

THE BETTER THINGS WHICH ACCOMPANY SALVATION

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"But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak."
Hebrews 6:9

It appears, from several passages in this Epistle, that the Hebrews, to whom it was written, were suffering under severe persecutions; and not being firmly established in the faith, they manifested under the pressure of these heavy trials a wavering disposition. It is for this reason that we find the Apostle Paul intermingling in this Epistle solemn warnings and admonitions with suitable encouragements.

He felt for them as undergoing persecution; but his keen, discerning eye perceived in some of them symptoms of wavering; and this led him to speak to them in a tone of solemn admonition, such as we scarcely find in any other of his Epistles. In the sixth and tenth chapters, especially, of this Epistle, we find two most solemn warnings; and perhaps there are no two chapters in the Bible which have more tried God's people than those just mentioned.

As the text is intimately connected with the fearful warning in the sixth chapter, it will be necessary for me, as briefly as is consistent with clearness, to drop a few hints on it, before I enter on the words of the text. In so doing, I shall set out by stating it as my firm persuasion that the Holy Ghost is not speaking of the children of God in that place; but that when he is describing those whom, if they should "fall away," it is impossible "to renew again unto repentance," he means professors of religion, entirely destitute of a work of grace on

their souls. "It is impossible," he says, "for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."

If we look at the words, there certainly seems to be a very near approach to what takes place in the heart of a child of God; and yet, if we examine the passage more minutely, we find nothing said in it of a work of grace, nothing of repentance unto life, nothing of faith in Christ, nothing of hope in God's mercy, nothing of love towards the people of God; in a word, nothing of that spiritual teaching which makes a man wise unto salvation.

1. The first thing said of these awful characters, is, that they were "**once enlightened.**" The apostle does not say they were quickened into spiritual life, regenerated, and born again; but he speaks of them as being "enlightened."

Now there are two different kinds of enlightenment; the one, spiritual and saving, such as the apostle speaks of in Eph 1:18, "**The eyes of your understanding being enlightened,** that ye may know what is the hope of his calling." And so David, "The entrance of thy word giveth light"(Ps. 119:130). "With thee is the fountain of light; **in thy light shall we see light**" (Ps. 36:9). In these passages, spiritual saving light is spoken of; what the Lord himself calls the "light of life" (John 8:12) ; that is, not merely light to enlighten the understanding, but life accompanying it to quicken the soul. But there is another enlightenment, and of that the apostle speaks here, the enlightening of the natural understanding; not a **spiritual** light, such as attends a

regenerating work on the conscience, but an intellectual light, whereby the truth is perceived by the natural mind in the letter of the word.

2. **"And have tasted of the heavenly gift."** In the apostolic times "gifts" were communicated to the churches for the profit of the saints. There were gifts of healing, of tongues, of prophecy, and others such as we find mentioned in 1Co 12:8, 9. These were given for the profit of the body, and were distinct things from grace, as the apostle declares in 1Co 12:31; when, after describing these gifts, he adds, "And yet show I unto you a more excellent way," that of "charity" or love: and then he goes on to say, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal; and though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing."

These gifts then, are called "heavenly gifts," as being communicated from heaven for certain purposes; but are not "grace," whereby the soul is regenerated. In the exercise of these gifts a natural pleasure was found by their possessors, here called **"tasting."** Similarly in our day, there are gifts in prayer, gifts in preaching, gifts in conversation, gifts in interpreting and expounding the Scriptures. Now a man may have all these gifts, and yet be entirely destitute of grace; and when he exercises them, he may find a certain pleasure and delight in their use, which is called a **"tasting** of the heavenly gift;" and is perfectly distinct from eating the bread of life, enjoying the presence of God, and feeding by faith on the savoury meat of the gospel.

3. But it is also said, they were **"made partakers of the Holy Ghost."** This perhaps is one of the most stumbling expressions in the whole passage; but I think we may clear it up by comparing Scripture with Scripture. Do we not read of Saul that "the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied?" (1 Sam. 10:10). Is it not also recorded when on one occasion Saul sent messengers to take David, in two successive instances, when they came into the presence of Samuel, "the Spirit of God was upon the messengers, and they also prophesied?" (1 Sam. 19:20). Do we not read too what the Lord says, Ex 31:2, 3, "See, I have called by name Bezaleel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to do all the work of the tabernacle?" And did not Balaam speak by the Spirit, and prophesy wonderful things concerning the Messiah? Thus in this outward sense, a man may be "made a partaker of the Holy Ghost;" his natural understanding being illuminated, but his soul never regenerated, nor the grace of God communicated to his heart. Balaam and his ass both spake as God moved their tongues, but the rider was no more regenerated than his beast.

