

The Work of Faith with Power

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"Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." 2 Thess. 1:11, 12

It is scarcely possible to read with an attentive eye the epistles of Paul in the New Testament without seeing what a spirit of prayer dwelt in his breast, and that not only for the saints of God generally, but for those churches particularly to which the Holy Spirit inspired his pen to write. Since he has said, "Be ye followers of me even as I also am of Christ," (1 Cor. 11:1) we may well ask ourselves whether we walk in the same spirit, whether we tread in the same steps. Alas! no. In this as in every other grace we fall painfully short of the bright and heavenly example which he has set us. Often, too often, when we find it hard to pray for ourselves. How much harder, then, to pray for others! Persons frequently ask me to pray for them. I usually make them no answer, for I feel that unless the Lord lay them on my heart I can no more pray for them than I can for myself, unless I have the Spirit of grace and supplications poured out upon me. I may indeed use words on their behalf, as I might on my own; but what are words without the Spirit's interceding breath in them, whether for one's self or for other's? But this blessed man of God had such a continual spirit of prayer dwelling in his breast, that when he fell upon his knees before God to supplicate his heavenly Majesty to supply his own pressing wants, the various churches with which he had been

personally connected, and even some, as those at Rome and Colosse, that he had never seen face to face in the flesh, were so brought before his mind and laid with such weight and power upon his heart, that he could not rest satisfied until he had poured forth his soul in prayer and supplication on their behalf. But whence came it that *his* soul was thus continually engaged in prayer and supplications for the churches when we bear them up so rarely and so feebly before the throne of God? The answer is obvious: it was because he had so large a measure of the grace of God in his bosom; for prayer in the soul is a kind of spiritual barometer which indicates the rising and falling of the life of God in the believer's bosom, as the quicksilver in the tube marks by its upward or downward movement the increasing or diminishing weight of the air in the atmosphere. Or I may perhaps with better reason call prayer a spiritual thermometer, for not only, like the barometer, does it register the rising and falling of the life of God in the soul, but it marks the degree of warmth that there is in the heart. Now when prayer is down to zero point, and as a consequence, if not a cause, frost and snow seem to chill every spiritual faculty, you will find that the low state of prayer in your soul is a faithful index of an equally low state of every other part of the divine life. Coldness in prayer as much indicates weakness of faith, faintness of hope, and declension in love, as the sinking of the barometer foretells rain, or the fall of the thermometer marks the diminution of heat. Blessed mark is it in us and for us when prayer begins to rise in the heart! It indicates that "the winter is past, the rain over and gone;" that "the voice of the turtle will soon be heard in the land," and that the Sun of Righteousness is about to rise through the dark clouds which have hidden him from view.

But apart from this abiding spirit of prayer in the apostle's

bosom which could only find vent in pouring itself out before God, were there not abundant reasons why he should thus besiege the throne of grace on behalf of the churches? Yes; from deep and personal experience, he knew well what dangers, snares, and temptations beset the path of the people of God; he knew also their weakness to withstand temptation, their helplessness against such foes and fears as beset every step of the way, and how surely they would fall a prey to their teeth unless they were held up by the mighty power of God. He knew also the grace that was in Christ Jesus—what a supply for all their wants was laid up for them in the inexhaustible fulness of the risen Son of God. Seeing, therefore, the dangers of the way, the trials and temptations of the wilderness, the persecutions which they would have to endure, the foes that they would have to meet, and the sorrows which they would have to suffer, and seeing too what a provision there was laid up in Christ Jesus to support them under every trial, and bring them off more than conquerors over every enemy, his very soul went up unto God in earnest prayer and supplication on their behalf, that he would pour down upon them the blessings which he felt they so deeply needed.

Our text, it will be observed, contains a prayer on behalf of the Thessalonian church, and stands in intimate connection with the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. This second coming of Jesus he holds before them under two distinct aspects—that of terror and vengeance to the foes, and that of comfort and deliverance to the friends of the Lamb. "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." (2

Thess. 1:7, 8, 9.) What a day will that be when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance—on whom? The thief, the drunkard, the blasphemer, the murderer? Doubtless. But on these only? Look at the character here given of those on whom the Lord Jesus takes vengeance, and whom he punishes with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power. It is all those—and O what a countless multitude it embraces!—"that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

But the same glorious and triumphant King of kings and Lord of lords, who comes from the shining heights of heaven arrayed with vengeance against the unbelieving and the disobedient, appears to the consolation and joy of his friends, for he comes to be "glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." Looking forward, then, to that great and solemn day, the second advent of our glorious Lord, the apostle lifts up his heart unto God on behalf of those to whom he was writing this epistle, that he would vouchsafe to bestow such blessings upon them, that the name of Jesus might be glorified in them and that they might be glorified in him: "Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

In opening up and laying before you, as the Lord may enable me, the treasures of divine truth stored up in these words, I shall, with God's blessing,

I.—*Firstly*, bring before you *the subject matter of the prayer itself*; which you will find to consist of *three petitions*.

