

THE LOST SHEEP RESTORED

"My people hath been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains: they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their resting place." Jeremiah 50:6

God the Father in His eternal appointments, God the Son in His mediatorial work, and God the Holy Ghost in His inward teachings, have drawn an eternal line of distinction between the whitewashed professor and the living soul. However the hypocrites in Zion may be mixed up in churches with the people of God; however they may profess to believe in the same doctrines, yet there is a boundary—never to be crossed—established between them by the hand of the triune Jehovah, a boundary line which not all the art or wisdom of men can ever break down. The child of God has that filial fear in his heart which the professor knows nothing of; he has that uprightness before God, that integrity, that simplicity and godly sincerity, that desire to be right, that fear to be wrong, that panting of heart feelingly and experimentally to know "the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent," **Joh 17:3** that longing to live day by day under the blessed Spirit's teachings, that humility of soul and brokenness of heart, that tenderness of conscience, and those other fruits of the Spirit, which may indeed be counterfeited and imitated, but which never really exist save in those hearts which God has touched with His finger.

It therefore behoves all those whom God has been pleased to plant upon the walls of Zion as watchmen, in order to call the hours of light and darkness, and to proclaim when "the morning cometh, and also the night" **Isa 21:11-12** to cry aloud and spare not betwixt the honest man and the thief. The faithful shepherds are called upon "to judge between

cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he-goats" **Eze 34:17** Nor has there ever been a period when the prophets of the Lord were more urgently required to take forth the precious from the vile and be thus manifested as God's mouth **Jer 15:19**

In the two verses that precede the text, and in the text itself taken in connection with them, we have a description by the Holy Ghost, speaking through His servant Jeremiah, of the way in which the Lord leads His people. We find described by the unerring pen of divine inspiration, the place where He finds them, the cause which has driven them there, the way in which they are delivered, and the spot to which they are eventually brought. And, therefore, in speaking from these words I shall not confine myself to the words of the text, but shall, the Lord helping me, take them in connection with the two verses which immediately precede it. And may the blessed Spirit condescend to favour us with His unction and dew, without which all that I speak, and all that you hear, will be like "water spilled upon the ground."

As there is nothing like a good beginning, I shall endeavour to make my ground good at first by stating as plainly and as decisively as I can who the persons are of whom these things are spoken. They are called in the text by the mouth of God Himself, "My people," and they are that peculiar people whom God the Father chose in Christ before all worlds, that chosen generation whom God the Son, taking their nature into union with Himself, redeemed by His own most precious blood, and that holy nation whom God the Holy Ghost condescends to teach, and lead and guide, and bring home safe to glory. This elect portion of the human race, God calls in the text, "My people," as though He would say of them, "They are Mine by choice, Mine by purchase, Mine by adoption; eternally Mine, irreversibly Mine; Mine in spite of

sin, death, and hell; Mine in spite of the flesh, the world, and the devil."

(i) But our first view of this peculiar people shall be in the place where God finds them. "My people," He says, "hath been lost sheep." They do not become sheep by being found, nor do they cease to be sheep by being lost. They were sheep eternally in the mind of God; and their becoming lost did not alter nor destroy their character of being sheep any more than the wandering of a sheep literally and naturally from the fold turns it into a goat. It may be lame, sick, or diseased; it may stray away miles from the fold; its fleece may be torn with briars or soiled with mud, and its whole appearance so altered that the shepherd can scarcely recognise it; but it is a sheep still, and ever will be a sheep whilst it continues to exist. And thus the elect being sheep eternally in the mind of God, and as such possessing an eternal union with the Son of God, could not cease to be sheep by falling in Adam, nor do their personal, individual falls, slips, and transgressions destroy their original, unalterable character.

