

The Good Work Begun and Finished

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, on Lord's Day Morning, Oct. 2, 1864

"For your fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until now; being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Phil. 1:5, 6

It is now more than twenty-eight years since I first opened my mouth in this pulpit to preach the word of life, and very nearly twenty-six since I was permanently settled as the minister over this congregation; for at that time the church here of which I am the pastor was not formed. In that space of time, more than a quarter of a century, I have lived to witness great changes. Those who then came to this place as babes in their mothers' arms, or as little children, are grown up into men and women, fathers and mothers of families, and have either remained with us, or from various causes have left us. The young have become middle-aged; the middle-aged have grown old; and the old have gradually sunk and passed away out of sight, some to eternal happiness, some to eternal misery. I myself have grown grey in your service. I have given you the best part of my life. I have spent upon you whatever strength I have had both of body and soul, and freely given you of both whatever the Lord has freely given me. And though time has dealt with me, as time has dealt with many of you, in robbing me of much of my activity and energy both of body and mind, I should have still gone on labouring among you in word and doctrine if I had been able to do so. But my failing health, and the attacks which I have had for several successive springs of illness, which, if not very severe, has usually been very long and weakening, warn me that I cannot go on as I

have done. I am not able to bear the continuous labour that I have borne thus far, or expose myself in travelling to the change of the weather at all seasons of the year as I have done for many years: and were I to persevere, I have been warned by strong medical authority that it would probably cast me into a state of health from which there would be no recovery. I have no other reason but this for giving up my charge. When I was favoured with better health, I have always resisted every temptation to leave you from worldly motives, or to move in, what is called, a more enlarged sphere of usefulness; but what I would not have done willingly, I now feel compelled to do by necessity; and if I am but favoured to see in the step I am now taking the good hand of God upon me in leading as well as his stretched-out hand, in compelling, I shall hope to feel submission to his holy mind and will, however painful or trying it may be to the flesh. And I hope that you also, my dear friends and brethren, may so see in my leaving you the will of God and his out-stretched hand, that you too may be reconciled to what no doubt is a trial to you as well as to me.

The apostle in the chapter before us (Philippians 1.), after the usual salutation and usual prayer for grace and peace, goes on to express his thankfulness to God for the mutual fellowship and communion in the gospel of Jesus Christ which he and the Philippian church had enjoyed together: "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now." (Phil. 1:3, 4, 5.) He then goes on to express his confidence that this fellowship of the gospel and their participation in its blessings would not die away and come to nought, or be dissolved even by death, but would be strengthened until perfected: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of

Jesus Christ." (Phil. 1:6.)

In endeavouring, therefore, to open up, as far as I understand it, the mind and meaning of the blessed Spirit in the words of our text, I shall,

I.—*First*, attempt to show what this "*good work*," of which the apostle speaks is.

II.—*Secondly*, how God begins it, carries it on, and "*performs*," or, as the margin reads, *finishes* it.

III.—*Thirdly*, that this performing or finishing of it, is "*until the day of Jesus Christ*."

IV.—And *Fourthly*, the *grounds of the confidence* expressed by the apostle, that he who had begun would surely perform or complete the good work begun in them.

I.—Let us first then attempt to examine, if the Lord enable, what a "*good work*" is, for that is the foundation of our whole text and subject; and if we stumble at the onset, we shall incur the liability to miss the mind and meaning of the Holy Ghost altogether.

i. Look first then at the word "*work*." It is something more than a thought, which may perish in the very conception; something more than a word, which is but a fleeting breath. It is something real, solid, and abiding. Again, look at the expression "*good*." To make a work good, two things are requisite: there must be good material, and there must be a good workman. However good the workman, he cannot make good work out of bad material. The most skilful cabinet-maker could not make a mahogany table out of a deal plank, nor the greatest master of the craft make up the "old shoes

and clouted" of the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:5) into the beautiful shoes of a Prince's daughter. (Song Sol. 7:1). The badness of the material must defeat all the skill of the artist. But another thing is requisite—ability and skill in the workman. You may have good material—gold, silver, and precious stones; but put them into the hands of a bad workman, and his want of care or defect in skill would ruin and spoil the best material. But when you have sound, solid, good material, and a skilful, able workman, there you have all the needful elements of good work.

Now apply this explanation and definition to the illustration of our subject. The "good work" of our text, is not a good work outwardly, but a good work inwardly, for it is spoken of as the good work in us, for, says the apostle, "He which hath begun a good work *in you*." This good work in us is the work of grace; and this is emphatically a good work, for it is good in its beginning and good in its end, good in its source and good in its streams, good for time and good for eternity. But to be a good work, it must be approved of God, for he is the Judge, the only true, infallible, and authoritative Judge of good and evil, and therefore of the goodness or badness of the work. It is not what may be generally commended or counted good by human approbation, or be reckoned good weight as weighed in an earthly balance. To be counted good work, it must pass under the eye and be approved of by the judgment of the all-seeing and infallible God.

