

## The Faith and Confession of a Pilgrim

Preached at Jewry Street Chapel, Aldgate, for the Aged Pilgrims' Friend Society, on Tuesday Evening, August 13, 1844

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country." Hebrews 11:13, 14

The Holy Ghost in this chapter (Heb. 11) not only gives us a *definition* of faith, (as we find verse 1,) but draws out also that definition into a number of *examples*. His object is to show us, that there is but "one faith," as there is but "one Lord, and one baptism;" and that the Old Testament saints were partakers of the same faith which Christ and his Apostles preached as necessary to salvation. Now this was very much to the purpose, considering the persons to whom the Epistle was addressed. It was written "to the Hebrews," that is, to the believing Jews, as distinguished from the believing Gentiles; and it was therefore exceedingly appropriate for the Apostle to show that the very faith of the gospel which he preached, and for which he was contending, existed in the days of old—that it dwelt in the heart and conscience, and was manifested in the life and conversation of the Old Testament saints. In order to prove this, he takes his stand from the very first saint recorded in the Scripture, Abel, and brings it down even below the times of the Old Testament; for there is in the latter part of the chapter (ver. 35,) a clear allusion to a circumstance recorded in the Apocrypha, "And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection." There is an evident allusion here to an account given us in

the book of Maccabees (2 Mac. 7) of a mother with her seven children, who were all offered their lives, one after another, on condition of renouncing Judaism; but who all consented to die under the greatest tortures rather than give up the faith of their forefathers. One of the brothers, "when he was ready to die said thus, It is good, being put to death by men, to look for hope from God to be raised up again by him." (v. 14.)

Thus the Apostle shews, that all the Old Testament saints, of whom the Jews had the highest opinion, and to whom the Lord himself had borne the strongest testimony, such as Enoch, who was translated; Noah, who, was saved in the ark; Abraham, their lineal ancestor; Sarah his wife; Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and others, of whom time would fail him to tell—that all these ancient believers were partakers of the same faith which was set forth in the gospel. It is as though the apostle said, "It is no new faith that we preach; your forefathers possessed and were saved by it. The Scriptures in your hands testify of it; to them we appeal as our witnesses that the saints of old lived by and died in the faith that we now by the gospel preach unto you."

The words, from which I hope to speak this evening, refer chiefly to the faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; for these, with Sarah, appear to be the persons of whom the Apostle says, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country."

I shall, with God's blessing, endeavour this evening to trace out the faith spoken of in the text; to show, if God enable me, what were the fruits and effects in the hearts of those to

whom it was given; and what a confession they made by their lips and in their lives.

I.—The first point to which I shall call your attention is contained in the clause, "*Not having received the promises.*" Of whom is the Apostle speaking here? Of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the lineal ancestors of the Hebrews to whom he was writing. But what were the promises which God gave to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? If you look to the book of Genesis, you will find, that the promise made to them was two-fold; and that the Lord repeated the same promise to each of these patriarchs. One was, that the land of Canaan was given to them and to their posterity, for a perpetual inheritance; and the other, that "in Abraham, and his seed, all the nations of the earth should be blessed." Thus one of the promises was temporal, though doubtless typical; and the other spiritual, pointing to the Messiah who was to come from the loins of Abraham, and in whom all the chosen seed are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. These were the two grand promises on which their faith was fixed; and yet neither of these two promises was ever received by them in their complete fulfilment. Bear this in mind, that they received a portion of the promise; but because they had not received the whole, the Holy Ghost in the text speaks of them as "not having received the promise." This clears up what appears to be a little contradiction; for we read a little lower down (verse 17), "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and *he that had received the promises* offered up his only-begotten son." Now there the Holy Ghost declares that he "had received the promises;" and yet in our text, we read, that he had *not* received the promises. There is no real contradiction. He received the promises in a portion of them; but he did not receive them in their complete fulfilment. He had an earnest of them, but not the whole harvest; he had the first-fruits,