II.—*Secondly*, what would be the *effect and fruit* of that prayer being registered in the court of heaven, and being *answered in the experience* of the saints to whom he writes.

III.—*Thirdly*, the *source* whence all these blessings must come, and the *power* by which they must be wrought.

I.—I hinted just now that if we looked at the subject matter of this prayer which the apostle put up for the church of God at Thessalonica, we should find it to consist of three petitions: 1. the *first* is that "God would count them worthy of this calling" 2. the *second*, that "he would fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness;" 3. the *third*, that he would complete "the work of faith with power." These three petitions we have, with God's blessing, then severally to consider.

i. And first, "*that our God would count you worthy of this calling.*"

The Scripture speaks much of "calling;" and well it may, for divine calling is the foundation of every other divine blessing. It is the first introduction into the grace of God, and therefore the chief pivot upon which the whole work of God in the soul turns—the main root from which every other blessing grows. We need not, then, wonder that the Holy Spirit in Scripture speaks much of calling, when we consider that it is a new birth into the kingdom of heaven, a turning from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God; that short of it all is darkness and death here, and endless misery and woe hereafter; that to be made a partaker of it is to be an heir of God and a joint heir of Christ, and that to live and die without it is to be a vessel of wrath, a child of the devil, an heir of hell.

But we must bear in mind that the same Holy Spirit who speaks so much of calling has laid down in an emphatic manner that there are two kinds of calling. The Lord himself, for instance, says, "Many are called, but few are chosen." There the Lord makes a distinction between calling and choice; evidently implying that not all who are called are chosen, though all who are chosen are called; in other words, that there is a calling which is not effectual, which is not saving, which does not prove and evidence the reality of a person's being chosen according to God's eternal purpose unto eternal life. Family bereavements, bodily sickness, especially if the illness be dangerous or severe, advancing age and infirmities, heavy strokes in providence, strong convictions of conscience, desires to repent and turn to the Lord, fears of death and hell, sitting under the sound of truth, witnessing the happy end of those who die in the Lord, the counsel and example of godly parents, the terrors of the Lord in a broken Law, and the invitations of mercy in a preached Gospel; all these are so many calls wherein and whereby Wisdom "crieth at the gates at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors, Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of men." (Prov. 8:3, 4.) But we well know that all these outward calls are ineffectual until the Holy Ghost puts forth his secret and sacred power upon the heart. This external calling, therefore, was not the calling of which the apostle speaks in our text, and the power and efficiency of which he prayed that the Thessalonian church might realize in their own breast. There is another calling, which, to characterize by a distinct name, is termed an *effectual* calling; that is, a calling which does not begin and end with those marked visitations in providence of which we have spoken, that have a voice if men could and would but listen to it—"Hear ye the rod and who hath appointed it." (Micah 11:9.) Nor is it a calling outwardly by a preached

gospel or by any such temporary convictions and alarms of conscience as do not end in the eventual possession of eternal life; but it is a call of that peculiar nature that God himself, by his own voice and by his own power, puts forth in the soul; and therefore, being God's own special call, is made effectual to its salvation and sanctification. This is the call spoken of by the apostle as springing out of eternal predestination, accompanied by present justification, and issuing in future glorification—"Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." (Rom. 8:30.) This calling, therefore, being so determinate in its origin, so blessed in its course, and so glorious in its end, is spoken of in the word of truth as possessing very blessed and distinguishing marks of its source, its nature, and its issue.

1. It is spoken of, for instance, as a "*high calling*," as in those words of the apostle where describing his experience and the warm breathings of his soul, he says, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3:14.) It is a "high calling" for two special reasons.

First, on account of its *source*. It comes from on high; it comes down into the soul out of the fulness of Jesus as the first fruits of his resurrection and ascension, and a choice pledge and foretaste of those good and perfect gifts which are from above. The voice of the preacher sounds but below; to call effectually he must speak who dwelleth on high. And is not our great High Priest the author of it?—for a risen and exalted Jesus is "the author" or beginner, as well as "the finisher of our faith." Is not he out of whose grace it comes and to where it leads, enthroned in the highest courts of heaven? Thus was he addressed in the spirit of prophecy long before his actual resurrection and ascension—"Thou hast

ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men: yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." (Psa. 68:18.)