ii. But now let us apply our rules of decision to the "good work" of our text. God, as we shall by and by see, is himself the workman. In him, therefore, as the workman, the good work has one certain element and requisite of goodness. But what as to the material? Is that good too? Is it worthy of the workman? a fit subject for an all-pure, all-wise, almighty hand? Now if God were to work upon our corrupt nature, the

old man of sin, the worthlessness of the material would effectually prevent the work being a good work. I dispute not the power of God; but the badness of the material must, as I have explained, impair the goodness of the work. God, therefore, who is the workman, for it must be either he or we, and if we, the work could not be good from the defects of the workman—God, I say, does not take the old Adam nature to work upon; but he himself, by his Spirit and grace, creates in us a new heart and a new spirit; for as "that which is born of the flesh is flesh," so "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:6.) "Put on the new man," says the apostle, "after which God," that is after the image of God, (as explained Col. 3:10,) "is created in righteousness and true holiness." (Eph. 4:24.) It is then upon this new heart, this new spirit, this new man of grace that God works. The material is thus good, good in itself by a divine creation, and therefore pure and holy, for it is born of incorruptible seed and sinneth not. This is John's testimony: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin because he is born of God." This new nature is "born of God" and therefore "sinneth not." It is not our old nature fresh done up, renewed and renovated, but a new nature, a new creature, or creation, as the apostle testifies: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature"—literally a new "creation." (2 Cor 5:17.) Thus much for the goodness of the material. Now for the goodness of the workman. This is no less than God himself. "He which hath begun a good work?" Who is this mighty He but the Lord? "I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the Lord, and there is none else." (Isa. 45:5, 6.) Look then at the power and the skill of the workman. All power belongeth unto God. His name is Almighty. He is Omnipotence itself; and therefore

none can doubt the ability of the workman to make good work. And as he has all power in himself as the Omnipotent God, so he has all wisdom; for he is "the only wise God." (1 Tim. 1:17.) If, therefore, I may use such an expression, he is both skilful and able to make good work from the depths of his own infinite wisdom, as well as from the boundless extent of his Omnipotent power. Who then can deny that this must be good work? If the old creation, before sin marred it, was "good," yea, "very good," and declared to be so by God himself (Gen. 1:25, 31); must not the new creation be good, yea, very good, as wrought by the same wise, holy, and powerful hand?

But now I come more to detail. You whose souls have been made alive unto God want to know what this good work is in its root and branches, in its various points and excellencies, in its difference from and superiority to bad work, and how as the work of the good workman it may be known from all the bad work of bad workman; you want to find some evidences in your own bosom, whether you are partakers of this good work. I must therefore show you in a little detail what this good work is, that you may by comparing your experience with it, gather up some comforting, encouraging testimony that it has been wrought in you.

iii. Let us begin then from the beginning, and trace in it from the first the hand of the Almighty workman, for God himself is said in our text to begin it. It is therefore all of his sovereign grace, the fruit of eternal choice, of electing love. No man can ever begin a good work upon his own heart. It would not, it could not be a good work if the creature began it. God himself therefore begins it by his sovereign grace and almighty power, that it may be good from its very beginning, sound at and from the very foundation. But we know it better by its effects than by its causes. We can see better the work

by looking at it as God works it, than understand the mode in which he produces it. It is with the work of grace as often with a piece of beautiful workmanship, say a porcelain vase or a marble statue; we can see the results of the workman's skill better than we understand the process which he employs to produce what so commends itself to our admiration. The Lord himself tells us, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8.) And so speaks Solomon: "As thou knowest not what is the way of the Spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of the God who maketh all." (Eccles. 11:5.) Let us look then at the effects rather than the cause, and, let us view them in due order.

1. The first beginning of this good work is *repentance*. Our Lord himself, when he preached the gospel said, "The kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye and believe the gospel." He bade also his disciples preach "repentance and remission of sins in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." (Luke 24:47.) According, therefore, to this command, when those who were "pricked to the heart" asked Peter and the rest of the apostles what they should do, his answer was, "Repent ye and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." (Acts 2:38.) And again, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." (Acts 3:19.) The preaching of repentance as the first work lay at the foundation of their ministry as of that of their blessed Lord's. And thus also Paul "testified both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ." (Acts 20:21.) There is indeed the false,

deceitful, hypocritical repentance of a Saul, an Ahab, a Judas; but all real, all true, all saving repentance is the work of God; for it is "he who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure;" and as Jesus is "exalted to give repentance," the work of grace begins with it. But what is meant by repentance? By repentance I understand a conviction of our sins as committed against a holy and just God, springing from a change of heart, attended with a sense of our lost, ruined condition, with the weight of eternal realities laid upon the conscience, and the entering in of condemnation through a broken law. Conviction, sound, genuine conviction of sin, must ever lie at the root of vital godliness; for "the whole have no need of a physician, but those that are sick;" and Christ "came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." A sense then of our lost, ruined condition must ever be the beginning of the work of grace upon the heart; and the deeper the repentance the more clear and manifest will be the work.

2. But where there is true repentance, and this springing from a change of heart, for real repentance means as well as implies this, there will be *confession* of sin; for there is no genuine repentance unless there be heartfelt confession. The two invariably go together. Though not in his case the first work, yet we see this point well illustrated in the case of David when convinced of his sin. For a while he nursed his sin in his bosom; but when Nathan came to him with "Thou art the man," and conviction smote his breast, he immediately confessed "I have sinned against the Lord." And he tells us in Psalm 32., how it was with him until he was able to confess his sins. "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture was turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sins unto thee, and my iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my

transgressions unto the Lord;"—and then what came? "Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." Thus repentance, confession, and forgiveness go with and follow upon each other. Where there is repentance there is confession; where there is confession there is forgiveness; corresponding to that gracious promise, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9.)