But viewed as to the place where the Lord the Spirit finds them, they are "lost sheep," ruined, undone, without hope, without help, without strength, without wisdom, without righteousness; lost, so as to have no power to find the way to glory; lost, as to any expectations of finding that in the creature which God can look upon with acceptance; lost, as to any hope of ever reaching the heavenly shore, save under the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit; lost, as to any possibility of doing the least thing towards propitiating the favour of God, or gaining an interest in His love.

When God the Holy Ghost takes a soul in hand, just as the fingers of a man's hand wrote a sentence of condemnation

upon the wall of the palace of the king of Babylon, so does the blessed Spirit write the word "Lost" upon the conscience of every vessel of mercy; and when He has written this word with power on their consciences, they carry it about with them branded as it were in letters of fire, in such a manner that the impression is never to be erased, until it is blotted out by the atoning blood of the Mediator.

And thus in the teachings of the Holy Ghost in the consciences of God's family, "lost, lost, lost," is written on their heart; "lost, lost, lost," is the cry of their lips; "lost, lost, lost," is the deep feeling of their soul. And none was ever found who had not the feeling lost, written more or less deeply upon his heart. None was ever gathered in the arms of the heavenly Shepherd; sought out upon the mountains and the hills, laid upon His shoulders, and brought home with rejoicing; none was ever brought into a spiritual acquaintance with Jesus, so as to enjoy communion with Him, who had not sighed, and groaned, and cried under a sense of his lost state, as a guilty sinner before God.

Now when the soul has been taught by the Holy Ghost to feel as well as to see and know itself to be without strength to deliver itself from the wrath to come, and is in consequence sunk down into despondency and dismay, then is the time when the Holy Ghost usually gives it some discovery of the mercy of God in the face of Jesus Christ. We find this sweetly set forth in that remarkable chapter, **Eze 16**. The vessel of mercy is there delineated under the figure of a new-born babe, abandoned by its mother, and "cast out in the open field, to the loathing of its person in the day that it was born". **Eze 16:5** As unpitied, as abandoned, as polluted, as helpless, as perishing, as wretched as an outcast is the quickened soul. But it is not left to perish. "When I passed by thee," says the loving Redeemer, "and looked upon thee,

behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee" (the time of espousal), **Ru 3:9** "and covered thy nakedness; yes, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine". **Eze 16:8**

There seems to be some hint of this in the last words of the text, "They have forgotten their resting place," implying that these "lost sheep" had to a certain extent been found, and had had some rest given to them in Christ; that the Lord the Spirit had brought them, some by a deeper, others by a more shallow way, some more and some less strikingly, to find Jesus to be their rest, so that their lost, distressed, and troubled souls had found a measure of rest in Christ, rest in His blood, rest in His righteousness, rest in "the everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure" **2Sa 23:5**

But the Lord speaks of His people in the text as having forgotten "their resting place." Now if they never knew what a resting place was, they could not be said to have forgotten it. And this, if I am not much mistaken, affords us a clue to the meaning of the text in speaking of God's people as being lost on the mountains through the instrumentality of false shepherds. It is clear that their being lost in the first instance could not arise from treacherous guides, as they were lost in their first parent, lost in the womb where they were conceived in sin, and lost from the womb, whence they went astray speaking lies. It is rather the straying away of a sheep which has been folded, than of one that had been yearned upon the mountains, and had never known the voice of the good Shepherd; the wandering of the backslider, rather than of the dead in sin. And thus it corresponds to the parable of the lost sheep **Lu 15:4-6** which describes the case of a backslider; and it falls in with David's penitent cry **Ps**

119:176 "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Thy servant."

(ii) The Lord then in the text states the cause, the instrumental cause, of the backslidings and wanderings of His people. He charges it home upon their false shepherds, their deceiving and deceived guides, who through ignorance or maliciousness lead them astray. "My people," saith He, "hath been lost sheep; their shepherds have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains; they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their resting place."