but the whole crop was not gathered in. For instance. He was a stranger in the land of Canaan, and "dwelt in tabernacles," as we read, or tents, with "the heirs with him of the same promise." Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were but sojourners in the land of Canaan, though it was given them for an inheritance; yet they all laid their bones there, and thus took possession of it in death. But their faith laid hold of it as their inheritance; and therefore Abraham would not suffer the servant of his house to take his son Isaac back to his own country, the land of the Chaldees (Gen. 24:6-8); and Jacob and Joseph left a charge on their death-beds that their bones should be carried up from Egypt, and laid in the land of Canaan. (Gen. 49:29; 50:25.)

Again. They did not receive the complete fulfilment of the promise, that "in Abraham, and his seed, all the nations of the earth should be blessed." (Gen. 22:18.) It was near two thousand years after the promise was first given before Christ came into the world; and in this sense therefore "they did not receive the promises," because they did not receive the complete fulfilment of them, that being reserved for a future period.

II.—But though they did not receive the promises in the sense I have explained, yet we read, "*they saw them afar off.*" The promises which God gave them were held up to the eyes of their faith; and by this faith they saw the promises near at hand; though, as to their actual fulfilment, they were far off. For that is the meaning of the expression—not that they saw the promises to be far off, but that they themselves being afar off, or remote by the length of time from their complete fulfilment, yet saw them as near at hand. For they would not otherwise have "embraced" them. We do not embrace what is distant, but what is near to, yea, what is already in our arms.

Thus by faith Abraham saw that his descendants should one day inherit the land of Canaan in which he was a sojourner; and in the exercise of that faith he buried his wife Sarah in the cave of Machpelah, and he himself was buried in the same spot. (Gen. 25:9, 10.) In similar faith lived and died Isaac and Jacob; and in the same land were their bones laid. Thus the certainty of the promises they saw afar off; though none of them enjoyed in their time the complete fulfilment of them. This is the way in which faith acts now; and if we have the same faith that they had, (for the Apostle's object in this chapter is to shew that there is but "one faith,") it will act in the same way, and run in the same channel. Do we not then receive the promises of the heavenly Canaan in the same way as Abraham received the promise that his seed should inherit the earthly Canaan? The land of Canaan was typical of that better country, that rest which remaineth for the people of God. Abraham was a sojourner in the land; he never could say that a foot of it was his own; yet he walked up and down in it, believing that all was his by a divine grant, and that his children should have full possession of it. Nay, when he wished to bury his wife out of his sight, he had to purchase a burial-place of the children of Heth. Is not this the way with the children of God respecting their eternal inheritance? God has given them a home above, and has promised them an eternal weight of glory. The heavenly land is theirs, and Christ the forerunner has already taken possession of it for them. It is theirs by promise and the oath of God; and yet not theirs by present possession. They have it in promise, but not in enjoyment; in prospect, but not in reality. They sojourn in a waste howling wilderness, looking forward to that city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God; hoping for a better country, even a heavenly one; and yet it is a great way off. In this sense then we do not receive the promise; we have the earnest, the first fruits, the beginning; but the full accomplishment of it is reserved for a

future period. Now this is the way whereby faith is exercised. Was it not so with the patriarchs? Five different times did the Lord distinctly promise Abraham that his seed should inherit the land of Canaan. (Gen 12:7; 13, 15; 15:7, 18; 17:8.) The same promise he repeated to Isaac, (Gen. 26:3); and again to Jacob at Bethel, (Gen. 28:13); and yet the soil was in the possession of seven strong nations who dwelt in walled towns and cities, while they lived in tents, roaming about as strangers in the land which they believed to be their own, because God had made it theirs by a divine grant. May we not justly suppose that their hearts were at times exercised, when they looked at themselves as a few, feeble sojourners, and saw the land possessed by armed inhabitants? Men of like passions with ourselves, and encompassed with the same infirmities, must not their faith have been often shaken whether the promise would ever have a completion? Look at their difficulties. How could their families grow up in sufficient multitudes to take possession of the land? How could they rise up against its warlike inhabitants without being crushed in the bud? We who have the Bible in our hands, and read the history of the past, can form no idea of the difficulties that perplexed them. We can see now, in God's mysterious providence, they were to go down to Egypt, to multiply there, and come up six hundred thousand fighting men, besides women and children. To us the book of the past is unfolded, and we can read the promise and the fulfilment; but to them the book of the future was sealed, and they had only a bare promise to embrace. How tried and exercised their minds must have been as they walked backwards and forwards in the land; and how their hearts must have sunk within them when considering how they ever could wrest it from its present possessors! How Jacob was terrified lest the violence of his two sons should bring down upon him their vengeance! "And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of