3. As a necessary and indispensable consequence of true repentance and heart-felt confession of sin, there will be a *forsaking* of it. Without this there can be no manifested mercy, but all must be rottenness and death: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." (Prov. 28:13.) How strong is the testimony here of holy writ against all who do not forsake their sins: "Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth: though he hide it under his tongue; though he spare it, and forsake it not, but keep it still within his mouth: yet his meat in his bowels is turned, it is the gall of asps within him." (Job 20:12-14.) Hard may be the struggle to give up bosom sins and crucify idol lusts; but wrath and terror, guilt, fear, and alarm will pursue every awakened sinner till he forsake all known sin and abandon his seen and confessed filth and folly.

4. A fourth mark of this good work—for in order to give clear views, we must in some measure separate what really is one—a fourth distinguishing mark of this good work is *the implantation of the fear of God*, which therefore is called "the beginning of wisdom" (Psa 111:10), and is indeed a choice new covenant blessing: "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." (Jer. 32:40.) Now it is this

possession of this grace of godly fear as "a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death," which distinguishes spiritual convictions from natural convictions, spiritual repentance from fleshly repentance, and spiritual confession from mere lip confession. This fountain of life plays its springs upon the internal graces of the Spirit, and draws them into living efficacy; and thus the fear of God watering the soul gives genuine repentance, genuine confession, and, as a fountain of life, a departing from the snares of death.

5. Connected with this, to pass on to another point, is a *spirit of grace and of supplications*, which God has promised to pour upon the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (Zech. 12:10.) This is not only one of the clearest but one of the most blessed marks of the work of grace on the heart; for it is by this pouring out of the spirit of grace and of supplications upon us that we are enabled to pour out our heart before God, to seek his face, to call upon his holy name, to confess our sins, and to sue for mercy. Who can describe the wrestlings that go on in a quickened soul—the sighs, the cries, the groans, the tears, the lamentations, the beseechings which ever attend a genuine work of grace? As I have brought forward the fear of God as one peculiar evidence that distinguishes the work of grace from all its counterfeits, so I may place side by side with it the spirit of prayer in a believer's breast. We find in the Scriptures instances of deep natural conviction, but no instances of prayer to God under those convictions. Saul fell upon his sword; Ahithophel went home and hanged himself; and Judas committed suicide in the same awful manner. There was in them a conviction of sin, but no repentance unto life; no godly sorrow which needs not to be repented of; no confession before God, and no spirit of prayer in their bosom for manifested mercy. Despair seized hold of its miserable victims, and under it they died and went to their place. But

whatever depth of conviction, repentance, or confession there is in the heart of a child of God, the spirit of grace and of supplications always attends it; and by the aid of this blessed Spirit who helps his infirmities, interceding in and with him with groanings which cannot be uttered, he pours out his heart before God; and thus his prayers, being indited by the Spirit of God, enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

6. Another part of this good work is *faith in the Lord Jesus Christ*. For faith and repentance were always preached together as kindred graces by the Lord and his apostles. Thus we read that our Lord when he opened his ministry, "came into Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God; and saying, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel." (Mark 1:15.) Paul's preaching as I said before, consisted in these two grand points: "Repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ." Faith in the Lord Jesus is indeed so eminent a mark and feature of a good work, that the very goodness and soundness of the work seem to depend upon it; for if "without faith it is impossible to please him" (Heb. 11:6); if by faith we are justified (Rom. 5:1); if by grace through faith we are saved (Eph. 2:8); if we become the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26); if by faith we stand, walk, and fight; if by faith in the Son of God we live, and in faith are to die that we may receive the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls, how important, how indispensable a part of the good work must faith be! For what is all conviction, repentance, and forsaking of sin, confession, seeking the Lord's face and pouring out of the heart before him, if there be no faith in the Son of God? Without faith in his Person and work, in his blood and righteousness, we must eternally perish. How decisive here is the Scripture: "He that believeth and is baptised shall be

saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." "He that has the Son of God hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." Without faith therefore in the Son of God there is, there can be no salvation. But are we able to raise up this faith in our breast? No; we may experience deep and strong convictions of sin; eternal realities may lie with great weight and power upon our mind; we may see and feel ourselves to be in a lost and perishing condition; under the pressure of guilt we may confess our sins before the face of him against whom we have so awfully transgressed; we may hate and loathe ourselves in our own sight because of our iniquities; but what is all this if we fall short of faith in the Son of God? Where is there any relief but by faith in his name; and where is there any promise of salvation except to those who believe? But what we cannot do for ourselves God can do for us. He is the giver of this most precious grace; for it is declared to be his express gift. "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." "To you it is given not only to believe, but also to suffer for his sake." Jesus is called "the author," that is, the beginner as well as the finisher of faith. All faith therefore is God's express gift, wrought in the heart by his own divine power, and lodged there by his own heavenly hand. But how is this faith given? By some spiritual and gracious discovery to the soul of the Son of God; by some revelation of the Person and work of Jesus as suitable to our lost, undone condition. When I speak of a revelation of Christ, as I often do, I am not contending for anything visionary. Dreams, voices, appearances in the air, sights and sounds, crosses in the sky, and apparitions at the bedside, I must leave to others. I believe that for the most part they are the portion of visionaries and enthusiasts, for we have all these in the visible church of God, as well as Pharisees and hypocrites, Arminians and Antinomians. I will not indeed deny that the Lord may have wrought by them in some peculiar instances,