4. **"And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come."** There is much in the word of God, which can be understood and relished by the natural understanding; there is in parts great eloquence, many flowers of poetry, many moving expressions, and pathetic sentiments; and all these things may have a certain effect upon the natural mind, quite independent of and distinct from any revelation or application of truth to the soul by the power of the Holy Ghost, quite different from the inward reception of truth in the heart and conscience. There may be also a natural relish for "the good word of God," and a

receiving of the gospel with gladness **which is meant by the expression "the world to come,"** where there is no peace nor joy in believing.

But the Apostle having shewn how far a man may go in a profession, and prove at last utterly destitute of vital godliness, proceeds to bring forward a word of encouragement and consolation for the people of God, who might have been tried and exercised with the solemn warning set before them. He therefore adds, in the words of the text, "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak."

I.—What does he mean by these **"better things?"** He means graces in opposition to **gifts;** the work of the Spirit upon the heart and conscience, as a thing distinct from any mere profession of religion, or any mere intellectual understanding and natural reception of truth. And why are these **"better things?"** They are better, because gifts are for time, grace for eternity; gifts profit the church, grace saves the soul; gifts puff up men with pride, grace gives a single eye to the glory of God; gifts, when unaccompanied by the grace of God, harden the heart, grace melts and softens the soul, and makes it meet for "the inheritance of the saints in light": gifts leave a man where they find him, or I might rather say, unaccompanied by grace, worse than they found him **for the more a man touches sacred things with unclean hands, the more hardening effect they have upon him,** while grace in its communication, makes a man a new creature, and lifts him up into the eternal enjoyment of the Three-One God.

Inasmuch then, as eternity is better than time, salvation better than damnation, and heaven better than hell; so are the blessed graces and teachings of God's Spirit in the soul

"better" than the highest gifts and brightest attainments which are short of the work and witness of the Holy Ghost in the heart.

II.—But the Apostle adds also, "**things that accompany salvation,**" which he was "persuaded" those to whom he wrote were in possession of.

What then is "**salvation?**" In looking at salvation, we must consider it from two points of view; salvation wrought out **for** us, and salvation wrought out in us. Salvation was wrought out **for** us by the finished work of the Son of God, when he cried with expiring breath, "It is finished." The salvation of "the remnant according to the election of grace" was then completely accomplished, so that nothing could be added to, or taken from it; for "by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that were sanctified;" and thus the elect stand complete in Christ, without "spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing."

But there is a salvation which is wrought out **in** us; the manifestation and application of that salvation which Jesus has wrought out by his sufferings, blood-shedding, and death: and this we can only know experimentally, so far as the blessed Spirit brings it into our hearts, and seals it there with holy unction and heavenly savour.

But all the people of God cannot feel sure they have this salvation as an experimental reality; doubts, fears, darkness, and temptations becloud their path; Satan hurls his fiery darts into their souls; and they are unable to realize their interest in the Lord Jesus Christ and his salvation. They do not doubt whether the Lord Jesus is the Saviour of those that believe; they know that there is no other refuge for their guilty souls but the blood of the Lamb. They are effectually

stripped from cleaving to a covenant of works; they are not running after things that cannot profit them, nor hiding their heads in lying refuges; from all these things they are effectually cut off, and cut out by a work of grace on their souls. But through the unbelief of their hearts, the deadness of their frames, the barrenness of their souls, and the various temptations they are exercised with, they fear they have not the marks of God's family, and are not able to realize their interest in the love and blood of the Lamb.

The Apostle, therefore, speaks of "things that **accompany** salvation;" that is, certain marks and signs, certain clear and indubitable tokens of the work of grace on the soul. And, speaking to the Hebrews, he says for their comfort and encouragement, "we are persuaded," whatever be your doubts and fears, whatever the darkness of your mind, however exercised with sharp and severe temptations, "we are persuaded" you are in possession of those "better things," of those "things that accompany salvation;" and that this salvation is therefore eternally yours.