Again, it is a "high calling" because it *calls* the Lord's people to *the enjoyment of high things*. Everything upon earth, as viewed by the eyes of the Majesty of heaven, is low and paltry. Earth is after all but a huge clod of dust, and as such, apart from its having been once the place of the Redeemer's sufferings and sacrifice, being now the habitation of his suffering people, and to be hereafter the scene of his glory, as insignificant in the eyes of its Maker as the small dust of the balance or the drop of the bucket. What, then, are its highest objects, its loftiest aims, its grandest pursuits, its noblest employments, short of the grace of the gospel, in the sight of him who inhabits eternity, but mean and worthless? Nay, even in our eyes is there not one consideration that when felt stamps vanity upon them all?—that all earth's pursuits, whatever high attainments men may reach in this life, be it of wealth, rank, learning, power, or pleasure, end in death? The breath of God's displeasure soon lays low in the grave all that is rich and mighty, high and proud; for "the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low." (Isaiah 2:12.) Thus that effectual work of grace on the heart whereby the chosen vessels of mercy are delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son may well be termed a "high calling," for it calls them out of those low, grovelling pursuits, those earthly toys, those base and sensual lusts in which the children of men seek at once their happiness and their ruin, unto the knowledge and enjoyment of those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. This made the apostle say, "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is

hid with Christ in God." (Col. 3:2, 3.) To enjoy fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ; to feel the mind drawn up to high and heavenly things; to have the heart weaned and separated from the poor, grovelling, miserable cares of this time-state; to have the soul solemnly engaged with the realities of a never ending eternity; to live a life of faith on the Son of God; to be spiritually minded which is life and peace; to be dead to the law, to sin, to the world; to seek happiness in knowing the will of God and doing it; and to be looking forward to the end of the race as giving a crown of glory,—surely there is something in this vital experience of the child of God that does, under the power and influence of the blessed Spirit, elevate his soul beyond this poor, wretched vale of tears—this miserable scene where everything is stamped with vexation and disappointment.

2. It is also termed a "*heavenly calling*," (Heb. 3:1) because those who are made partakers of it are thereby put into possession of a sure title to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for them as kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. (1 Pet. 1:1, 5.) To this they are begotten again by the quickening power of the Holy Ghost in their heart, and when favoured with a living hope can read their title to and their interest in it. It is true that when it is under the law, the soul, quickened to feel little else but guilt and bondage, is unable to realise its interest in this heavenly inheritance. Faith is not yet given to believe in the Son of God so as to receive deliverance from guilty fears, and whilst in this state the child of grace cannot realise his title to his heavenly inheritance. But it is his, though he cannot claim it or even understand it. So the infant heir of a vast estate—say, the eldest son of a wealthy duke—when lying on his nurse's lap, is little aware of the wealth and rank to which he is born, or

of the title which he even then bears. But it will not always be so with him. He will in due time have Christ revealed, his atoning blood sprinkled, his righteousness brought near, and his love shed abroad in his heart, and he will then rejoice in hope of the glory of God, and find and feel himself a partaker of a heavenly calling.

3. Again, it is a "*holy* calling." "Who hath saved us and called us with a holy calling" (2 Tim. 1:9); and again, "God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness." (1 Thess. 4:7.) The author of it is the Holy Spirit: he breathes holy desires into the soul, communicates holy feelings, inspires holy affections, and works in us by his own power and grace that inward holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. (Hebrews 7:14.) In my judgment, there is no greater mark of the lax, loose, Antinomian spirit of the present day than the disuse and neglect of the word "holiness." Men are afraid of the word as if it were bordering on legality. That holy life for which our Puritan ancestors so contended, and of which they gave so bright an example, is rarely enforced and rather sneered at as if it were Pharisaic self-righteousness. But they may live to prove the truth of those solemn words, "he that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still." (Rev. 22:11.) Let men then say what they will, and act how they may, the calling of the Holy Ghost is a high calling, a heavenly calling, a holy calling, and the end of it will be the salvation of the soul and an eternal weight of glory.

But the apostle prayed that "God would *count them worthy* of this calling." Does he mean thereby to lay down that man has any worth or worthiness in him before he is called by grace, and that out of respect to this goodness in him, God counts him worthy of being called? The experience of a babe

would give the lie to this explanation of the words. The first teachings of the Spirit in the conscience of one who is effectually called would manifest the falsehood of this view of the subject; for if there be one truth more than another which the Holy Ghost writes upon the heart of a called vessel of mercy, it is his sinfulness, his unworthiness. We cannot therefore for a moment admit that the apostle meant there was any worth or worthiness in the object of this calling, which moved God favourably on his behalf and influenced him to make the call effectual. Would this view of the text apply to Paul himself? Where was his worth when, exceedingly mad against the saints, he neared the gate of Damascus? And yet, with his own experience flashing in his face, he prays that "God would count them worthy of this calling." But observe to whom he was writing. Were they called or uncalled, dead in sin or alive unto God? That point will settle the question. They clearly had been already called, for their "faith grew exceedingly, and their charity (or love) toward each other abounded." And yet, in a sense, there is a worth in the saint of God. But where? Not in himself; but in Christ his covenant head: he alone is worthy to receive all the praise, whether it be of their being called, or justified, or glorified. Because Jesus then is worthy of all honour and praise, God sends his Spirit down into the hearts of those who belong to Jesus, and thus counts them worthy of this calling. He is the head, they the members; he the bridegroom, they the bride; he the stem, they the branches; and therefore for his name's sake they receive the blessing. Thus, in this sense, viewing with ineffable delight and complacency the covenant worthiness of his dear Son, what he is in the courts of heaven as the great and glorious high priest over the house of God, when looking down upon his suffering members here below, as ever one with the Son of his love, God counts them worthy of this calling. Is not this the song of heaven, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to

receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing?" (Rev. 5:12.) And as worthy to receive power, is it not that he may make his people willing in the day of his power? Have you any testimony that God has called you by his grace? Is there a root to your religion? Was there a period never to be forgotten when God was pleased to call you powerfully and effectually unto the knowledge of himself? If so, you know for yourself it was not for any worthiness in you; that your past life, let it have been what it may, was anything but what could recommend you to God's favour; that if not stained by open ungodliness, yet there was everything in you that the eye of God must abhor—worldliness, pride, carnality, self-righteousness; that even if your life was not defiled with actual sin, nor polluted with what men call crime, yet there was an utter absence of all righteousness. You must renounce then, first and last, all idea of worth or worthiness either before or after divine calling. It is not to be named upon earth in the breast of a child of God, much less in the courts of heaven where Jesus fills the throne.

But we may give the words another sense, which I believe is the apostle's meaning, and which we gather up from the marginal reading. The word "count worthy," means also to "*vouchsafe*," that is, "kindly deign," "mercifully grant;" in other words, that God would of his infinite mercy put them into possession of all the benefits and blessings that spring out of a heavenly calling; for you will bear in mind that the persons to whom he writes had been already called; the Holy Ghost had begun his work upon their conscience; they had already, according to the apostle's own testimony, "turned from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven." (1 Thess. 1:9, 10.) The calling therefore respects here not so much the past as the future, not what they were called from, or the mere fact of their

having been called, so much as what the calling was unto, what it ends in. Thus we read, "that ye may know what is the hope of his calling." (Eph. 1:18.) And again, "the prize of the high calling." (Phil. 3:14.) There calling is spoken of as containing here a gracious hope and hereafter a glorious prize. Apply this to the text and see whether it does not bring out a blessed meaning. He had been speaking of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the glory to be revealed in that day. Then bearing up in the arms of prayer his dear Thessalonian friends, he begs of God that he would kindly deign to put them into the experimental possession of this gracious hope here, and the enjoyment of that glorious prize hereafter, so that having been called by his grace, when the Lord Jesus Christ was revealed, he might be glorified in them; that they, with him, might be witnesses of his second coming, and that in anticipation of that joyful day they might even now lift up their hearts with joy as washed in his blood and clothed in his righteousness. He thus prays for them that God would deepen his work of grace upon their souls, give them clearer evidences, make them more manifestly meet for the inheritance of the saints in light; and thus letting down into their hearts all the blessings connected with their high and holy and heavenly calling, would enable them to live under the enjoyment of his gracious presence, to be daily contemplating their glorious inheritance, to have their affections loosened from earthly objects, and walk as redeemed and regenerated children of God. He would thus lay before them every constraining motive for all holy and godly obedience. To revert to my figure, if parent or master saw the heir to a splendid property, a nobleman's eldest son, associating with plough-boys and companions unfitting his rank and station, he would say, "Remember, it is not becoming your present and future place in society to make friends and playmates of these rude boys; you are called to something beyond them: to an education which they cannot

have, and to a property and a title which they cannot share with you; walk then and act in a manner worthy of the station in which you are placed." So it may justly be said to a saint of the Most High, "God has called you with a high and holy and heavenly calling: walk worthy of that vocation; adorn the doctrine in all things; live to his praise; act in his fear; set your affections on things above. Do not be swallowed up and buried in the poor, low objects of this earthly scene, in the perishing things of time and sense; but lift up your hearts to him that sitteth in the heavens, that he would kindly vouchsafe to bestow upon you a sweet foretaste of those heavenly blessings to which you are called by his grace, and of which he has already given you a sure pledge and earnest, in turning you from darkness to light."

ii. The next petition offered upon their behalf is, that God would *"fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness."*