as in the cases of Augustine and Colonel Gardiner. But taking the generality of God's people and the ordinary mode of divine operation, the revelation of Christ to the soul is a gracious internal discovery by the power of the Spirit, revealing him to the eyes of faith. Nothing is seen or heard by the bodily senses; and yet his glorious Person is as much seen, and his voice as much heard, as though eye and ear beheld his glory and listened to his words. It is altogether of grace, wholly heavenly and divine, and therefore nature, sense, and reason have no place here. It is a divine bringing into the heart of the power and presence, grace and glory, love and blood of Christ in a way that may be felt but never described. Under these spiritual operations and influences—for it is the Spirit's work to take of the things of Christ and reveal them to the soul; it is his covenant office to testify of Jesus under these sacred influences, divine anointings, and gracious operations, Christ is made known unto the heart and looked unto, according to his own word: "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." He is therefore looked unto, believed in, laid hold of, and brought into the heart, where he meets a most cordial and blessed reception; for he takes his seat upon the throne of the affections, and sways his peaceful sceptre over every faculty of the soul.

7. Now where there is this faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, there will be as its accompaniment, and also a part of the good work, what the Scripture calls "*a good hope through grace*;" and surely if it be a good hope through grace, it must be a part of the good work. The Scripture speaks of it as an "anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and entering into that within the veil." If therefore it enters within the veil where Christ now is, taking fast and firm hold of his glorious Person, as the anchor takes fast and firm hold of the sand or gravel in which it is embedded, I must have faith before I can have hope. Faith is its very substance (Heb. 11:1), and hope

does but expect what faith believes. Here, then, we see the necessity of faith for the communication and maintenance of a good hope. How can I hope in the Lord if I know nothing of the Lord? How can my hope in that within the veil be an anchor of my soul both sure and steadfast, to take hold of Jesus, unless I have seen by the eye of faith something of the person and work, grace and glory, blood and righteousness, sweetness and suitability of the risen Son of God? And how in a storm will my anchor be able to hold fast the ship of my soul amidst the temptations which threaten to wreck it unless it can hold its own by what it has tasted, felt, and handled of the Word of Life, of what I have received from God by faith, and what has been lodged in my bosom by the holy Spirit, through the operation of faith upon the Person and work of God's dear Son?

8. Accompanying, and a part of this good work is love. "For he that loveth is born of God and knoweth God." Whenever Christ is revealed to the heart by a divine power and hope springs up as faith's accompaniment, the hand-maid love will join the train; for these are the three Christian graces, all intertwining each other, and walking in sweet union and most blessed concert. "And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." Love therefore must ever be an eminent part of the good work; for where there is no love there is no grace, no heavenly birth, no knowledge of the Father or of his Son Jesus Christ, no evidence that we have passed from death unto life, because there is no love for the brethren; for observe, that by love I mean love not only to the Lord Jesus Christ but those who are Christ's. Wherever then there is love to him that begat, there will be love to those begotten of him. Love to the Head will produce love to the members, love to the bridegroom will certainly ensure love to the bride; and if we love the Lord, we shall love those that belong to the Lord, that know the Lord, and

love the Lord. You find therefore that our gracious Lord, in the parable of the sheep and the goats, brings forward as the distinctive mark of saving grace the love which had been shown to himself not in person, but to the members of his mystical body as though they were himself. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Then sounds forth from the same lips the invitation: "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

9. But I have not yet exhausted my description of the good work. Besides those leading features which I have already brought forward, there will be *obedience*, sometimes called "obedience to the gospel," sometimes spoken of as the obedience of faith, or obedience to the truth. And is not this a most important feature? What religion worthy the name can a man have if it has not produced practical obedience? What evidence is there of the good work if a man's life, conduct, and conversation are what they were before? Now the first act of obedience is to come out of the world: "Come out from among them and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing." It is the first act of obedience, and the first to which there is a promise attached. Abram proved it so. He went out to a land whither he knew not. The first distinctive feature of his call was his obedience to it. And that call separated him for ever from his own kindred and from his father's house. Again, this coming out of the world is connected with a joining oneself with, and a cleaving unto the people of God. Why do we leave the world? Because it is a place and a people with which we feel no longer union or communion. We feel the truth and force of the words of the prophet: "Arise ye and depart; for this is not your rest." And why? "Because it is polluted." (Micah 2:10.) By the implantation of a new heart and a new spirit, we become separated from the things of time and sense as unclean