Let us then with God's blessing, endeavour to trace out a few of these "better things," these "things that accompany salvation;" and shew how far better and more blessed they are than any gifts that hypocrites or mere professors may be in possession of.

1. **A work of grace on the soul** then, is "a better thing" than any mere gift, and is "a thing too which accompanies salvation." And what is a work of grace on the soul? It is to be quickened by the Spirit of God into spiritual life; it is to be made a new creature, by being brought to experience the almighty work of God on the conscience, renewing us in the spirit of our minds; and it consists in the communication of eternal life to the soul, with all its blessed consequences.

But wherever this work of grace takes place in a man's soul, there will be certain fruits and results that follow out of it. A man cannot be a partaker of the grace of God, and remain where he was before the Spirit quickened his soul; being "a new creature, old things are passed away" with him, and "all things are become new." And thus, being a new creature, and having the life of God in his soul, it will be manifested by the certain fruits that invariably spring out of it.

And I know not a surer test that this good work is begun than when **the heart is made tender in God's fear**. The Lord took especial notice of this mark in Josiah, when Shaphan the scribe read to him the book of the law, which Hilkiah had found in the temple, and he sent to enquire of the Lord: "**Because thine heart was tender**, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord &c., I also have heard thee" (2 Kings 22:19). This tenderness of heart was a mark in Josiah, on which the Lord, so to speak, put his finger; it was a special token for good which God selected from all the rest, as a testimony in his favour. The heart is always tender which God has touched with his finger; this tenderness being the fruit of the impression of the Lord's hand upon the conscience.

This spiritual tenderness of heart is a very different thing from a natural conscience. Many persons mistake the movings to and fro of natural conscience for a heart made tender by the work of God's Spirit. But you may know the difference between a natural conscience, and a heart tender in God's fear by this, that the natural conscience is always superstitious and uncertain; as the Lord says, it "strains at a gnat, and swallows a camel." It is exceedingly observant of self-inflicted austerities, and very fearful of breaking through self-imposed rules; and whilst it will commit sin which a man

who has the fear of God in his heart would not do for the world, it will stumble at mere unimportant trifles in which an enlightened soul would not feel the least scruple. It will "pay tithe of mint, anise, and cummin," whilst it "omits the weightier matters of the law" (Matt. 23:23); and "will not go into Pilate's judgment-hall lest it should be defiled" (John 18:28), at the very time that it is seeking to imbrue its hands in the blood of the Saviour.

But here is the mark of a heart tender in God's fear; it moves as God the Spirit works upon it; it is like the mariner's compass, which having been once touched by the magnet, always turns toward the North; it may indeed oscillate and tremble backwards and forwards, but still it will return to the pole, and ultimately remain fixed at the point whence it was temporarily disturbed. So when the heart has been touched by the Spirit, and has been made tender in God's fear, it may for a time waver to the right hand or to the left, but it is always trembling and fluctuating till it points toward God, as the eternal centre of its happiness and holiness.

2. **Godly sorrow for sin** is a "better thing" than any gift which a mere professor may possess, and a thing too which invariably "accompanies salvation." Godly sorrow for sin differs much from natural conviction for sin. Powerful natural convictions, I believe, for the most part are not felt more than once or twice in a man's life; and when they have passed away, the conscience is more seared than it was before, the world more eagerly grasped, and sin more impetuously plunged into.

But godly sorrow is produced by a work of grace on the heart. The eye of faith sees sin in the light of God's countenance, and thus the soul becomes alive to its dreadful evil and horrible character. The heart too is melted down into

godly sorrow by beholding the Saviour's sufferings, and viewing the Lord of life and glory as stooping and agonizing under the weight of sin, not only as imputed to him, but as pressing him down into anguish and distress. And thus, godly sorrow for sin is not a thing which a man feels once or twice in his life: but from time to time, as the Spirit works it in his heart, godly sorrow flows forth. If he has been entangled in sin, overcome by temptation, slidden back into the world, or his heart has gone after idols, a living soul will not pass it by as a thing of no consequence: but, sooner or later, the Spirit touches his heart, godly sorrow flows out, and his soul is melted and moved within him by feeling what a base wretch he is in the sight of a holy God.