1. How good God is! How supreme in benevolence, loving-kindness, and tender mercy! And it is this feature in the Divine character that softens and melts the heart when sensibly brought under its influence. "The goodness of God leadeth to repentance"—not the severity of God against sin, not the justice of God against transgression, not the law of God with all its fearful terrors; but his "goodness," the kindness of his heart, the compassion, the tenderness, the mercy that ever dwell in his breast. When a sense of this is revealed by the Holy Ghost, it breaks the heart asunder, it melts it all to pieces, it softens the conscience, it makes the eyes overflow, it brings with it an unspeakable feeling of self-loathing and self-abhorrence, and fills the heart with that godly sorrow for sin which needs not to be repented of. O, the goodness of God! And when we view this goodness in contrast with our badness, our unworthiness, sinfulness, baseness, blackness, and vileness, it is so surpassing all

thought that if ever contrition, brokenness, humility, sincerity and godly simplicity, desire to please him, and fear to offend him are sensibly felt, it is at such a moment. But we here read of "the good pleasure of his goodness." God's goodness is directed by God's will. It is not indiscriminate goodness, a pouring out of goodness without its being determined by a ruling principle which guides it. We see sometimes persons naturally very kind and benevolent, but they have no judgment: they give liberally, but have no wisdom to know how to give, nor to whom to give; and thus worthless characters abuse their bounty, and their gifts often do more harm than good. Goodness therefore requires, so to speak, a guiding principle, or you may throw away money upon a wretch who will only squander it in profligacy, as, say, give a sovereign to a drunkard, who will be drunk with it for a week. Thus, though God is full of goodness, he is not so indiscriminate or unwise, for his "good pleasure" or eternal will and fixed decree guide and rule it, and through them as a bounding channel his goodness flows. And as the good pleasure of his eternal will regulates his goodness, so it causes that it cannot be checked or held back, as is the case with earthly goodness. You may perhaps have shown great kindness to some individual by whom it has been badly requited. This ingratitude has cut you deeply, and has perhaps for a time dammed back the flow of goodness in your soul. You say, "I see it is of no use giving money with the view of doing good; it is so abused; people are so ungrateful; and what I give is either squandered away or is requited with the basest ingratitude. I will keep my money to myself." Now these miserable feelings hold back, at least for a time, the flow of your liberality. But God has "a good pleasure" which guides his goodness, and his goodness being thus guided is not checked in its flow out of his bosom by any such considerations as I have hinted at. His eternal goodness is consistent with every other divine attribute, with the

highest wisdom, with the most far-seeing providence, with the most fixed decree, and with the most absolute predestination. "The good pleasure of his goodness" is therefore not merely goodness supreme in all its beauty and blessedness as the pouring out of his unspeakable benevolence and love, but it is so guided and directed by his infinite wisdom, that whilst it flows in an abounding stream of grace, it does not overflow the banks set to it by the eternal determination of his will.

But because the goodness of God is thus bounded and regulated by his infinite wisdom, it may often wear an aspect very contrary to your expectation. Thus it may be the good pleasure of his goodness to lead you into a path that to you may appear anything but good: as, for instance, into many severe temptations, trials, sufferings, and afflictions; for in calling you by his grace, God has called you to suffering, that you may be conformed to the suffering image of his dear Son. "Unto you," says the apostle, "it is given in the behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake" (Phil. 1:29.) And again, "If so be that we suffer with him that we may be also glorified together" (Rom. 8:17.) But God calls his people also to self-renunciation, self-denial, taking up the cross, mortifying the whole body of sin, putting off the old man, and putting on the new. As it was the good pleasure of his goodness that his dear Son should become "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;" so it may be his good pleasure to call you to the experience of much sorrow, that you may have fellowship with Jesus in his sufferings. As, then, it was the good pleasure of God to lead his dear Son into affliction's thorny maze; to make him a curse for us; to allow Satan to tempt, and the world to hate and persecute him; as he himself withdrew the light of his countenance from his tortured soul and taught him obedience by the things that he suffered, so it may be the good pleasure of

God's goodness to lead you into a very trying path, that you may drink of Christ's cup and be baptised with his baptism. And whilst thus leading you his "good pleasure" may so obscure his goodness that it is not seen or believed. But it is the good pleasure of God's goodness still and you will one day be able to say, "Truly goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life."

2. But the apostle prayed that God would "*fulfil* all the good pleasure of his goodness." There is a ripening of the purposes of God, a fulfilling of his all-wise decrees, a thorough performance of his all-gracious designs. Thus he first tried Job and then doubly blessed him; put the feet of Joseph in the stocks and then set him over all the land of Egypt; let David be hunted like a partridge on the mountain and then placed him on the throne of Israel. But it was goodness first and last. Job among the ashes and Job when his latter end was blessed more than his beginning; Joseph in the prison house and Joseph riding in Pharaoh's chariot; David in the cave of Adullam and David in his house of cedars, were equally proving the goodness of God, though to sense and reason his dealings were so contrary. Goodness must mark the whole of the path, or how could all things work together for good to those that love God? "I will not leave thee," said the Lord to Jacob, "until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." (Genesis 28:15.) Thus it is goodness to begin the work, goodness to carry it on, goodness to accomplish it; goodness to wound, goodness to heal; goodness to kill, goodness to make alive; goodness to sink you by a sight of self, goodness to raise you by a sight of Jesus; goodness in taking away and goodness in giving; goodness in stripping and goodness in clothing; goodness in the thorny paths in providence, as well as in the intricate mazes of grace; yet all this goodness ruled and directed by God's good pleasure. So he will fulfil in you that fear his