things, and from the company and society of those who are devoted to them as unclean persons. And this not from Pharisaic pride, or an assumption of superior holiness, but from the fear of God and a tender conscience. With this coming out of and separation from the world, as if instinctively and almost instantaneously, there is a going forth of love and affection toward the family of God. We never knew before that God had a family. We might have seen or known persons moving about us of a peculiar stamp, an odd kind of people like no others, whom we might have honoured or despised according to the way in which we were brought up, and the natural tendency of our minds to religion or profanity. But as to any internal perception of the grace of God in them, or any love or affection to the mind and image of Christ visible in them, not having that spiritual understanding or feeling ourselves, not knowing anything of Christ in our own bosom, we could not see, recognise, or feel any union with what we saw in them. But the same blessed Spirit who baptises us into a knowledge and experience of Christ, baptises us into love and affection to all in whom we see the mind of Christ; and this is necessarily attended with a cleaving to them. See how it was with Saul of Tarsus. He came to Damascus' gate like a roaring lion or bloodthirsty wolf, to ravage Christ's little flock. He is struck down by the exceeding great light which shone above the brightness of the sun, and arrested by the words of the persecuted Lord, which thrilled through his inmost soul. Conviction seizes his breast; three days and three nights he neither eats nor drinks nor sleeps, so pierced was he by the arrows of the Almighty. At the end of that time Ananias comes to him with a message from the Lord—pardon and peace reach his heart. He arises and is baptised. And now what follows? "Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were in Damascus"—the very disciples whom he came to drag bound unto Jerusalem. And what more? "Straightway he preached

Christ in the synagogues that he is the Son of God." (Acts 9:18-20.) Thus at once he leaves all his bloodthirsty companions, gives up everything he formerly held dear, joins himself to the despised, hated family of God, amongst whom he continues in life and death in the firmest union and the warmest, tenderest affection. So we trust it has been with us. Like the bride, we have forsaken and forgotten our own people and our father's house; for Jesus is our Lord whom we desire to worship and him alone. (Psa. 45:10, 11.) Thus, wherever there is a good work it will be clearly manifested as such by a full and final separation from the world, a joining one's self unto, and walking in love and union with the dear family of God, esteeming them the excellent of the earth, casting our lot in among them, as having the same faith, the same hope, the same Lord, the same God and Father of all who is above all, and through all, and in them all. (Eph. 4:4-6.) Such has been my case. I never thought, till wrought upon by a divine power, of casting in my lot among the saints of God. Indeed I did not know that there was such a peculiar people; for I was brought up in utter ignorance that there was such a thing as spiritual religion, or that the Lord had saints now upon earth. I had other views, other prospects, other expectations, and should, but for God's constraining grace, have been well satisfied with a portion in this life, with scarcely a thought of eternity. I was not compelled by necessity to leave the world, or abandon my earthly prospects by misconduct, as if turned out of it whether I would or not; but was led, as I hope, by a divine influence to come out of it, when I might, to my great advantage, have continued in it, to cast my lot amongst the poor, despised saints of God. And may I not add that but for that constraining influence calling me out of the world, and fixing my heart and affections on the Lord and his people, you would never have heard my voice in this place?

But the same power which brings us out of the world and unites us with the dear family of God, leads also to all other spiritual and practical obedience. The love of Christ constraining us, we are led to attend to the ordinances of his house; to live godly, uprightly, and consistently before God and man, the church and the world; to minister, according to our means, to the temporal wants of the family of God; to abstain from everything unbecoming the gospel in word and deed; and to live or desire to live to the honour and glory of God.

II.—But let us now pass on to consider our second point, how this good work is *begun, carried on, and completed*.

i. I shall not be very long upon this point, at least not upon the first part of the good work; for that has been already entered into; and I have sufficiently pointed out that nothing short of the sovereign grace of God could begin it. Indeed upon this point we need go no further than the testimony of our own conscience, which must speak loudly in our breast if it have any voice at all. If any man were to assert in my hearing that he began the work of grace upon his own heart, that by the exercise of his own free will he turned to God, and produced in himself faith and repentance, I should instantaneously feel and declare that such a one was completely ignorant of the very beginning of a work of grace; for I am certain it is the universal feeling and confession of all the subjects of regenerating grace, that God and none but God began that work upon their heart. Besides, therefore, the testimony of the scripture, which on this point is so clear and decisive, you have the testimony of your own conscience; and in the mouth of these two witnesses this truth is established. Were you not thinking of anything but the Lord, seeking anything but his favour, and desiring anything but his mercy, when he was pleased in a sovereign

way to work with divine power upon your heart? Thus, one wave of your hand, one breath of your lips, is able to sweep away all the cobwebs of free will.

ii. But the same God who began *carries on*. This though not expressed is implied in our text; for if God begin and finish the middle cannot be left out. But if that middle were left for us to do, it would harmonise with neither beginning or end, foundation or top-stone, both of which are laid in grace (Zech. 4:7-9); nor could the whole be called a "good work" if spoiled by bad hands and bad material half way. But we feel inwardly convinced that we have no more power to carry on the good work than we had power to begin it; and that were it left in our hands it would, like Jerusalem of old, lie desolate, so that the bear out of the woods would waste it and the wild beasts of the field would devour it. (Nehem. 2:17; Psa. 80:13.) But this is the unspeakable mercy of those who have an interest in these divine realities, that he who began carries on; for "he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee;" and David could speak in sweet confidence, "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me." (Psa. 138:8.)