O! what thunderbolts of divine vengeance are threatened in God's Word against false ministers—enough to make any man with a tender conscience who stands up in the name of the Lord tremble from head to foot! What awful denunciations of the wrath of God against the idol shepherds **Zec 11:17** the slothful, self-seeking pastors, who never strengthen the diseased, nor heal the sick, nor bind up the broken, nor bring again the driven away, nor seek the lost, but rule them with force and cruelty, feeding themselves, and not the flock! **Eze 34:4,8**

But if the Lord's people are led astray by these shepherds after they have obtained some knowledge of Christ, we may be very sure that their treacherous guides came in the grab of truth. The doctrines of grace were on their lips, but deceit and hypocrisy in their heart; and thus, under the mask of truth, they insinuated themselves into the affections, biassed the judgment, and beguiled the heart of God's people. Did they come with open errors, did they at once propound their deceptive sentiments, did they at the outset manifest their ungodly lives, the sheep would take alarm and not listen to their alluring voice. But they come into the fold as real

shepherds, the divinely commissioned pastors of the flock, though they enter it only to break down the hurdles, and scatter and lead astray the sheep. We will, the Lord enabling us, unmask and hold up to view some of these false shepherds who come in the name of Christ, but are neither taught nor sent by Him.

Some of these false shepherds lead them aside by building them up in doctrines, without the sweet power and living efficacy of truth being felt in the soul; and thus the children of God get drawn aside from sighs, and cries, and groanings after the Lord, to rest upon doctrines as doctrines, without the sweet unction and blessed power and divine savour of those doctrines being communicated and breathed into their heart by the mouth of God Himself.

Now whatever it be that leads the soul away from its "resting place," whatever draws it aside from an experimental knowledge of the Son of God, whatever seduces it from the Spirit into the form, and from the power into the letter, injures, seriously injures, a living soul. However Scriptural, however true these doctrines are, however ably stated, clearly proved, or eloquently enforced, yet, when used by ministers of unrighteousness, as they frequently are used, to build the soul up in presumptuous confidence, and oppose the Spirit's work upon the conscience, they draw the sheep away from the power and spirit and savour of divine realities as made experimentally known, into the dead letter and dry form. Doctrines in the letter are but the skeleton and wire-fastened bones of truth, without the sinews and flesh coming up upon them, and the skin covering them above, or the breath of the Holy Ghost breathing upon them that they may live **Eze 37:8-9**

I appeal to the consciences of some here present, if you have not been thus led astray.

When the Lord first began His work in your soul (**I can speak for myself**), was there not a simplicity, an uprightness, and mingled with convictions of sin and helplessness, a panting to know Jesus by His own manifestations? And when brought to some measure of faith and hope in Him, was there not a sincere, childlike reliance and rest upon His blood and righteousness? But have not some of you been led away from this simplicity and godly sincerity, this implicit and panting reliance upon the Spirit's inward teachings, into a dry, cold, hard profession of truth, much further advanced indeed in the knowledge of the letter, but the freshness, the savour, the vitality, and the power of truth sensibly declined, and as it were dried up out of your soul? And what has been the instrumental cause of this substitution of the wisdom of men for the power of God? Trace it to its source, and it will generally be found that the false shepherds were the cause, who came into the fold, pulled down the hurdles of godly fear, and drove or drew the flock away upon the barren mountains, leading them from mountain to hill of doctrines and speculations, hairbreadth distinctions and strifes of words, until amid disputes and controversies the sheep forgot their resting place.

Again; others of these false shepherds, who come in the garb of truth bring with them a base antinomian spirit, which they may conceal at first, but which, after a time, they breathe forth, and infuse into the minds of their hearers. It is not so much a man's words as his spirit that we are to watch and narrowly observe.