the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house." (Gen. 34:30.) And thus it is now with the exercised children of God. He that knows himself by divine teaching, and has had a glimpse of future bliss and glory, will often thus reason with himself, "How is such a poor, blind, ignorant creature as I, surrounded by so many enemies, oppressed or beguiled by so many of Satan's temptations, beset by the workings of a depraved nature—how am I ever to enter the heavenly inheritance, and enjoy the promised rest?" True faith always has difficulties to encounter. There are two things that stamp faith as genuine. In one of them consists the nature of faith; in the other the trial of faith. And observe how the Apostle brings together these two marks of faith in the chapter before us, as well as in Romans 5.—1. that the nature of faith is to believe what God has revealed and sealed upon the soul; and 2, its trial is to have a constant opposition made to it. Look, for instance, at Abraham's faith with respect to the promised seed. It clung to the promise that his seed should be for number as the stars of heaven. This was his justifying faith, as we read Gen. 15:6, "And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness." Thus to believe was the nature and essence of his faith. But had it no trial? Did all things flow easily towards the accomplishment of the promise? Were there not (shall I use the term? it is not too strong) impossibilities in the way? And yet Abraham's faith clung to God's promise in spite of all these impossibilities. It was the actings of living faith, in spite of impossibilities, that proved it to be the faith of God's elect; and God was glorified in removing these impossibilities in his own sovereign way, and fulfilling the answer in his own appointed time. So that an easy faith, a faith that is never subject to questionings, a faith that is never opposed by Satan, a faith never assaulted by doubts

and fears and the infidel suspicions of our carnal heart—a faith of that smooth, slip-shod kind, is not the living faith which the saints of God had in the days of old. Their faith was of this nature—it hung upon the promise of God, made known by a divine testimony to their conscience, in the midst, and in spite of all the difficulties and obstacles that fought against its fulfilment. For their faith was not "to take God at his word," as it is called, because such and such truths were found in the Scripture; for there was not one line of the Bible written in their day; but they believed what God spake with his own lips to their heart with divine power. And this is the nature of faith now, to believe the promise that is spoken to the heart with divine power, while every thing in nature opposes it; and thus to maintain its ground in spite of all the impossibilities that hang like a mill-stone round its neck. If, then, your faith is never subject to difficulties, trials, questionings, and oppositions; if you can always believe, and take hold of the promises in the word, as you would cut a slice from the loaf upon your breakfast table, is it not to be feared that it is a dead faith, and that you are but a dead professor?

Thus Abraham's faith must have been tried also with respect to the promised Messiah. God declared to him, that "in him and his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 12:3; 22:18.) But what difficulties lay in the way! How day by day the promise seemed to be removed farther and farther off! How for twenty-five years the Lord kept back the fulfilment of the promise! Must not Abraham's heart often have sunk down within him? He and his wife getting older and older; and the accomplishment of the promise removed farther and farther by natural circumstances! But yet his faith held on to the promise of God in spite of them all. Thus, to get to heaven we must wade through difficulties, improbabilities, nay, impossibilities. We shall meet with such



hindrances, such impediments, such obstacles, that nature will fail and give up the ghost, as much as Abraham's and Sarah's decayed body. And yet, as divine power, in their case, triumphed over nature's death, so grace superabounds in the case of the Christian over all the aboundings of sin, and lands him safe in glory.