3. A "**spirit of grace and supplications**" springing up in the heart from time to time, as the Lord works upon it, is a "better thing" than any gift a reprobate may be in possession of, and a thing too that "accompanies salvation." Now there is what is called a gift in prayer, but that is a very different thing from the communications of a "spirit of grace and supplications" by God himself to the soul.

A man for instance may pray in public apparently most feelingly and movingly; he may play well on his instrument, so as to touch the passions, and work on the feelings of God's people; yet he himself may be only "a tinkling brass," or "sounding cymbal," and know nothing of "a spirit of grace and supplications" in his own soul. But whenever there is a work of grace on the heart, it is always accompanied by a spirit of prayer; as the Lord says, "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications" (Zech. 12:10). And wherever it has been once poured out into a sinner's heart, it will never leave him from the moment that God quickens his soul until that blessed day when prayer shall end in praise.

I do not mean to say, that there may not be long suspensions of it; that darkness of mind may never cover it; that coldness and iciness of heart may never freeze it up; that emptiness and barrenness of spirit may never seem to quench it: but in spite of, and in the midst of all these things, the blessed "spirit of grace and supplications" will from time to time rise up to its Source. If this spirit of grace and supplications exists in your heart, if you have not power to pray, you will have power to sigh and groan. There will be again and again some inward going out after the Lord, some panting after his presence, some expression of dissatisfaction against self, some seeking his grace, some longing and languishing after his manifested favour and love.

And thus, the spirit of prayer wherever once given, will from time to time be springing up in the soul. But we cannot call it forth; we may attempt it, but we shall feel powerless to produce it: yet the Lord will sometimes **and perhaps at a moment when we least expect it, when we are cold, dull, stupid, and carnal**, draw up the desires and breathings which he has himself implanted, and raise the soul up that it may spring upwards once more towards its eternal and heavenly fountain.

4. Brokenness of heart, and contrition of spirit, is a "better thing" than any mere gift, and a grace which "accompanies salvation." The heart that feels the burden of sin, that suffers under temptation, that groans beneath Satan's fiery assaults, that bleeds under the wounds inflicted by committed evil, is broken and contrite. This brokenness of heart and contrition of spirit, is a thing which a child of God alone can feel. However hard his heart at times may seem to be, there will be seasons of spiritual reviving; however he may seem steeled against any sense of love and mercy, or

even of misery and guilt, from time to time, when he is least expecting and looking for it, there will be a breaking down of his soul before the Lord; there will be a bewailing of himself, a turning from the world to seek the Lord's favour, and a casting himself as a sinner once more on undeserved mercy. Tears will flow down his cheeks, sighs burst from his bosom, and he will lie humble at the Saviour's feet. If your soul has ever felt this, you have a "better thing" than any gift; for this brokenness of spirit is a thing that "accompanies salvation," and is a sacrifice that God will not despise (Ps. 51:17).

5. Deadness to the world, an inward separation from the things of time and sense, is a "better thing" than any mere gift, and a thing too that "accompanies salvation." I believe no one is really dead to the world but a child of God. A man may change his world who is not separated from it: he may for instance leave the profane world for the professing world; he may change from a Churchman to a Dissenter, from an Independent to a Baptist; he may become a member of a gospel church; he may, like Herod, do many things, and hear ministers of truth gladly. But all the time, unless he is made a partaker of "the divine nature" by a work of grace in his soul, his heart is and ever must be in the world.

The human heart must be engaged upon something; its affections must be fixed upon some object; its thoughts and desires must be occupied with one thing or other. If his heart, then, is not set Godward, if his affections are not fixed upon Christ, if his soul is not engaged on heavenly things, he may have the greatest profession of religion, but his heart is still worldly, his affections still earthly, and his soul still going out after idols. But where the Lord has really touched the conscience with his finger, and made himself precious to the soul, however a man may seem for a time to be buried in the world, and his affections going out after forbidden objects;

however he may be "hewing out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water;" however he may secretly backslide from the Lord, still he cannot break the hold that eternal things have upon his heart; he cannot find real pleasure in the world, though he may often seek it; nor bury himself contentedly in its pursuits. There will be a restless dissatisfaction with the things of time and sense, an aching void, and a turning again to "the strong hold," a seeking the Lord, who only can really satisfy the soul, and make it happy for time and eternity.

