I feel it? If pardon be revealed to my heart, can I know anything of pardon, if I do not feel it? If I am in bondage, is there not a feeling of bondage? And if in liberty, is there not a feeling of liberty? Can we touch an object without feeling? Can we see an object without feeling? Can we hear a sound without feeling? Can we move a single step forward without feeling? What is the greatest misery of a paralytic? Is it not that he is without

feeling? Is it not his cry, "O that I could have some feeling in my paralysed limb, or paralysed side!" There is death in it, because there is no feeling in it. How awful, then, it is to hear ministers saying, "Away with your frames and feelings!" when we have no more true religion than we have of feeling? If I fear God, I fear in feeling; if I believe in God, I believe in feeling; if I love God, I love in feeling. If I rise to the highest point of assurance, I rise there in feeling; and if I sink to the lowest depth of despondency, I can only sink there in feeling. In fact, I know nothing but by feeling. Just in proportion to the depth of the work of the Spirit on my conscience, will be the depth of feeling in my soul. You wives and husbands, what would you think of your partners telling you they loved you without feeling? You parents, can you love your children without feeling? or you children, can you love your parents without feeling? When love is in exercise, we find there the deepest feeling; and when love is not in exercise, there is the absence of feeling. When we are in trouble, are we not troubled in feeling? and when we are glad, are we not glad in feeling? To say, then, "Away with your frames and feelings," is to cut down all vital godliness. It is like a man at work in a garden, who should pull up all the flowers, and leave only the weeds; or cut down every fruit-tree, and spare all the nettles, thistles, and brambles. So to cut down, or attempt to cut down frames and feelings, (for being the work of the Spirit, they never can be cut down) under the idea of setting up a faith without them, is but to pluck up (if the hand of man could do so) every fruit of God's planting in the soul, and leave nothing but the thorns, thistles, and briars of vain-confidence and presumption. O that we had more feeling! It is this which condemns us, that we have so little of it. Is it not wretched to have no feeling under the word?—to be as hard as the seats we sit upon? And, on the contrary, when we hear with feeling, is it not sweet to our souls? When we read the word, is it not blessed to read with feeling? When

we pray, is it not sweet to pray with feeling? When in conversation with God's people, is it not sweet to converse with feeling? And when attending to ordinances, and partaking of the Lord's supper, is it not sweet to be engaged in them with feeling? How miserably shut up and cold the soul is when it has no feeling! And how condemned the conscience is, when we go through these things in a hard and vain-confident manner.

A main branch, then, of this "treasure" is *life*. And wherever there is life, there will be feeling in proportion to the depth of that life. By this life we feel a fear to offend God, and have a desire to please him; by this life we groan under the weight of sin; by this life we breathe out our desires after the manifestations of his mercy and grace; and by this life we receive into our heart and conscience the Lord of life and glory. The work of the Spirit of God is to communicate this life, and to keep it bright and burning in the soul; when desponding, to revive; when drooping, to raise up; when cast down, to comfort; and from time to time to keep it alive by pouring in the oil of his own heavenly grace.

3. But another branch of this heavenly treasure is, *the fear of God*; as we read, "*The fear of the Lord is his treasure.*" (Isa. 33:6.) And O, what a treasure is this! Treasure, as I have hinted, in ancient times was generally hidden; it was concealed from the eye of man, hoarded up, and not brought out ostentatiously to view. Wealthy men of old hid the knowledge of their treasures, lest they should be spoiled of them by the hand of violence. So spiritually, the fear of the Lord is hidden in the heart, and lies deep in the soul; it is not spread out ostentatiously to view, but is buried out of sight in a man's conscience.

But though hidden from others, and sometimes even from



ourselves, this "fear of the Lord" will act as circumstances draw it forth. There may be times and seasons when we seem almost hardened and conscience seared; sin appears to have such power over us, and evil thoughts and desires so carry us away, that we cannot trace one atom of godly fear within; and the soul cries, "What will become of me! Where am I going now! What will come next on such a wretch as I feel myself to be!" But place him in such circumstances, say as befell Joseph, then he will find that the "fear of the Lord," is in him a fountain of life, a holy principle springing up in his soul. Thus, this fear, which is a part of the heavenly treasure, acts when most needed. And the more the life of God is felt in the soul, the more the fear of God flows forth as a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death. The more lively the grace of God is in the soul, the more lively will godly fear be in the heart; and the more the Spirit of God works with power in the conscience, the deeper will be the fear of God in the soul.