name all the good pleasure of his goodness. Have you not already had some proof of this? Can you not sometimes look back and see the various trials and temptations through which your soul has been led and bless God for them; and yet when passing through them no friendly light shone upon your path? But a light has since shone upon it. A beam of living light, a ray of gospel grace has fallen upon the road; and now you see that the whole of your path was unmixed goodness, goodness first and last. Goodness brought you into birth and being; goodness preserved you from a thousand deaths during the days of your unregeneracy; goodness called you by grace when the set time came to favour Zion; goodness held you up and held you on during your soul's travail under a burden of guilt; goodness delivered you from the curse of the law; goodness revealed Christ to your soul; goodness keeps you still waiting upon God, hoping in his mercy and cleaving in faith and love to his dear Son. And as he has thus far fulfilled all the good pleasure of his goodness, been faithful to every promise, never left you quite destitute of cheering hope, broke into your soul when most deeply sunk, and held you up to the present hour, so will he go on to fulfil it down to Jordan's brink, and beyond Jordan up to the realms of endless day. O the mercy of being a child of God, an heir of heaven! O the unspeakable blessedness of having the goodness of God on our side, to experience his good pleasure fulfilled in our hearts, so as to live under the smiles of a God so good, under the open hand of a Benefactor so bountiful, under the teaching of an Instructor so wise, under the guidance of a Friend so unerring! May we not lift up our hearts with our hands unto God in the heavens that, in strict accordance with the apostle's words, "he would fulfil in us all the good pleasure of his goodness"—not give us our evil pleasure, but his good; not let us walk in our paths, but guide us into his own; not let us have our own way and our own will, but let us have his way, that we may know his

will and do it upon earth, so as to see him face to face in heaven.

iii. The third petition put up by the apostle is that God would fulfil "*the work of faith with power.*" Faith is God's gift: it is a grace of the Holy Spirit. It is not in the power or gift of the creature, but springs wholly and solely from the operation of God's grace in the heart. This is a fundamental truth, and one which every child of God can ratify by his own personal experience. But there is "*the work of faith;*" for grace in the soul is not idle. I have no faith naturally in idleness. An idle man, an indolent woman, is a useless man and often a worthless woman. We were not sent into this world to be idle. To earn his bread by the sweat of his brow is the appointed lot of man. An idle man is the sure prey of Satan. Industry is necessary as well as becoming in all walks of life, and in the lower walks idleness justly brings a man to rags. Never think of the grace of God as fostering idleness and laziness, whether master or man, mistress or maid, husband or wife, parent or child; but fill your varied situations in life with honest industry, praying God to bless with his kind providence what your industrious hands are put to, be the implement high or low. I can say for myself that I am a hard worker, though I neither plough nor dig, neither handle the trowel nor wield the hammer. I labour by pen and tongue, and hard too, for much work lies upon me—more sometimes than suits my weak health and frail tabernacle. And I am sure that in grace there is no idleness. The graces of God's Spirit in the soul are not indolent graces, folding their hands and ever crying with sluggard's voice, "A little more sleep, a little more slumber—a little more folding of the hands to sleep." They are active, working graces and there is no more active grace of the whole than that of busy faith. And indeed it must be so, for it is the main wheel of the whole machine, which, set in movement by the blessed Spirit's breath,

carries on every part. If faith did not revolve in the soul, every wheel and cog would stand idle. But when faith is blessedly acted upon by the power of God and revolves in its appointed circle, every cog and wheel of the soul move in accordance with it.