6. Faith in the Lord of life and glory; to receive him into our hearts as the Christ of God, and view him with the eye of faith as our once bleeding, suffering, and agonizing Lord, and now raised to God's right hand as our Intercessor, Advocate, and Mediator—this is a "better thing" than any gift, and a thing too that "accompanies salvation." This the apostle clearly points out in this chapter, where he says, "Be not slothful, but followers of them, who **through faith** and patience inherit the promises."

He had not said a word about **faith** in those, of whom he declares "it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance." He never dropped a hint that they were partakers of this or any other grace; but when he comes to the "better things," he puts his finger immediately on living faith in the soul. This faith in the Son of God, whereby he is believed on to life eternal, received into the heart, adored by the spirit, enthroned in the affections, submitted to and embraced with every faculty of the soul, is a blessing only communicated to God's family. A faith which is lodged in the secret court of conscience, in the deep recesses of a man's heart, which views the Son of God, and receives him as all its salvation and all its desire, and hangs upon his blood and righteousness; such a faith as this is beyond the highest

attainment of any gifted hypocrite, and is a "better thing" than was ever possessed by the most flourishing professor.

7. A hope in God's mercy, not the "hope of the hypocrite, that shall perish;" but what the Scriptures call "a good hope through grace;" a "hope which is as an anchor to the soul, both sure and stedfast, that entereth into that within the veil;" such a spiritual hope is a "better thing" than any mere gift, and a thing too that "accompanies salvation." We do not find that the apostle said anything about hope as dwelling in those awful characters, whom he compares to "the earth, which beareth thorns and briers, and is therefore rejected, and nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned." They indeed had a heavenly gift, and an enlightened understanding, and did many wonderful things; but they never had hope, "as an anchor to the soul," to keep it steady in the winds and storms. They had not on board their gallant bark this heavenly anchor, which was never known to break or fail, because its flukes take hold of the flesh of the God-Man Mediator, and its cable forms a living communication between the storm-tossed vessel and him in whom it anchors.

The hope which penetrates beyond the things of time and sense, and enters in and anchors upon a blessed Jesus, was never possessed by the most gifted professor that ever deceived himself, or ever deceived the church of God. And what is the root of this good hope through grace? The Lord's own work and witness in the conscience, his tokens for good, his manifested favour, enabling the soul to look to Christ as his forerunner who has entered within the veil. This hope which "maketh not ashamed" does not arise from anything in the flesh, does not hang upon the approbation of man, does not depend upon the testimony of the creature; it passes beyond all these things, and enters within the veil, into the

immediate presence of God, where Jesus is sitting as Mediator and Advocate.

8. And **love** also is "a better thing," and a thing that "accompanies salvation." Love is the crowning point of all: as the apostle says, "Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing," but "sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." We do not find **love** mentioned in the catalogue of the "heavenly gifts." Those whom it was impossible to renew again unto repentance were not made partakers of this blessed grace.

But, on the contrary, the apostle, in speaking to the believers, says, "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of **love**" (Heb. 6:10). The other wretched apostates might have every gift, yet they were destitute of love; and being destitute of **that**, had not passed from death unto life. And what is **love**? It is a grace that changes not; one of the three heavenly sisters, and the greatest of them all; for "now abideth faith, hope, and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13). Faith will be changed into sight, and hope into fruition, but love remains the same, for "God is love."

If your soul, then, has ever known what it is to love God, and to feel the flowings out of affection towards the Lord Jesus Christ; if you have felt him precious to your soul, you have a thing that "accompanies salvation." You are not a poor miserable self-deceived professor, not a Satan-deluded wretch, that flutters for a little time in the religious world, like a moth around the evening candle, till at last it burns its wings, and is destroyed in the flame. But if ever the Lord Jesus Christ has been made precious to your soul, it is

because you have embraced him in the arms of a living faith, as the Scripture says, "Unto you therefore which believe he is precious" (1 Pet. 2:7).

But **love** comprehends not only **love to God, but love also to God's people**. The apostle especially insists on this mark in the verses following the text. "But God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed towards his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Heb. 6:10). The Apostle John, too, says, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14). This is the first evidence the soul usually has of its having "passed from death unto life," that it sensibly feels a union of spirit with God's people, a drawing forth of affection to those who are manifest partakers of the grace of God.