Now, there is a fear "which hath torment," a slavish fear, which devils and carnal men have, and which is cast out by love; (1 John 4:18) and there is another fear, filial or godly fear, a member of the new man, an effect of divine teaching, a fruit of the Spirit. This godly fear love does not cast out, but strengthens. The highest angel must stand in fear of God. The great and glorious majesty of Jehovah must cause even those pure and bright spirits to fear before him. The seraphim, whom Isaiah saw in the temple, "covered their face." (6:2.) However high, then, faith may rise, fear will be its constant companion; the greater the faith, the stronger the fear; the more sweet the confidence, the more will fear work with it. So that, the higher the soul rises in blessed confidence, the higher will fear mount up with that faith, so as to keep it from ever soaring on the wings of presumption. Fear is, as it were, a ballast to faith; and thus, however high

faith may mount, godly fear and holy reverence of God will mount up side by side with it; and though faith may penetrate into the very presence of God, it will not be deserted by this blessed companion; for reverence and godly fear will accompany it even to the throne room of the King of kings. The Apostle therefore says, "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire." (Heb. 12:28, 29.) It is this blessed companion that so distinguishes true from false faith; the confidence that God gives his people, from the daring presumption of those dead in a profession. These have no filial fear, no reverence of God, no trembling apprehension of his dread Majesty; but they make to themselves wings of vain confidence and presumption, and soar aloft on these self-constructed pinions, till they fall from the heaven of their own imagination into the awful ocean of never-ending woe.

This filial fear dwelt in the human nature of Jesus. "The Spirit of the Lord," we read, "shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge *and of the fear of the Lord; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord.*" (Isa. 11:2, 3.) With every other grace of the Spirit, the "fear of the Lord" was in Christ's human nature. So that, in proportion to the fulness with which he was anointed, was the fulness of the holy fear that dwelt in him.

4. Another part of this heavenly treasure is, *faith*. For it is only so far as God gives us faith that we can spiritually realize the things that the Lord has prepared for those that love him. There is this difference between the faith of the operation of the Spirit of God, that dwells in a regenerate heart, and vain-confidence—that true faith ebbs and flows in the soul, but vain-confidence stands always on a level. Faith

is a fountain that gives out, more or less, gushing water, but vain-confidence and presumption are always at one and the same stand. They resemble the water in the London Docks, which has no ebbings and flowings like the River Thames, but is shut in by gates, so as always to preserve the same level. And you know what is the nature of water that neither runs, nor ebbs and flows; it is always stagnant, and often stinking. And so with vain-confident professors: they have no afflictions, and no consolations; are never cast down by the temptations of Satan, and never raised up by deliverance and manifestations. Their religion preserves one constant level; they can always believe, and always confide, always see their interest, always talk about religion, and always say, "My Father and my God." Their soul knows nothing of the ups and downs that God's people experience.

True faith I may call the *grand tidal wave* of the soul. I will endeavour to explain the expression. We see the River Thames day by day ebbing and flowing. What causes this change? You answer, "it is produced by the sea in the Channel alternately coming up and retiring." It is a true explanation. But what makes the sea of the Channel alternately come up and retire? There is what is called, "a grand tidal wave," that comes across the Atlantic Ocean, which, as it ebbs and flows, affects all the minor tides of the neighbouring seas; and thus the tide of the Channel, and that of the River Thames, ebb and flow in unison with this huge Atlantic wave. In the same way faith is the tidal wave of the soul; and all the graces and fruits of the Spirit ebb and flow just as faith rises, or just as faith sinks. If faith rises in the soul, all the graces and fruits of the Spirit rise with it; light increases, life is deepened, the fear of God strengthened, hope brightened, and love augmented. And when this great tidal wave of faith falls in the soul, all the minor tides of the Spirit's graces fall in unison with it. Thus

when faith recedes and becomes low in the soul, all the other graces of the Spirit sink with it; consolation ebbs out altogether, hope recedes to a narrow streamlet, life dwindles to a scanty current, and love is reduced to a shallow channel. And as in the Thames we see, at low tide, the muddy banks which the stream has forsaken, so as faith sinks to a low ebb in the soul, there seems little else left but the mud and mire of corruption. But what makes the grand tidal wave itself move? There is a cause for that also. It is drawn up by, and obeys the attraction of the sun. And is not this true spiritually of the grand tidal wave of faith in the soul? Is it not drawn up by the Sun of Righteousness, as the natural sun draws up the wave of the ocean, and makes it ebb and flow? And when that glorious Sun ceases to draw up faith, does it not ebb and sensibly sink in the soul, as the natural sea sinks when the sun recedes from it?