But this was the grand point in which Abraham's faith, and that of the patriarchs, was conspicuously manifested, that *they "saw the promises afar off."* Though the promises were, so to speak, at a distance so remote that by the eye of sense, nature, and reason they could not be seen, yet faith's perspective glass pierced through all the intervening distance, and fastened upon the promise which God had made sure to the heart. I may illustrate it thus. Has not love, I mean natural love, very keen eyes? How the lover (not to bring the subject down too low) can tell the form and figure of the person he loves at a distance, where the eye of another could not perceive it! And has not love very sharp ears? How well the affectionate wife knows her husband's footstep! You mothers, do you not know your children's cry? You can tell your child's voice out of a thousand others. So with faith. It is so keen-sighted as to see into futurity; so keen-eared as to hear what the Lord speaks to it; so keen-hearted as to feel, though clouds of obscurity and mists of darkness are wrapped around it. Thus they saw the promise "afar off."

III.—But what is the next thing that we read of these ancient believers? *"And were persuaded of them."* This is the nature of faith, to be persuaded of the reality and certainty of God's promises. We therefore read in the first verse of this chapter, "Faith is the *substance* (or *realization*) of things hoped for, the evidence" (or convincing testimony) "of things not seen." The nature of faith is to realize the things which God has

spoken, and to believe them to be most certain and true, though nature, sense, and reason contradict them. Faith thus turns into reality, and gives a substance to things that to other persons are but shadows. The living faith of God's elect is not a mere passing thought, or hasty opinion, or fancied imagination; no, nor a well-grounded conclusion from arguments and proofs, nor any exercise of reason, in its lowest or highest degree. It is a divine faculty in the soul, as distinct from sense and reason, as the eye of a living man from the eye of a marble statue. And its work and office is, to turn the truths of God which are revealed to it into blessed realities; to feed upon them as heavenly food and to believe them to be as certain and far more abiding than the things the bodily eyes see, the natural ears hear, and the literal hands touch. Is your faith of that nature—a thing that has substance, reality, and power in it? All other faith is but emptiness and delusion; all other faith leaves the soul under the wrath of God. Thus, those ancient patriarchs, possessing this living faith, "were persuaded" of the truth of those things that were revealed to them, and of the certain fulfilment of those promises which God had given them. They knew that there was no uncertainty in the matter; but were confident that God who cannot lie would fulfil the promises which he had made for his own name's sake.

There is a very sweet meaning, I think, contained in the expression "*persuaded*." There is a softness, a tenderness, and yet an experimental power and beauty in it which I much admire. If a person persuade you into a thing, it is with your own will; you are not driven, forced, compelled into it. A man may do many things by force of circumstances, or by compulsion from others—that is not persuasion. Persuasion carries the heart with it. And this corresponds with what we read Psa. 110:3: "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." If a person persuade me into a thing, I do it

willingly, cheerfully, pleasantly. It was not, indeed, at first my own suggestion; but he has, so to speak, put his mind and will into me; and it has now become my mind and will as much as if it had originated with myself. He has given me his eyes; and I now see it as he does. Thus, when the patriarchs are said in the text to have been "persuaded of the promises," it implies that the promises had been so wrought with divine power into their hearts, so communicated with sweetness to their souls, that God's mind and will had become theirs. Their hearts were moulded into a reception of them as sweet, precious, and suitable, bringing glory to God and happiness to them. O what inestimable favour it is to be persuaded of the truth of God's promises by a revelation of them in our conscience!