This union with the children of God is better felt than described. There is often a sweet knitting of spirit, a blessed interweaving and interlacing of hearts, when God's people come together, and speak of the things which they have tasted, felt, and handled. The Spirit of God rests on them, and baptizes them into a blessed union with each other, so that their very souls are melted together, and they embrace each other, just as though they had but one heart and one spirit: as the Holy Ghost describes the early Christians, "they were all of one heart and one soul" (Acts 4:32). Their spirits were so fused by the heat of divine love into each other, their hearts were so intermingled, and there was such a flowing out of mutual affection, that all the company seemed to have but one heart and one soul amongst them.

Now, my friends, just see if you can realize this one evidence in your soul. You meet with a person, say, whom you have never seen before; he is, perhaps, one from whom in the

pride of your heart you would turn away with disdain; he has no personal gifts, nothing whatever naturally to recommend him; or he may be a person against whom you have been prejudiced, and when you see him you look on him with distaste or sullen aversion. But he begins to speak; and as you listen, you feel all your prejudice give way; the bar is effectually broken down; and there is a sweet melting of your heart into his, and his into yours, and a mutual flowing forth of love to each other. Now, if your soul has ever experienced this, you are not a gifted hypocrite, though you may have gifts, but one of those whom the Lord has taught by his Spirit, and are in possession of those "better things" that "accompany salvation."

God's children fear to be deceived, and if a man have no such fear, the probability is that he is deceived already. All God's people know the deceitfulness of the human heart, and the abounding hypocrisy of their corrupt nature; they are more or less alive to the devices of Satan; and all know what a dreadful thing it is to be deluded, and have a portion with the hypocrites, where there is "weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

III.—The Scriptures, then, have brought certain marks not only to test but also to comfort God's people. But in order to keep them tremblingly alive to the fear of being deceived; in order to set up an effectual beacon lest their vessel should run upon the rocks, the blessed Spirit has revealed such passages as we find in the sixth and tenth chapters of the Hebrews. They seem set up by the Spirit of God, as a lighthouse at the entrance of a harbour. Is it not so naturally? Some shoal or sandbank often lies near the entrance of the port, which the mariner has to guard against. How is he guarded? A lighthouse is erected, on or near the spot, which warns him of the shoal.

Now I look on this chapter, and the tenth, as two lighthouses, standing near the entrance of the harbour of eternal safety. And their language is, "Beware of this shoal! Take care of that sandbank! There are gifts without grace; there is profession without possession; there is form without power; there is a name to live whilst the soul is dead." The shoal naturally often lies at the very entrance of a harbour: and as the ship makes for the port, the sandbank lies in her very course; but when the harbour is neared, the friendly beacon not only warns her of the shoal, but also points out the safe passage into the haven. And so, spiritually, from these two chapters many of God's people have seen what shoals lie in the way, and have, perhaps, before they were warned off, come near enough to see the fragments of the shipwrecked vessels. The gallant barks that sailed from the same ports with themselves they have seen wrecked on the rocks, their freight lost, and the dead bodies and broken fragments floating on the waves. But these never looked for the lighthouse, nor saw the bank; they were intoxicated, or fast asleep; they were sure of going to heaven; and on they went, reckless and thoughtless, till the vessel struck on the shoal, and every hand on board perished.

These awful warnings and solemn admonitions seem to me so written that they may scrape, so to speak, as nearly as possible the quick of a man's flesh. And they appear couched in language of purposed ambiguity that they may be trying passages; nay, the very beauty and efficacy of them, and the real good to be wrought by them, is in their ambiguity; so that the people of God may take a more solemn warning by them, and may cry unto the Lord more earnestly that they may not be deceived.

Then, my friends, it is not the poor desponding children of God, who are tried by these passages, that have reason to

fear them. Their being thus tried shows that their conscience is tender in God's fear, and that they are "the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringing forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God;" and that they are not that "which beareth thorns and briers, which is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned."

And thus, these very fears and suspicions, by which many of God's people are exercised, causing strong cries unto the Lord, that he would teach, guide, and lead them, are so many blessed marks that they are not graceless persons, but partakers of the grace of God; and at the same time prove, "that he which hath begun a good work in them" will carry it on, and "will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ," and bring them into the eternal enjoyment of God that they may see him for themselves, and not for another.