5. *Hope* also—I mean a "good hope through grace," arising out of the Spirit's work in the soul and from a divine testimony in the conscience, a hope that rests not upon the opinions of men, but upon the mercy of God—this "good hope through grace" is also a part of the heavenly treasure.

6. And so with *Love*; for the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, producing love to the Lord and love to the Lord's people, makes a man rich indeed. This divine gift is, indeed, a conspicuous part and main branch of the heavenly treasure which God puts within the soul.

In fact, grace, with all its various fruits, communications, and gifts; especially, Christ in the heart, the hope of glory, revealed and made known there by the power of God, form this treasure. He who possesses it is rich indeed. And though he be a pauper, whose lot is to live and die in a Union Workhouse; to be thrust when dead into an elm shell, and

buried at the expense of the parish, with no follower to his lowly grave, and no tombstone to mark the date of his birth and death; yet the riches of this poor despised man far exceeds those of the most opulent banker that rolls in his carriage, or of the wealthiest peer who lives and dies an enemy to sovereign grace.

II.—But the Apostle tells us *where* this treasure is lodged: "We have this treasure *in earthen vessels.*" These earthen vessels are our bodies, those miserable tabernacles of clay; as we read, "For we know that if our *earthly house of this tabernacle* were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (2 Cor. 5:1.) But what an unsuitable receptacle for such a treasure! What a mean casket for such a jewel! Christ in the heart, the hope of glory; light, love, and immortality; the earnest and the first fruits of eternal bliss, and of that glory which will make the saints shine brighter than the stars for ever and ever;—that all this unspeakably rich treasure, which neither the tongue of men or angels can describe, should be lodged in a poor, crippled, aching, diseased, corruptible body! O what a disparity between the casket and the jewel! What a difference between the precious treasure and the contemptible vessel in which it is deposited!

But what do we understand by the expression, "*earthen vessel*?" It means a vessel made of clay, common clay; an earthen pitcher, such as stands in every poor man's cottage. What do we gather then from this idea?

1. *First*, that of *great meanness*. What vessel can be so common as one made of clay? It is not a porcelain, or china vase that the Apostle speaks of, compounded by all the skill of Wedgwood, and gilded and painted, such as a nobleman puts for ornament on his mantelpiece; but a common,

earthen vessel, made of baked clay. Is not this true in grace? Whom for the most part does the Lord cause to be partakers of this treasure? Those whom men admire? The beautiful, the noble, the learned, the wealthy? Few of such are the Lord's people; but he has chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith; those who have nothing to recommend them in the eyes of the world, and possess nothing in outward appearance to attract the admiring sense and reason.

2. But again, if we look at the expression "earthen vessel," it denotes something *frail*. How soon the earthen pitcher is broken at the well! Our poor tabernacles, how frail they are! How soon can sickness cut them down! A piece of falling timber, a blow from a passing carriage, may at once break to pieces this frail tabernacle! Health, strength, and vigour are no security: a raging fever in a few days may cut off the strongest man, or what is called "an accident" may in a moment deprive him of life. I believe, for the most part, the Lord, in his providential dealings with his people, makes them know the frailty of their clay tabernacles. Very few of the living family have strong healthy bodies; nearly all of them are afflicted with some ailment or disease; and many have lingering complaints, so as scarcely to know a single day's ease from pain, so that nearly the whole of their lives they are kept alive by miracle, and yet are immortal till their work is done.

3. Another idea is that of *corruption*. Earth, clay, dirt, are words nearly allied to each other; the expression, "earthen vessel," may well then refer to our earthly, fallen, sensual nature.

4. Another idea contained in the figure may be, that the earthen vessel *leaks*; it cannot hold wine or milk put into it. Now, is not this true with respect to the good things which

God puts into the heart? If we have a sweet frame, we cannot keep it; if we have a blessed feeling we cannot retain it; if we hear well under a sermon, it soon leaks out. At least it is so with us in the country; though I believe in London they have a patent method of glazing their vessels to prevent their leakage; for I understand there are preachers and professors here whose strength, wisdom, comfort, and confidence never leak out. I myself have never yet discovered this secret; I have not yet learnt how to compound this patent glaze; for I find the sweetest feelings soon leak away, and leave the soul as dry as ever.