1. But how does the Lord carry on this good work? Mainly by and *through his word*, and especially what the scripture calls "the word of his grace," as I may perhaps have an opportunity of opening up more fully this afternoon. It is mainly then by the word of his grace that God carries on the work begun. He has therefore, as one branch of this word of grace, appointed a preached gospel to be a means of building up his people on their most holy faith. This is clearly laid down in Ephesians 4., where the apostle instructs us into the nature and intent of those spiritual gifts which the Lord gave unto men when he ascended upon high. "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints,

for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Here we see the object of the institution of a gospel ministry; whether the ministers be apostles, or prophets, or evangelists, or pastors and teachers, it is to perfect the saints—that is, to establish them firmly in the truth; to carry on the general work of the ministry in its various branches of calling, comforting, instructing, and reproof; and to edify or build up the body of Christ, both by adding fresh living stones to the mystical temple, and building up individual saints in faith and love. By "the word of his grace" we may also understand the word as read and meditated upon, and applied to the heart in private. For we are bidden to search the scriptures (John 5:39); and give attendance to reading and meditation. (1 Tim. 4:13, 15.) We also read, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to all good works." (2 Tim. 3:16, 17.) Thus it is by the word of his grace read and meditated upon, and made life and spirit in private, or brought home to the soul in public under the ministry of the gospel, that God carries on the work of grace begun.

2. But that we may spiritually understand, and savingly believe the word of his grace, and thus find that "whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4), it is *through a path of tribulation* that God for the most part carries on the good work. His own testimony is that it is through much tribulation we are to enter the kingdom of God; and as this kingdom is within us (Luke 17:21), and a spiritual kingdom, as being "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17), every branch of this kingdom must be entered into through tribulation. Thus, though God uses the word of truth

to carry on the work begun, yet it is the word of truth as revealed to our understanding and applied to our heart in a state of tribulation. That the kingdom of heaven may be ours, we must be "poor in spirit," for they are the children and heirs of it. (Matt. 5:3.) To them God looks and with them he dwells. (Isa. 57:15; 66:2.) But it is through tribulation that they become so. Through affliction then of body and mind; through severe and painful trials; through distressing bereavements; through powerful temptations; through assaults of sin and Satan; through discoveries of our own corrupt nature to humble us in the very dust, and, in a word, through the various paths of tribulation in which the Lord leads his people, he mercifully and yet mysteriously carries on the work begun. It must needs be so. The Lord's people are a poor and afflicted people, and each member must be conformed to the suffering likeness of a suffering Head. But how many and various are the sources of suffering and the paths of tribulation. We carry about with us a body of sin and death, our greatest plague and sorest annoyance. Our poor frail bodies, created out of the dust of the earth, and soon to return to it, are exposed to the incursions of every kind of disease and sickness; we live in a world that hates Christ and his people; the enemy, sworn foe of God and man, is always upon the watch, ever seeking to entangle by treachery or assault by violence. Need we wonder then at the number and variety of the afflictions and sorrows which fall to the lot of God's people and through which he carries on the work begun? But for these afflictions and trials, and exercises of mind which they produce, we should think we had some power of ourselves to carry on the good work; but those tribulations beat all such weapons out of our hands, and we are glad to come to such points and such Scriptures as these: "I will work and none shall let (or hinder) it" (Isai. 43:13): "Their strength is to sit still" (Isai. 30:7): "But now O Lord, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou our

potter, and we all are the work of thy hand." (Isai. 64:8.) Here then the word meets us in the path of tribulation, is made sweet and precious to tried and afflicted souls, and thus instrumentally carries on the work. How sweet for instance is the promise when the soul is brought down by trouble into a state to need the help it gives, and the support it yields; and adapted are the consolations of the Gospel to a season of affliction; how suitable the deliverance in a time of bondage; how blessed the liberty proclaimed by the gospel, when sunk into captivity; and how gracious the light to the soul that walks in darkness. Thus we see that though the word of God's grace brings with it light and life, grace and strength, liberty and love, it is only so as it is made the power of God in those seasons of trial and affliction to which it is suitable.

iii. But this work is not only to be carried on, it is to be *finished*. Nor will its beauty, blessedness, and perfection be fully and clearly known until it is completed. I adopt the marginal reading, "finish," in preference to what we find in the text, "perform;" for it more distinctly points out an end to a beginning. This finishing is essential to the goodness of the work; for it is in grace as in nature. Until the work is finished we cannot see what is the design of the architect in some grand or noble building, say a palace for a king. In its rough, rude, unfinished state the beauty of the design, the proportion of every part and the grandeur of the whole cannot be seen. But when finished, then it stands forth in all its beauty and glory, fit residence for a monarch. The same thing is true of every other work of art, as a picture, a statue, an engraving. Until finished their beauty cannot be seen. We cannot judge therefore of the beauty of this good work, the work of grace, whilst we see it in its present imperfect state. It is being carried on, but not finished. But it is to be finished, to be completed, as was the building of the

restored temple, after the return from the captivity, the foundation of which was laid by the hands of Zerubbabel. The Lord we read was "jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy." He therefore said, "I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies; my house shall be built in it, said the Lord of hosts." (Zech. 1:14-16.) He then gave this promise: "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it." Neither the jealousy nor the mercy of the Lord would suffer him to leave the temple in ruins, or that his servant Zerubbabel should not finish what he had begun. He therefore declared, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain; and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying grace, grace unto it." (Zech. 4:6-7.) So shall it be with the temple of mercy. He who has begun the good work will certainly finish it.