And you will bear in mind, that to persuade a person implies that there was a difficulty to be overcome. If I persuade a person to do a thing, it presupposes that the person is not willing at first to do it; but at last by my arguments, or on account of his natural love to me, or through the influence I may have over him, he is persuaded to do it. You wives, you know what it is sometimes to *persuade* your husbands into something you wish to be done. You cannot drive nor compel them, for you are the weaker vessel; but you gently persuade them; and then they follow in the path marked out, and do it cheerfully and willingly. So spiritually. When the Lord makes a promise sweet, opens up the truth to our hearts, gives us to see the beauty and glory that there is in the Son of his love, he persuades us to receive in love what he reveals in power. This is called in Scripture a receiving of the love of the truth, that we may be saved (2 Thess. 2:10); an opening of the heart (Acts 16:14); an inclining of the ear that our soul may live (Isa. 55:3); and it seems especially summed up in that verse (Gen. 9:27): "God shall enlarge (marg. *persuade*) Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of

Shem." Our hearts are thus drawn toward the Lord, and we receive the truth as it is in Jesus; not by compulsion, not merely as a speculation, a notion, or a theory in our judgment, but with a divine power. The heart and conscience are persuaded; the rebellious will is subdued; unbelief and infidelity are silenced; and that takes place of which the Apostle speaks, "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." (2 Cor. 10:5.)

IV.—And this leads us to the next thing said of these ancient patriarchs, that they "*embraced them.*" What did they embrace? The promises. But does it not say in a preceding clause, that "they had not received them?" How could they embrace what they had not received? It is true that they had not received them in their complete fulfilment, but they embraced them as to be fulfilled. These are two different things. We may embrace the earnest of a thing, and yet not receive it in its full completion. And this was the way with the ancient patriarchs; they did not receive the promises in their full completion, but they embraced that earnest of them which was given into their hearts. Though so distant, faith brought them near; and what faith brought into their heart, their affections laid hold of and embraced. There is something, to my mind, very sweet and expressive in the word "embrace." It signifies a laying hold of a beloved object, a clasping of it in our arms, a bringing of it to our bosom, a bestowing of all our fondness and love upon it. This is the way whereby God's people embrace the truth. It is clasped in the arms of affection, as something sweet, suitable, dear, near, and precious. And yet the promises thus embraced are seen afar off, and not received in their full completion. God has given many promises to his people. He has promised them "eternal life" (Titus 1:2);—that "all things shall work

together for their good" (Rom. 8:28);—"that he will never leave them, nor forsake them" (Heb. 13:5); and that they shall eventually be with him where he is (John 14:2, 3.) The people of God do not receive these promises in their complete fulfilment. Like the patriarchs, they are strangers and pilgrims on the earth. The inheritance of the saints is still future; but yet a sufficient measure of its sweetness and glory is given to show them what it is, and to raise up in their souls a love and affection, whereby the promises concerning it are embraced as sweet, suitable, and precious. To embrace a thing implies an affection on the part of the person who embraces; it implies a closeness, and also that we desire to hold the object embraced as near to our heart as we can. So that when the soul embraces the promises, it is not with our reasoning mind, as we receive natural truths; but in faith, hope, and love, as precious realities. There are degrees of this divine embracement of the truth, from the feeblest actings of that faith which works by love, to the height that Peter speaks of, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." (1 Peter 1:8.)

There are many men who preach what is called truth; but if you look at the grand object and drift of their discourses, what is it? Merely to fill the people's mind with certain ideas; to inform their judgments; to bring them off Arminian errors; and to settle them down into a sound creed. To belabour the doctrine of free will, and to prove the doctrine of free grace; to bring some novelty out of the Scriptures; to ridicule the Arminians, and flatter the Calvinists,—it is to be feared, is the sum and substance of much that is called "preaching the Gospel." But this will not satisfy one whom the Lord has thrust out into the ministry. To see people deceiving themselves into the belief that they are the children of God, because they have a few sound opinions in their heads, a few