III.—But the Apostle tell us, *why* it is, that the treasure is put into earthen vessels—*"that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."* That is the reason which the Holy Ghost gives, *why* the treasure is put into the earthen vessel. If they were put into golden vessels, then "the excellency of the power" would not be of God: gold being a vessel inconsumable by fire, would of itself keep the treasure unharmed. If the casket were indestructible and inconsumable, it would not want the power of God to preserve the treasure there. But it is put into an earthen vessel, into a frail tabernacle, a poor weak body, a feeble frame, for this express purpose, that the casket may not glory in its power to hold the heavenly treasure. If we had power in ourselves to retain what God gives; if we could keep the faith that God communicates, maintain the hope that he inspires, preserve alive the love which he sheds abroad, nurture the sweet frame, or cherish in our bosoms the divine sensations that God the Spirit enkindles there, "the excellency of power" would be of us; and we should "sacrifice to our own net, and burn incense to our own drag." We should not know whence the power came; we should not believe that God was the author and finisher of faith in the soul, and of every atom of hope and love in the heart. But

when we find and feel that the treasure is in an earthen vessel, defiled with sin; in a frail heart, perpetually leaking out the wine which God communicates, then we begin to learn that grand and important secret, that "the excellency of the power is of God, and not of us." If we see the light, we know it must come down from God into our conscience, for we cannot create nor keep it. If we feel life, we cannot preserve it. If we find faith in exercise, we know not how to retain it. If we have hope, we are sure that God is the author of it, and that he too must keep it alive. If we have any love, God, we know, gave it, and he alone can keep it in lively exercise. But were the casket at all in proportion to the treasure it contains; if the Spirit of God dwelt in a pure and spotless soul, free from frailty, imperfection, or backsliding, so that there were no workings of a depraved nature and of a sensual, filthy heart, we should begin to think that "the excellency of the power" was of us; and we should glory in our own strength, wisdom, righteousness, and knowledge, and the actings of our own faith, hope, and love. But this the Lord will not suffer. "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." (Jer. 9:23, 24.)

But when the Lord puts this treasure into *earthen* vessels, and we find that except the Lord keep alive his work in the soul, according to our feelings, it goes out; that we have no more power to retain it, than we had power at first to create it; *then* we learn to ascribe to him every good we receive; and that wretched presumption, self-righteousness, and self-conceit of which our hearts are full, get their death-blow. It becomes stamped on our feelings that "the excellency of the



power" is not of ourselves; that what we are, we are by God's making; what we have, we have by God's giving; and what we know, we know by God's teaching.

But observe the words, for they will bear looking at: "*The excellency of the power.*" It does not merely say, "power," but "*the excellency of the power.*" As though the Apostle would call our minds to observe the excellency, the surpassing excellency of this power. It would not require (so to speak) so much power to be displayed on God's part, were we not what we are. If we were not so deeply sunk in carnality, it would not require "the excellency of the power" to make us spiritual. If we were not so buried in the world, it would not shew forth the excellency of God's power to make us heavenly-minded, and draw our affections upward. If we were not so full of unbelief, if our hearts did not continually breed infidelity, questionings, doubtings, and fearings, it would not require such "excellency of the power" of God to communicate the gift of faith to the soul. If we never desponded through the temptations of Satan, the besetments of our vile nature, and the many difficulties met with in the way, we should not feel that we required "the excellency of God's power" to keep alive a good hope in the soul. If we never felt cold and dead in our affections, and as unable to bring forth one spiritual desire as to create a world, we should not want "the excellency of the power" displayed in communicating to our souls heavenly love and affection. If we had no trials and perplexities, and did not find that we could not muster up a grain of patience to bear them, we should not feel our need of "the excellency of the power" to support us under them. If we were never distressed in our minds, and felt that we had no power to speak peace or comfort to our souls, we should not want "the excellency of the power" to be of God to comfort us. And so we might say of every other grace. So that the more we are led into this