Whenever a minister is over a people, and is preaching to them continually, he will breathe his spirit into them, will

infuse into their minds what his own mind is full of. A minister, then, shall come among a people professing vital godliness, with truth on his lips, with the doctrines of grace and some show of experience, and yet there shall be a spirit of levity and carelessness about him, a spirit of slighting the preceptive parts of God's Word, of neglecting the ordinances of His house, of making light of the workings of godly fear and tender conscience, and without absolutely denying the experience of the saints, for that were too barefaced and might damage his own interest, he shall throw out contemptuous remarks against the sighs and cries of a troubled heart, the tears, groans, and supplications of the living soul. He shall set aside these things as legality and bondage, and clamour loudly for what he calls the liberty of the gospel and the unwavering assurance of faith. When he has brought them off from "looking into self, and poring over frames and feelings," in other words from a heart-felt, divinely-taught and wrought religion, he will infuse into their minds the reckless, hardened presumption, that licentious, antinomian spirit, which Satan has breathed into him—a spirit as different from holy trembling, godly awe, and reverential fear, as heaven from hell, or Christ from Belial.

The sheep who had found some resting place in Christ, who had felt the savour of His name as ointment poured forth, gradually drinking into this loose spirit, and finding how suitable it is to their vile lusts and passions, often get so intoxicated with this wine of Sodom and these grapes of Gomorrah, that they "forget their resting place;" and being "turned away on the mountains," wander "from mountain to hill" of presumptuous confidence, and perhaps fall down some of the steep crags, until the good Shepherd seek them out where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.

Others of these false shepherds, coming under a profession of truth, introduce Sabellian, Arian, Pre-existerian, and other abominable error, and yet wrap them up so covertly that they deceive the unwary.

But there is another class of false shepherds of a totally different stamp, who are great zealots for the precepts of God's Word, and the ordinances of His house, but whose object is secretly to infuse a spirit of self-righteousness—to lead the people up to what they call holiness, as though holiness were something to be attained by diligent cultivation; and thus they draw them aside from lying as poor miserable sinners at the foot of the cross, and bring them to lean upon something in self, where by dishonour is done to the Holy Ghost, as teacher of the church of God, and to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our sanctification as well as our righteousness. Whatever leads a man away from lying at the foot of the cross, from godly fear, reverential awe, and a trembling sense of God's presence, whatever draws him aside from communion with Jesus, from contrition and self-renunciation, does not come from God. Whatever Scriptural language it be dressed out in, whatever piety and holiness are worn in the features, manner and garb of the preacher, whatever zeal, devotion, and fervour he seems to carry with him, yea, though he comes as an angel of light, he and his message are to be rejected if he teach anything that leads the soul away from the cross of the Lord Jesus.

"If anything, easy or hard He teach, save the Lamb and His blood." But in early days, before the soul is led deeply into the mystery of sin and the mystery of salvation, nothing more readily falls in with the engrained self-righteousness of our hearts than earnest persuasions to holiness from the lips of a preacher who seem embalmed in all the odour of it, and

in our undiscerning eyes clad from head to foot in well-nigh sinless perfection.

But however these idol shepherds differ from one another, in one point they all agree; one charge is made against them all. "They have caused the sheep to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains." They have turned them away from the cross of Christ, away from simplicity and godly sincerity, away from tenderness of conscience, away from the distressed and troubled paths of the children of God, away from beggary, bankruptcy, and destitution, away from looking unto the Lord of life and glory as the only hope, strength, and righteousness of their needy and naked souls. Nor is this all, "They have turned them away upon the mountains," have driven or drawn them upon the barren mountains—the mountains of Gilboa, where there is neither dew nor rain, neither food nor shelter, where in the day the drought consumes them, and the frost by night. They do not lead them into the vale of humility, amid the green pastures, and beside the still waters, which are only to be found in that valley; but turn them away on the mountains of pride and self-exaltation, presumption, and barren speculation. And what is the consequence? "They have gone from mountain to hill"—from one barren height to another, wandering they knew not whither, dissatisfied with every spot to which they came, but still unable to come down into the valley, trying mountain after hill, notion after notion, text after text, doctrine after doctrine, but finding rest and peace in none. The living sheep who are seeking after food and pasture, however they may be led astray for a time from the simplicity that is in Christ, never really feed upon anything but that which the Holy Ghost Himself communicates. Though the child of God may be continually entangled in doctrines and speculations, yet he never really rests in anything short of sweet communion with Jesus; is never