III.—But when? In *the day of Christ*, our third point: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." (Phil. 1:6.) It is "until" or up to "the day of Jesus Christ" that this work is to be finished.

i. By the day of Christ I understand three things.

1. I understand by it, first, the day in which Christ is revealed to the soul. We often find a peculiar day spoken of in the prophets which is sometimes called "the day of the Lord," and sometimes more briefly "that day." Now generally speaking "the day of the Lord" or "that day" is connected with some great deliverance, some manifestation of the Lord's power, or some discovery of his salvation; as where we read, "And in that day shalt thou say, O Lord, I will praise thee though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned

away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation." (Isa. 12:1, 2.) Now when Christ is revealed to the soul by the power of God, it is in a special sense "the day of the Lord," or "the day of Jesus Christ;" for it is a day of days, a day which he made for himself—a day in which he specially magnifies his grace, reveals his beauty, and discovers his glory. We may say therefore that in a certain sense it is the finishing of the good work; for it is an accomplishment of, an answer to the prayers, tears, supplications, wants, wishes, and desires of the quickened soul in which the good work is begun. To have Christ revealed to the heart with a clear testimony of interest in his blood and righteousness, is to the soul's feeling an accomplishment of its most earnest desires. And thus in that sense there is a finishing of the work, and accomplishing and performing of it, until and up to this day of Christ.

2. But there is another sense of the word which we may I think fairly adduce. *Christ is to be made our all in all*; and this is not, usually speaking, done in the first days of our profession. We have to be effectually stripped of all our own wisdom, strength, and righteousness, that Christ may be experimentally and feelingly our all in all; that we may have none but Christ and nothing but Christ, so that all we are and have may be in Christ, and through Christ, and him alone. But O what stripping do we need to pull away the rags of self-righteousness which cleave so closely to us; what hard labour to wear us out of all our own strength, and exhaust us of our own wisdom. What discovery after discovery of our wretched and miserable inability is needed to bring us down to that spot of felt helplessness and utter ruin in which Christ becomes our all in all. Now when Christ is thus made our all in all, after, it may be, many a long and weary season of

struggling with a body of sin and death, with a burden of guilt and shame, condemnation and self-reproach; after being exercised, perhaps for years, with powerful temptations and many grievous afflictions,—when we thus cease to be nothing and to have nothing, and by some clearer and brighter discoveries of his glorious Person and work, Christ becomes our all in all, that is a performing or finishing of the good work until the day of Christ. For it is a good work to bring us unto Christ; and to make Christ everything to us which our souls can desire is accomplishing the good work, and if possible making it better still, by setting on it God's own crown and bringing forth the top stone of his love and goodness "with shoutings of grace, grace unto it." And surely that must be truly and emphatically "the day of Jesus Christ" when he is thus supremely exalted: "And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." (Isa. 2:17.)

3. But there is a third sense, and one that seems to be especially the mind of the Holy Ghost in the text—*the day of Christ's appearing*, when he will come a second time without sin unto salvation. This second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in the glory of the Father is much spoken of in the New Testament, and formed an important portion of the preaching of all the apostles. This second coming is often spoken of as "the day of Christ." Thus to the Corinthians Paul writes: "Waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 1:7, 8.) So elsewhere the apostle speaks of being "sincere and without offence till the day of Christ," and of his hoping "to rejoice in the day of Christ that he had not run in vain neither laboured in vain." (Phil. 1:10; 2:16.) Now the good work begun in the heart of the saints of God will never shine forth in all its

completeness and glory until this day of Christ; for when all the veils and coverings of mortality are dropped then will the work of God burst forth in all its beauty. When a statue, erected to some distinguished individual, as say, the late Prince Consort, is to be what is called inaugurated, and exposed to public view, it is kept closely covered up until the appointed day; and then when all the preparations made for the occasion are completed, and the Sovereign herself perhaps present, it is suddenly uncovered, and in one moment stands forth in all its beauty. Nobody could see its grace and beauty until the covering was removed; but now all may admire its exquisite proportions and the truthfulness of the attitude and likeness. What the statue was when covered up so is it now with the saints of God. God is working by his Spirit and grace in their soul a glorious and yet hidden and invisible work, but now covered up by a body of sin and death. But in that day when Christ shall be revealed; when he shall come with all his saints; when the bodies of the sleeping saints shall be raised from the dust and reunited to their souls, made perfect in holiness, and the living be changed in the twinkling of an eye, without passing through death—in that day of Christ what glory will be seen encompassing the saints of God. What glorious souls, purified from every spot and stain of sin, and what heavenly, spiritual, and immortal bodies will each combine with all their powers to praise the God of their salvation. This will indeed be the "day of Christ," when he shall take to himself the kingdom and reign before his ancients gloriously; when his people will shine, according to the ancient promise, as pure and as numerous as the dew in the morning; when the church will come forth as the bride adorned for her husband, and reign with him in glory for ever and ever.