divine secret, that this treasure is in "earthen vessels," and the more we feel the disparity between the casket and the jewel, the more we see "the excellency of the power" of God; and how that excellency is displayed in the various circumstances by which we are surrounded; in the leadings of God's providence, and in his dealings with us in grace. God is a jealous God; and he will not share his glory with man: he will have all the glory to himself. But you and I are such base wretches, that we would rob the Lord himself of his glory, if he did not teach us otherwise. If he did not open up to us the depth of our corruption, and shew us the depravity that lurks and works in our carnal minds: if he did not cover our faces with shame; if he did not put us in the furnace to burn out our pride, and drag us through the water to drown our hypocrisy; if he did not humble us under a daily sense of our frailty and feebleness, we should soon want to sit down on the same throne with the Lord, and share the glory of salvation with him. But when we carry about with us such repeated evidences of our base original, and see and feel what earthen vessels the treasure is lodged in, we come to this conclusion, that we have no light, life, faith, hope, love, nor any one good thing unless God give it us, and work it in us; unless it come from his hand, and is wrought in our soul by his divine operation. And thus we learn, that "the excellency of the power is of God, and not of us." But if I could always keep a sweet frame, or nurture a pleasant feeling; if I could always command the Spirit of God; if I could go when I pleased to the Bank of heaven, draw a cheque, and receive over the counter the amount I wished, how could I know that "the excellency of the power" is of God? But the more deeply we sink into creature helplessness, and the more experimentally we are acquainted with creature weakness, the more we learn that "the excellency of the power is of God, and not of us." It is to teach us this, that we so often feel the chisel and mallet, chipping and hacking off

all the patent glazing that presumption and vain-confidence would fain smear over our vessel. And is it not a mercy to have this "covering which is not of God's Spirit" stripped off? to know nothing except what God teaches us; and to have nothing from day to day, and from hour to hour, but what God works in us?

But there is one more remark to which I must call your attention, and that is, that *the treasure is not defiled by the earthen vessel*. Gold and silver, those precious metals, take no injury, receive no spot of corruption from the vessel in which they are contained: let them be buried in the damp earth, no tarnish or rust form upon them. So spiritually, the grace of God in the heart, surrounded as it is with corruption, is not tarnished by it; the heavenly treasure is not contaminated, though lodged in an earthly vessel. Christ in the heart is not defiled by the inward workings of depravity, and by the base thoughts that strive perpetually against his grace, any more than the gold of the Bank of England is defiled by the dark and damp cellars in which it is stowed. And what a mercy it is, that our corruptions cannot tarnish the grace of God; that our unbelief cannot mix with, and adulterate the faith of God's elect; that our despondency cannot spoil and ruin a gospel hope; that our deadness, darkness, coldness, and rebellion cannot mingle with and defile the love of God in the soul! This heavenly treasure remains still as unpolluted and pure as when God first put it there; being a part of "the divine nature," it remains uncontaminated by the filth and corruption that surround it. Is not this a mercy for God's tried people, that spiritual knowledge, living faith, gospel hope, heavenly love, and the fruits and graces of God's Spirit in the soul can never be defiled; but, like the streams of a fountain, are ever gushing forth in pure water? What a blessing it is, that the pure grace of God in a man's heart cannot be contaminated by the filthy

streams that are dashing from a vile nature against it, like the torrents of water from a fire-engine against a burning house, but remains as pure as when God the Spirit first breathed it into the soul.

Now, may not this clear up to some poor child of God here why it is that he is so tried and exercised; why he has so many desponding thoughts, why his soul at times sinks so low, and why it is that he is so tossed about, harassed, burdened, and plagued with the darts of infidelity; why he feels so little Godward; and why he feels so much of nature, sense, and reason working in him? It is because you have the treasure in an earthen vessel. That is the reason. But do you not sometimes find that there is a treasure in your heart, something you would not part with for a thousand worlds? Something spiritual, something heavenly, something holy, something blessed, something that lifts up your heart Godward, something that brings eternal things near; and something that at times enables you to trample upon the world, all its riches, all its honours, and all its pleasures? If you feel this, you have a treasure, though lodged in an earthen vessel, that "the excellency of the power may be of God," and not of you; that he may have all the glory, and that you and I may not be able to take one atom, one grain of praise to ourselves.

And this, too, is the reason why so many of God's people carry about with them a frail, weak, and afflicted tabernacle;—that they may not take pleasure in the things of time and sense; and to shew them that their affections are not to be set here below, but where Jesus sits, at the right hand of God.

I here close my labours for this year among you, this being my Farewell discourse. And I do sincerely desire that the

Lord may bless Zoar; for I have felt, I believe, a measure of spiritual union and communion with the Lord's people who attend here. My soul's desire, then, is, that the Lord would shine upon, and be with you; that he would come up with the men of God whom he is pleased to send to stand up, from time to time, in this pulpit; and manifest more and more, that he is present here to make the place of his feet glorious, and to bless you of a truth.