satisfied short of the divine manifestations of mercy to his soul, the lifting up of the light of the Lord's countenance, the sweet whisperings and droppings in of His eternal love and discriminating favour. But it does continually happen, and I believe it has happened to some in these towns, that, seduced by false teachers, the living family go astray, wander from mountain to hill, trying first one thing and then another, seeking rest and finding none; restless, perplexed, baffled, confused, unable to feed upon what is set before them, and yet unable to get to the pastures, where they may lie down and feed.

(iii) But we come to the way in which the Lord delivers these sheep that have been thus led astray—the manner in which He fulfils the promise contained in **Eze 34:10-12** "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require My flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; for I will deliver My flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them. For thus saith the Lord God, Behold I, even I, will both search My sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered, so will seek out My sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day."

"In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping; they go and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten" **Jer 50:4-5**

The Lord had a wise and gracious purpose in thus suffering them to wander. He had an end to accomplish thereby. He wanted to teach them the emptiness of all mere profession,

the nothingness of the creature, and the depravity of their fallen nature. By thus allowing them to wander, baffled, troubled, and perplexed, He brought to pass His own secret purpose, which was to sicken them thereby of men, to wean them from the creature, to break down the pride of their hearts, to show them the emptiness of all their own wisdom and strength, and to turn away their eyes from beholding vanity.

He brings, then, powerful convictions into their consciences, and lays judgment to the line in their hearts. And this He does by some affliction or cutting stroke in their persons or their families, by bringing them under a heart-searching ministry, by shooting a secret arrow into their consciences out of His own Word of truth, or by recalling to their mind their feelings in times past, and how they have declined from them. This produces in them the feeling described in **Ho 2:7** "I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now." There is a movement in the soul, a going forth of heart, a returning of the backsliding child. "In those days, and at that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping; they shall go and seek the Lord their God." "They shall come weeping, and with supplications will I lead them" **Jer 31:9** "I will arise," said the repenting prodigal, "and go to my father" **Lu 15:18** Whilst they were bewitched by their false teachers, and wrapped up in dry doctrines, there was no going and weeping. Sighs and groans were counted the very dregs of legality, fit indeed for beginners, but not for such established believers. Whilst the heart was hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, there was no going and weeping. Whilst leaning to self-righteousness and the work of the creature, there was no going and weeping. All religion that springs from the flesh and stands in the wisdom of man leaves the heart

unimpressed. No contrition, no tenderness, no humility, no brokenness of heart, no tears of godly sorrow, no honest confession, no daily sigh, no midnight groan, no restless tossing of the bed, nor secret supplications at the footstool of mercy, are to be found in the heart that is drawn aside into flesh-pleasing delusions. But when the Lord "rises up that He may do His work, His strange work, and bring to pass His act, His strange act"—when "He sets His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people, and to gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth"—when as a shepherd He seeks His sheep on the hills and the mountains, He smites their conscience, and causes grief and distress to be felt, in order to bring them to turn their faces toward Zion, "O," says the poor soul, smarting under these convictions, "how I have been deceived and deluded! how I have been resting upon doctrines without feeling their power! how I have neglected secret prayer!—how I had almost got above reading God's Word! how slighting the work of grace in the soul! believing myself to be walking in liberty, when I was in the very worst of bondage! O I am ready to weep tears of blood, that I was so led astray by the false shepherds under whom I sat."