But what particularly is the work of faith, and that with power, of which the apostle here speaks? What is the main work of faith? To believe in the Son of God. "This is the work of God," said our blessed Lord, "that ye believe in him whom he hath sent." (John 6:29.) To believe in the name of Jesus Christ—that is the work of faith. You may say, "That is easy enough." Yes, for you it may be; but not for a man who knows what the human heart is; who has a deep sight and sense of the innate unbelief and infidelity of the carnal mind; who is exercised with doubts and fears, darkness, and bondage; and who knows he might as well attempt to make a new sun and plant him in the sky as to raise up a grain of living, saving faith in his own soul. The man who knows what the deep and desperate unbelief of his heart is knows best what a spiritual, supernatural, divine thing faith is; that it must be freely communicated to his soul by the grace of God, and kept alive by the same power that first gave it. But faith is never inactive—no, not at its worst state. It may not be exercising itself upon the Person of the Son of God so as to obtain a manifest deliverance, but it is trying at something. It is trying to believe, though its attempts are baffled; it is struggling upward, though its feet are in the miry clay (Ps. 40:2); it is crying out of the belly of hell and looking toward the holy temple, though the weeds are wrapped about its head (Jonah 2:2, 5); it turns its face toward the wall, though its eyes fail with looking upward (Isaiah 38:2, 14), and trusts in him which raiseth the dead, though it has the sentence of death in its bosom. (2 Cor. 1:9.) It is like a bird tied by the leg that longs to soar on high, but the twine prevents its

rising; or like an eagle in a cage, that flaps its wings and beats its breast against the bars, but cannot get out. But the very beating of the bird's wings against the bars shows that it longs for liberty, that it wants to soar on high, look at the bright sun and drink in the pure breath of heaven. So the believing soul is sometimes tied by the leg with the cord of unbelief, or shut up in the cage of darkness and despondency. But its very struggles show that it is not dead, but alive—that, like the imprisoned bird, it longs to mount upward but cannot.

3. Now God alone can fulfil this work of faith by his own spirit, and grace. He begins the work, carries it on, and brings it to perfection. The apostle therefore adds, "*with power.*" It is not merely faith, but "the work of faith," and not merely the work of faith, but "with power," which draws it forth into living exercise, sets it into vital movement, and enables it to act upon the truth of God, and more especially on the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We may view faith without the power of God as a steamless, smokeless locomotive upon a railway. There is every capacity for movement in it. It is made to move, and not only move itself but a whole train of carriages attached to it. So faith is made to move, and that not itself only, but a whole train of heavenly graces which it draws after it. But there it stands: the fire wants lighting, the water heating, the steam generating, the cylinders filling, the pistons working, that the engine may fly along at its wonted pace. So there is already faith in the breast of the child of God, but it wants power; it needs the steam; it lacks the breath of God upon it; and when it gets that, it can run the way of God's commandments, as the locomotive upon the railway. Have you not felt this powerlessness of faith to act? Is it not sometimes with you like a ship at sea: the sails are all raised, but flapping idly against the mast; harbour in sight, but no

power to reach it; the tide strong, but sensibly carrying the vessel from its course; nothing wanting but the breeze? So when becalmed in soul, you look and hope for the breeze to come, saying, if not in words, at least in thought, "Come, thou north wind; and blow, thou south." Now when the Holy Spirit is pleased to breathe upon the soul, his influence is felt; the ship moves on; every sail bellies to the wind; the flag of free grace flies aloft at the mast-head; land is in sight, port is in view, and on the ship sails, and anchors in the desired haven. So it is with faith as acted upon by the power of God. Don't you long that it may be so with you when brought to a death-bed? When you spread the sail and see the harbour, will you not long for a favouring gale that you may enter with flowing sheet and cast anchor in the haven of eternal rest and peace? God can do this for you and everything else, for he can and will fulfil the work of faith with power. May we ever be looking up to him to give us power to believe, to hope, to love, to suffer, to endure, and above all to know and do his will, until we reach the heavenly shore. Is he not able to do all these things for us? Why else should the apostle have begged of him to give the church these three blessings unless he knew they were in the heart and hand of God to bestow? The very circumstance of the Lord being asked to give them shows that the apostle knew not only how deeply the church needed them, but knew the exceeding riches of God's grace, that he was able and willing to do for them exceeding abundantly above all that they could ask or think.

II. But we have now to consider what would be *the fruit and effect* of those three petitions being answered: "*the name of our Lord Jesus Christ would be glorified in them and they in him.*"

1. All that God does he does to his own glory. There can be

no object so dear as this to the great and glorious self-existent I AM. Why was heaven, with all its bright seraphic intelligences; why was earth, with all its inhabitants, created, but for the glory of God? He could have no other final object or end but the manifestation of his own glory. We therefore read, "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psal. 19:1); and again, "But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord." (Num. 14:21.) But besides this declarative glory of God as manifested in the works of his creative hand, he has designed from all eternity in an especial manner to glorify his dear Son. And though in the riches of his grace, the glorifying of his dear Son harmonises with the salvation of an innumerable multitude of sinners, yet let us not forget that he is glorified in the lost as well as the saved. As he spake in prophecy, "Though Israel shall not be gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord." (Isai. 49:5.) And thus the glory of the Father and the glory of the Son meet together in the Person and work of Christ. What said the blessed Lord in the opening of that touching prayer (John 17.)?—"Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee." And God did glorify him. He sent him into the world that he might assume a nature in which, by becoming the Father's servant, he could do the Father's will; and thus glorify him by a pure and spotless obedience. He made him a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief that he might be glorified in his humiliation; he delivered him up to the cross by his determinate counsel and foreknowledge, that being crucified by wicked hands he might glorify him by meekly suffering that agonising and ignominious death, and thus make his soul an offering for sin; he glorified him by raising him from the dead and setting him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, that he might be the great High Priest over the house of God; he glorified him on the day of Pentecost when he sent the Holy Spirit to testify of him by signs and