scriptural sentiments floating in their brain, and a Calvinistic creed embraced in their judgment—O what a spectacle to an honest man of God! Will he, can he foster such a delusion, when he knows that souls are at stake, and eternity at hand; that salvation does not consist in a few crude ideas or sound doctrines; but that it is an eternal reality; revealed and manifested to the conscience by the power of God the Spirit? As the brisk gale drives before it the rolling mists, so does the north wind of the Spirit's teachings drive away this delusion out of the hearts of the Lord's saints; and when the south wind blows upon their soul, they embrace the truth, because it drops into their heart from the lips of God, as the dew of heaven. Truth and the believer's heart are like the mortise and tenon; the mortise is useless without the tenon, and the tenon is useless without the mortise; but put them both together, and there is a union. So with God's people. Their heart is the mortise, hollowed and chiselled out, so to speak; a place dug in it for the Lord to occupy, for the truth of God to come in with divine power. Until a man is emptied and stripped, and a place made in his heart for the Lord to come into the tenon, God's word, the power of God's truth, and the promises God has made, have no place in his heart; as the Lord said to the Jews, "My word hath no place in you." (John 8:37.) They wanted the Spirit's inward work chiselling out a place for the truth of God to fit into. But when the heart, under divine teaching, becomes exercised, cast down, and humbled; when the world and its charms fade out of sight, and eternal realities come with weight upon the conscience—then the precious promises which God has revealed in his word, especially those that speak of salvation through the blood of the Lamb, and justification by his imputed righteousness, are embraced in the arms of love and affection as sweet and suitable. In this way the old patriarchs embraced the promises. When they walked up and down the land of Canaan in which they were sojourners, they were

thinking of the time when their posterity would inherit it; and they embraced it as for them. Thus the Lord commanded Abraham, "Arise, walk through the land, in the length of it, and in the breadth of it, for I will give it unto thee." (Gen. 13:17.) Abraham thus saw what a goodly inheritance it was for his children to dwell in. So spiritually. The Lord sometimes lets down a little taste of heaven into the soul, gives a sweet rest from sin, from the devil, from doubts, fears, and perplexities; and as he took Moses upon Pisgah's top, and shewed him all the length and breadth of the land, so he sometimes takes his people to the top of the spiritual Pisgah, and shows them by faith the goodly land which is their inheritance. This they embrace in its sweetness, power, and reality; their affections go out after it as their eternal home, believing that one day they shall be where sin and sorrow are no more, where the inhabitant shall not say, "I am sick," and where tears will be wiped away from all faces.

So also with respect to the promise of the Messiah. Abraham, and the patriarchs were not only persuaded that the Lord would give the Messiah from Abraham's loins, but they embraced it, and felt a sweetness and power in it; their faith leaped over all the distance that separated them from its fulfilment; and they rejoiced in it as if already accomplished. Thus the Lord said to the Jews, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad." (John 8:56.) He looked over the intervening near two thousand years. His faith over-leaped every obstacle, and saw the day when God would appear in flesh, when the Son of God would come into this world to take the body which was prepared for him in the womb of the Virgin Mary, Abraham's lineal descendant. More than nineteen hundred years before the God-Man came, shed his blood on Calvary's tree, and rose from the dead, Abraham embraced the power of that blood to purge his conscience, and the power of that righteousness

to justify him before God. We have received the promise indeed in its fulfilment; but we need similar discoveries, Pisgah views, glimpses and glances of "the King in his beauty," in order to embrace him in the arms of faith and say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." (Psa. 73:25.) Old Simeon thus embraced the babe Jesus in the temple, and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." (Luke 2:29, 30.) Nor till we embrace in the arms of faith and affection the Lord of life and glory can we use the language of that aged saint. What a blessing it is to embrace Jesus, and the truth as it is in Jesus, in a living conscience and a believing heart, by the operation of the blessed Spirit! and thus to feel the sweetness, preciousness, reality, and power of vital godliness! How different this is from merely being a sound Calvinist, possessing a correct set of sentiments and scriptural views of the scheme of salvation floating in our mind, while the heart is as destitute of divine unction and heavenly teaching, as the stones in the street on which we tread!