Convinced of his error, he turns his back upon the false ministers who have beguiled him, and turns his face to Zion. As we read, "They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward." The apostle tells us what it is to come to Zion **Heb 12:22-24** "But we have come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel." "Out of Zion, the perfection of

beauty, God hath shined" **Ps 50:2** for "there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore." (**Psa 133:3**) Zion is the seat of all gospel blessings. In it is laid "the precious corner-stone" **Isa 28:16** in it "is placed salvation for Israel" **Isa 46:13** the Lamb of God stands upon it **Re 14:1** mercy, and glory come out of it. In turning the face, then, Zionward, is implied the seeking of gospel blessings. They are therefore said "to seek the Lord their God," who is only to be found in Zion, His dwelling-place **Ps 76:2** and where praise waiteth for Him **Ps 65:1** But they ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward in no light and trifling spirit, and in no positive certainty that they shall ever arrive there. They have to ask the way step by step, often doubting and fearing whether they be in the way. Having been so often deceived and deluded, they dare no more trust their own hearts, but have to beg of the Lord to show them every inch of the road. They can no longer blindly follow every presumptuous guide, but have to cry to the Lord Himself to teach, and lead, and quicken them in the way. And as they go, they weep. They mourn over their base backslidings, over the many evils they have committed, over the levity of mind which they have indulged, over the worldliness of spirit, the pride, presumption, hypocrisy, carnality, carelessness, and obstinacy of their heart. They go and weep with a broken heart and softened spirit, not resting in their tears as evidences, but seeking the Lord their God; seeking the secret manifestations of His mercy, the visitations of His favour, the "lifting up of the light of His countenance;" seeking after a revelation of the love of Jesus; to know Him by a spiritual discovery of Himself. Being thus minded, they seek not to establish their own righteousness, they seek not the applause of the world, they seek not the good opinion of professors, they seek not the smiles of saints, they seek not to make themselves Christians by their own exertions. But "they seek the Lord their God"—seek His

face day and night, seek His favour, seek His mercy, seek His grace, seek His love, seek His glory, seek the sweet visitations of His presence and power, seek Him, wrestling with Him till they find Him to be their covenant God, who heals all their backslidings.

And as they seek Him they say, "Come let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten." The desire of one thus taught and led, thus deeply convinced of the emptiness and worthlessness of all religion that does not centre in the experimental knowledge of the Son of God, is to feel a manifested union with Christ; to find his very soul melted into communion with Jesus; and therefore he presses forward to join himself to the Lord, so as to drink into all the meaning of those wonderful words, "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" **1Co 6:17** He says to himself, "Dry doctrines floating in the brain can do me no good; the praise of man cannot ease a guilty conscience." "Nothing," he says, "can give me solid peace, but a manifested union with Christ, to feel myself one with Him, to know the power of His love, the efficacy of His blood, and the manifestation of His glorious righteousness."

"Come, let us join ourselves to the Lord." Does this imply any power in the creature to join himself to the Lord? No; but it implies this—that, when the Lord unites us to Himself, then we unite ourselves to Him; when the Lord brings the believer into a manifested union with Himself, then there is a leaping forth of the soul, a going forth of the affections, a cleaving to Him with purpose of heart, a believing in Him with all the powers of the mind, and a solemn renunciation, a casting aside, a trampling under foot, a rejection of everything but that which stands in the power of God, as made known to the soul by the Holy Spirit.

It is not spoken in a presumptuous way; "Come, let us join ourselves to the Lord." It does not indicate any bold presumptuous claim upon the Lord, as if being now on the road to Zion, and being possessed of certain evidences, they could claim the inheritance, and, as it were, rush in, and lay hold of gospel blessings; but it points out the actings of living faith in the soul, which goes forth, when raised up and drawn out by the blessed Spirit. The vain confidence and rash forwardness of those who are at ease in Zion, is a very different thing from the meek faith of those who are going and weeping, asking the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward, whose hearts are melted by the Spirit into contrition, and desire to feel and taste the sweet manifestation of the love of a dying Lord. These, without presumption or bold familiarity, can say, "Come, let us join ourselves to the Lord," as feeling in their souls the actings of that living faith whereby they cleave to and lean upon Him, as the only prop between them and hell.