wonders done in his name; and he glorifies him still by revealing him to his people and thus making him precious and glorious in the hearts of all that believe. There is, then, no object dearer to God's heart than the glorifying of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ: and thus the bringing forth of the blessings for which the apostle prayed, such as being counted worthy of a high and heavenly calling, the fulfilling of all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power, would all eventuate in the glorification of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that in you and all to whom he is made experimentally known.

2. But what are we to understand by "*the name of our Lord Jesus Christ?*" The name of Jesus signifies every perfection of the Son of God which is revealed in the Scripture, such as his true, proper, and eternal Sonship; his co-equality and co-eternity with the Father and the Holy Ghost; his glorious Person as Immanuel, God with us; his atoning blood as cleansing from all sin; his justifying obedience as our only righteousness before the throne; his dying love, displayed in the garden and on the cross; his holy example in obeying and suffering all the will of God; in a word, all that he ever has been, all that he now is, and all that he will be when he comes a second time without sin unto salvation: all this is summed up in "the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;" that name which is above every name; that name which is as ointment poured forth; that name of God which is ever in him as it was in the angel sent before the children of Israel. (Exod. 23:21.) This name is to be glorified in us; the perfections of Jesus Christ are to be glorified in our souls. His blood and righteousness; his death and resurrection; his presence and his power; his love and mercy; his grace and glory; his strength and wisdom; his priesthood and intercession; his advocacy and mediation; his holy example on earth; in a word, what he is in himself as the Christ of

God—all this is to be glorified in our hearts and in our lives: in our hearts as wrought upon by a divine power, in our lives as guided and governed by the blessed Spirit, according to the revealed will and word of God. Why has God a people upon earth? Why does he call them by his grace? Why count them worthy of being so called? Why does he fulfil in them all the good pleasure of his goodness and the work of faith with prayer? That the name of the Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in them: that they may be witnesses for Jesus in their day and generation; that what Jesus is in himself may be manifested in them—in their experience inwardly, in their life and conversation outwardly; that what Christ is as the Son of the Father in truth and love, may be made known to the sons of men by there being upon earth living witnesses to the power of his resurrection, to the efficacy of his grace, and to the revelation of his glory.

Now do you seek in your daily conversation that his name may be glorified in you? Are you daily conscious of being a professor of this holy religion, with the eyes of God, of saints, and of sinners upon you, and all expecting that the name of Jesus Christ is to be glorified in you, by a personal experience in your own breast of his love and grace and blood, and the manifestation of that experience in a holy, upright, consistent life? Is the glory of God dear to you? Have you a single eye to it, and do you ever beg of God that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ might be glorified in you, whether by life or death?

3. But not only is Christ glorified in his saints, but they are "glorified *in him*." As grace is the beginning of glory, the pledge and the foretaste of it, even now by their personal union with Christ the saints are glorified in him; but they will be peculiarly and especially glorified when he comes a second time in the glory of his Father with his angels. (Matt.

16:27.) Then will be accomplished the Lord's prayer, when he said, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am: that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." When he comes he will bring all his saints with him; they will be glorified in him and shine forth in the brightness of his glory; for their immortal souls and immortal bodies will both be conformed to the glorious image of their risen Head.

III. But we come next to our third point, on which I must not detain you long—*the eternal spring and the maintaining power of the whole: "According to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."* Whatever blessings God bestows are according to his grace. Man being what he is, can have no claim upon God. All therefore that he receives he receives as the pure gift of his grace. If we have not learned this, we know nothing as we ought to know. But in giving freely, in giving graciously, God can bestow upon us every blessing that can be for our good and his own glory. And as grace is the source, so it is the guiding rule of every divine blessing, for all that is given is "according to the grace of our God." From such an ever-flowing, overflowing fountain, all may draw who hunger and thirst, who are weary and heavy laden, who in themselves are without strength, wisdom, righteousness, hope, and help; for the God of all grace will supply all their need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. It is therefore according also to "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," for as co-equal, co-eternal with the Father, he has a blessed share in this grace; for though the Father is the source, yet the Son is the stream which comes from the Father, through whom all grace and glory come down. Thus every mercy and every blessing, for time and eternity, are freely bestowed "according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ;" to whom with the Father and the Holy

Ghost be ascribed everlasting honour, power, and praise.