V.—But what was the effect of this faith on the aged patriarchs? *"They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."* What made them witness this good confession? It was because seeing the promises afar off, and embracing them, they felt a measure of their sweetness and power. If you look to what is recorded of the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, you will see that they all acknowledged they were sojourners in the land. Abraham said to the sons of Heth, "I am a stranger and a sojourner with you." (Gen. 23:4.) Here he confessed that he was a stranger and a pilgrim on the earth. We find Isaac also making the same confession when he sent away Jacob to Padan-aram, "God Almighty give thee the blessing of



Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee, that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a *stranger*, which God gave unto Abraham." (Gen. 28:4.) And we find Jacob making the same declaration before Pharaoh, (and to this the Apostle seems more specially to allude,) "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty years; few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage." (Gen. 47:9.) Thus we see these three patriarchs confessing they were strangers and sojourners on the earth; and this, the Apostle says, sprang from their seeing the promises afar off, and being persuaded of them, and embracing them. It was because these three things had been done in their conscience that they made this confession. But this acknowledgment of the lips sprang from the feeling of it in their soul;—did it not? For "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Rom. 10:10.) "I believed, therefore have I spoken." (Psa. 116:10.) The witness in the heart first, the witness in the lips next; faith the root, confession the fruit. So with these patriarchs; they confessed they were strangers and pilgrims, because they felt it; otherwise their confession would have been but hypocrisy. What made them strangers and pilgrims? Their persuasion of the promises; having seen them afar off; having embraced them in their conscience. Look at the case of Abraham. Had he not every thing to make him happy naturally? Had he not more than three hundred armed servants ("*trained*," as we read in the margin) to defend the rest of his property? These servants were soldiers, at least, might be used as soldiers, to defend the rest of his goods. He was most abundantly rich in flocks and herds; yet he was a stranger and a pilgrim; and, doubtless, often burdened and tried through the difficulties of the way. It was because these patriarchs had received eternal realities into their heart and

conscience that they felt themselves to be strangers and pilgrims upon earth. Nothing else will effect it. Many people say, they are "strangers and pilgrims" here below; but they take care to have as much of this world's comforts as they can scrape together by hook and by crook. They talk about being strangers, yet can be in close connection with men of the world. And could you see them upon 'Change, at the market, behind the counter, or at home with their families, you would not find one mark to distinguish them from the ungodly. Yet they come to chapel; and if called upon to pray, they will tell the people they are poor strangers and pilgrims, in a vale of tears; while their hearts are in the world, and their eyes stand out with fatness; while they are as light and trifling as a comic actor, and have no care or anxiety except to get the largest slice of the well-sugared cake that the world sets before them.

It is not the mere profession and acknowledgment of the lips, but grace in the heart, that makes a man a stranger and a pilgrim. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob made no affinity, no connection with the Canaanites; they kept to themselves, and were a separated people. And so God's people do now, as the Lord works in their hearts. They are strangers and sojourners; the world is not their home; nor can they take pleasure in it. Sin is often a burden to them; guilt often lies as a heavy weight upon their conscience; a thousand troubles harass their minds; a thousand perplexities oppress their souls. They cannot bury their minds in speculations and derive all their happiness from their successes; for they feel that this earth is not their home; and they are often cast down and exercised, because they have to live with such an ungodly heart in such an ungodly world.

A stranger, you know, is distant and shy. When he comes into company, his lips are closed; there is no familiarity,

because he is a stranger. If, then, we are strangers in the world, we shall have some distance and shyness towards it; we shall have no fellowship with the carnal people that we are mixed up with; but we shall stand aloof from them, and with the dead professors also of the day. We cannot be at home with those who have no fear of God in their hearts; who have but a name to live, and are dead. We cannot take up with every sound Calvinist, and receive him as a brother, because his head is clear in the truth. We want to find some true faith, some marks of the life of God being there; some evidence that his conscience has been made tender in God's fear; that he walks consistently in life and conduct with his profession; and that he really is what he professes to be,—a stranger, not having his heart fixed upon the things of time and sense.