There was no presumptuous claim nor bold familiarity in the woman who stretched forth her hand to touch the hem of Jesus' garment, and yet she joined herself to the Lord by taking hold of His raiment. The touch of living faith is one thing; the intrusion of daring familiarity is another. A child may climb its parent's knees; a servant must keep his due distance.

"Come," say they, with filial confidence, "let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant;" as wanting to feel the power of that eternal covenant made manifest in their souls; desiring to see their names manifestly written in the book of life; desiring to look upon Him whom they have pierced, and see their sin atoned for by the shedding of His precious blood; desiring to feel in the depths of their broken heart their interest in the everlasting covenant "ordered in all

things and sure." And thus, though nothing in themselves but beggary, bankruptcy, destitution and nakedness; nothing by nature but a filthy mass of all that is loathsome and detestable in the sight of God, yet longing to find and feel themselves wrapped up in the bundle of life with the Lord of life and glory, to have their conscience sprinkled with those balmy drops of atoning blood which the Holy Ghost applies to purge it from dead works, and to rejoice in the Lord as all their salvation and all their desire.

Now, I would by no means wish to lay down the path I have feebly and imperfectly chalked out, as one in which all the redeemed walk without any variation. The outlines may be the same in all, but the filling up may be different in each. Many, for instance, have not been led astray by false shepherds, but have sat under sound ministers from the beginning of the work upon their souls. But if not deluded by them, have they escaped the deceits and delusions of their own hearts? or if kept from evil and error outwardly, have they been preserved inwardly? Here all are upon a level; nor can one boast over another. Bearing this then in mind, have you not, each in your measure, trod in these paths? When the Lord began His work of grace in your soul, was not the word "lost" written upon your conscience? Did you not carry that burden with you wherever you went? Whenever you awoke in the dead of the night, did not the word lost stare you in the face? However you might seek to drown your convictions, did not the word lost ring in your ears? Whenever you went to chapel, did not the word lost seem written before your eyes?

And did not the Lord in His own time and way lead you up to some persuasion of your interest in the blood and love of the Lamb, and cause, in some measure, the hopes and affections of your renewed spirit to flow forth unto Him? Then you

found a resting-place, and never wished for any other rest but that which "remaineth for the people of God," even an entrance by faith into the finished work of Immanuel. But did you always rest there? Whether led astray by false guides, or drawn aside by your own base heart, let honest conscience, speaking like a faithful monitor in your bosom, testify whether there was not some secret departure from the Lord.

What an awful error it is to deny backsliding! What ignorance it manifests of a man's own heart! How it stamps a man as a perverter of truth, and one that trifles with sin and the displeasure of the Most High! Who that knows himself and the idolatry of his fallen nature dares deny that he backslides perpetually in heart, lip, or life? Can any of us here deny that we have backslidden from our first love?—backslidden from simplicity and godly sincerity—backslidden from reverence and godly fear—backslidden from spirituality and heavenly-mindedness—backslidden from the breathings of affection and pouring forth of the heart into the bosom of the Lord? And if we have not been suffered to backslide into open sin, if the Lord has kept us, and not suffered us to be cast down into the mire, yet have we not committed the twofold evil which the Lord charges upon His people; "They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water?" **Jer 2:13**

And what do we reap from backsliding?—do we reap pleasure, comfort, or peace?—do we reap smiles of God, or the solemn testimony of the Spirit in the conscience? No. If conscience speaks in your bosom, what does it say? That every departure from the Lord has brought grief and trouble, that so far from justifying yourself in your sin, you have been ready almost to weep tears of blood, that you have so wickedly departed from the Lord. It has been our mercy that