IV.—I now pass on to my fourth point, *the confidence* of the apostle that God will do all this.

i. His confidence rested upon two grounds: first, *general*; secondly, *particular*.

1. It rested first upon the *general* ground of God's faithfulness—that he would be faithful to his word and his oath as made in and ratified by an everlasting covenant. This covenant is "ordered in all things and sure," and contains a special promise made in it to the Son of his love, "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David: His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me." (Psa. 89:34-36.) According to the tenor of this promise in the eternal covenant, none of the elect can ever perish, or otherwise the seed of the spiritual David would not endure for ever. But need we any other testimony than our Lord's own declaration? "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." (John 10:27, 28.) But I need not dwell longer on a point so firm and clear.

2. I will therefore pass on to the *particular* ground of confidence in the case of the Philippian church, as forming a part of our text: "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making request with joy, for *your fellowship in the gospel* from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing," &c. Thus we see that it was their fellowship with him in the gospel which gave him a sure confidence on their behalf that he who had begun the work would finish it to the day of Jesus Christ. But let me explain in a few words what is meant by "the fellowship of the gospel." It means a mutual participation in the blessings, in the grace, and in the power of the gospel, cementing their hearts together in the union

and communion of the Holy Ghost. He had felt union and communion with them; they had felt union and communion with him; and this was the ground of his confidence, that he who had begun the good work in them, which he knew was the case from his feelings towards them, would finish it unto the day of Christ, when they and he should be glorified together.

Now may I not in some measure say the same thing of those of you in the church and congregation, in whom there is any real evidence of the good work having been begun? Have we not some mutual fellowship in the gospel? Has not this been the ground, the sole ground, of our love and union with each other? Have we not felt and known something within these walls of the power of the gospel? Has it not reached your heart sometimes from my lips, and been made the power of God unto your salvation? If I have felt, as I hope I have the power of the gospel in my own soul, within these walls, and you have felt the power of the gospel in your soul under my ministry, that has given us fellowship; that has united us in the gospel, and made us mutual partakers of the blessings of the gospel, the consolations of the gospel, the hopes of the gospel, and the promises of the gospel. We may esteem or like each other from various motives, and to some I may have been as a "lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument" (Ezek. 33:32)—the instrument of preaching. But all these are earthly ties, pleasures which perish in the using. It is nothing but the fellowship of the gospel which unites heart to heart and knits people to minister and minister to people. Now you and I for many years—I speak to those who desire to fear the Lord and have been hearers of mine, whether in the church or out of it, for I do not tie up my esteem and affection within the bonds of church membership, you and I have had for many years some fellowship in the gospel. What motive, what

inducement has brought you here, many of you from long distances, through all weathers, except to hear the gospel with some power and savour to your hearts? And when you have come and heard something that has brought life and liberty, love and mercy into your soul, it has been through the power of the gospel, and nothing but the power of the gospel. It has not been my eloquence, nor abilities, nor talents, nor anything of that kind, for I have but little of them; and if I had, in this matter of fellowship in the gospel, they would be worthless. But it has been the simple power of the gospel which has come out of my heart and through my mouth into your soul. That is the foundation, and the only foundation, of all our fellowship, of all our union, love, and affection. This fellowship of the gospel must be mutual, from the very meaning of the word. So it was with Paul and the Philippians; for if you look at the margin in the 7th verse you will find it read, "Ye have me in your heart," as well as "I have you in my heart," as in the text.

Now it was this mutual fellowship in the gospel which made him feel the sure confidence that he who had begun the good work could carry it on. May I not feel and say the same? If you were mere cold, dead, indifferent hearers, how could I think or speak with any confidence that he who had begun a good work would carry it on? But so far as I know you, or any of you, to have some experience of the work of God upon your soul, or some hope that he has wrought savingly and graciously upon your heart under my ministry, I feel a sure confidence that he who has begun the good work will perform it to the day of Christ, and that independent of me or any other man. It does not want my presence, though you may value it; it will not fail through my absence, though you may feel it. It depends upon the faithfulness of God as I have opened it up. Whether, therefore, I be present or absent, it will not affect your salvation or the carrying on of the good

work. It may for a time affect your feelings. I should indeed be a poor minister not to be missed; and it would not speak much for my character in or out of the pulpit if we parted without affection and without regret. But as regards the carrying on and finishing of the work, remember this—I did not begin that work upon your soul; and I shall not complete that work of grace upon your soul. If I did, it would not be a good work. If I had given you the material it must be bad, as my gift and not the gift of God. If the material were good, if I were the workman I should spoil the material by my bungling hand. But if, as I pointed out in the beginning, it is a good work from goodness of material and goodness of workmanship, the finishing of the work in its beauty and perfection does not rest upon me or any man, but upon the faithfulness, the wisdom, the skill, and the power of him who began it. In this spirit therefore, the spirit I trust in some measure of the apostle, I commend you to him who began the good work, in the sweet confidence that he will carry it on; and O that it may be carried on day by day and hour by hour in my breast and in your breast until finished, that when the great and glorious day of Christ comes, you and I may stand before the great white throne, clothed in white garments and the palms of victory in our hands, and lift up our united voices to sing honour and praise and glory and power to him that sits upon the throne and to the Lamb for ever.