But they confessed they were "pilgrims." What is the literal meaning of the word? The English expression is borrowed from superstitious times, and applies chiefly to those travellers who used to visit the sepulchre at Jerusalem. I do not know whether our translators were very wise in using the word. But the Greek word means sojourners; that is, persons not natives of the place where they dwell, but aliens or foreigners, who tarry for a time in another country that is not their native home. That gives us a better idea of the word "pilgrim," than of one who went to the Holy Land gathering up dead men's bones, and, with a cockle-shell in his bonnet, bringing home chests full of rotten relics. A sojourner is one that does not speak the language of the country, nor understand its customs, nor associate with its people. This metropolis is full of foreigners. How they all herd together! They cannot speak our language; they are not familiar with our habits! What a picture this is of God's family, sojourners in a strange country, speaking another language! They cannot lie, cheat, swindle, and carry out tricks of trade under

the mask of a profession, nor do those things that honest and honourable men would be ashamed of. But their language is pure, the language of Canaan seasoned with grace. They speak of the exercises, troubles, and difficulties of their path; and of those manifestations and testimonies which none know but themselves. But some of our Calvinistic preachers—see them out of the pulpit, and what would meet your eye and ear? lightness, frivolity, and joking. But the Lord's people, whose hearts the Spirit has touched, are strangers and sojourners; they do not live in this world as men of the world. In that invaluable work of the immortal Bunyan, "The Pilgrim's Progress," which the more it is read the more it is prized, what a sweet account we have of a conversation that was held in the house Beautiful. "I will warrant you," to use one of his own expressions, there was no jestings there, no light, frivolous vain conversation. How Prudence, Piety, and Charity, those three modest damsels, entertained the Pilgrim with the work of grace upon the heart! What a sweet picture this is of the family of God conversing of the things he has done for their souls! These were true sojourners; not professors merely; but persons having the real grace and fear of God in their consciences. And thus the patriarchs confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims; and they walked as a peculiar people living to God's honour and glory.

VI.—And from this the Apostle draws this conclusion, "*They that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.*" A man must have some home. If he cannot be at home with the world, it is plain he is seeking a home somewhere else. Now if these aged patriarchs could have been satisfied as the rest of the nations were, they would have built houses, and tilled the fields, and not have been a company of houseless wanderers, living in tents. They would have had houses, lands, and title-deeds, and been like our

modern Colonists. But "they confessed they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth;" and by that confession declared that they were seeking another country; that is, as the Apostle explains it, "a heavenly one." And all their pilgrimage and all their sojourning declared this, that they sought this country. They had no land of their own; neither house nor home; no fixed habitation; but they sought "a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." In a word, their hearts were, more or less, in heaven; their desires were tending there, and there in due time they hoped to be. And having this experience wrought with divine power in their conscience, they declared it plainly, so that men could see it by their actions, that they sought another country.

Now, does your profession of religion allow you to be like other people? Is your pride like theirs? Is your covetousness like theirs? Are your affections like theirs, buried in the things of time and sense? Are you selfish and quarrelsome, and acting all together as the men of the world? What will they think, what can they think of such a profession as this? They will say, "The man talks about heaven; but he is very glad to get a heaven here below too; he tries to make himself as comfortable as he can now; he talks of his treasure being above; yet a keener man in the market, or a greater screw to his servants, is not to be found in the whole town." What do the apprentices and servants think? They must say, "Master tells us at family prayers that his treasure is in the heaven; and yet he gets out of our bones all the sweat and blood he can." Now, I say, such men are a disgrace to the Christian profession. Is this the way for them to declare they are seeking a country? How did you come by your religion? Does it consist in expressions picked up from the pulpit, and scattered up and down in the family prayers? Or, is it manifest in your life and conversation, by a deadness to the world, and a separation from the things of time and sense;

and so made evident that you are seeking a better country, that you are not satisfied with the poor perishing things of the world, but looking forward to a city "which hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the lamb is the light thereof." (Rev. 21:23.)