the Lord has not given us up to hardness of heart and searedness of conscience, that we have not been allowed to say with Israel of old, "I am innocent, I have not sinned" **Jer 2:35** but that He has "led us with weeping and with supplications." Have not some of us within these walls (**I am sure I have for one**) been obliged "to go and weep," and tell the Lord a piteous tale of backsliding; how we have departed from His fear, and sinned basely against Him; how unwilling we have been to take His yoke upon us, and walk in His precepts? Have we not been forced to tell Him that we have been disobedient and stubborn, filthy and vile, and has He not, in some measure, led us "to turn our faces Zionward"—to turn our back upon all false ministers, upon all idol shepherds, upon all the strength, and wisdom, and righteousness, and will of the creature, and given to us some simplicity, uprightness, and integrity of heart and conscience, whereby we have turned our face Zionward, looking for a blessing to come out of Zion, looking for grace, looking for glory? "I will make thee sick in smiting thee," say the Lord **Mic 6:13** alluding to the feeling of sickness produced by a wound ("I am made sick)," **1Ki 22:34 (margin)**. And have not these wounds in our conscience made us, in our measure, sick of the world, sick of the professing church, sick of hypocrites, sick of our backslidings, sick of all but the Word of God revealed with power, sick of all but the blood and love of the Redeemer, of all teachings but the teachings of the Holy Ghost, of all company but the company of the children of God? Can you say thus much? that you have turned back upon everything but Christ, and Him crucified? that you have turned away from all doctrines but those which centre in the blood of the Lamb? that you have turned away from universal charity and general philanthropy, as substituted for the power of vital godliness (though you desire to love and serve your fellow men as men), and that your spiritual affections are toward God and His people? and

has there been in your soul any such feeling as Ruth had when she said, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God?" Any sweet response in your bosom to the voice of the Lord, "My son, give Me thine heart?" "Take it, Lord, with all that I have and am!" Any casting yourself at the foot of the cross, and there entreating the Lord of life and glory to speak peace to our souls?

Now this, I believe, is the way in which the Lord more or less leads the souls of His children. There is indeed no dictating to Him how He shall lead us into the knowledge of Himself, whether by a longer, or whether by a shorter path than others of His children, whether by terrible things in righteousness, or by a less distressing mode; but He will surely bring all His people sooner or later to be nothing and to have nothing—to cast aside their own righteousness as filthy rags; sooner or later to obey that precept—"Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing." Sooner or later the peculiar people will have to walk in the paths of temptation and sorrow; and sooner or later will be led into sweet communion with the Lord of life and glory, to be "satisfied," like Naphthali, "with favour, and full with the blessing of the Lord."

This religion is what I desire to preach; to live in, and to die by. For there is no other that can satisfy a quickened soul.

He that is not interested in the eternal election of God the Father, in the atoning blood and justifying righteousness of God the Son, in the work and witness of God the Holy Ghost, whatever be his name, sect, denomination or profession; whatever be his outward conduct, the doctrines he professes, or the creed to which he signs his name, he will die as Esau died, as Balaam died, as Saul died, as Judas and Ahithophel died. He will never see the King in His beauty, never see the

land afar off, never see the new Jerusalem, nor the blood of sprinkling, "that speaketh better things than the blood of Abel." But every living soul that has been feelingly taught his lost condition—that has known something of a resting-place in Christ—that has turned his back upon the world and the professing church, and gone weeping Zionward—in whose heart God the Holy Ghost has implanted those solemn desires, and **(if I may use the expression)** those solemn determinations under divine teaching—not a determination of freewill, but the inward determination of grace strengthened to it by the Spirit of God, "to join himself to the Lord in a perpetual covenant never to be forgotten"—that he may live in Jesus and die in Jesus—live out of Jesus and unto Jesus, that he may feel His power, taste His love, know His blood, rejoice in His grace—every such soul shall, like Israel of old, be borne safely through this waste howling wilderness, shall be carried through this vale of tears, and taken to enjoy eternal bliss and glory in the presence of Him whom to see as He is constitutes the blessedness of the redeemed. Every such poor, exercised, tempted soul shall be brought into personal enjoyment of Christ below and of Christ above, so as to enjoy a foretaste of heaven here, and hereafter to bathe in the ocean of endless bliss.