

What is Truth? or Truth in its Purity and Truth in its Power

Preached at Woodbridge Chapel, Clerkenwell, London, on Lord's Day Morning, May 14, 1865

"What is truth?" John 18:38

Before I proceed to speak from my text, or unfold the mysteries of divine truth which in connection with it have been suggested to my mind, I wish briefly to mention the reason why I have been induced to take it this morning. After I had engaged myself to preach here, which I certainly should not have done but for the personal and pressing solicitations of two of your deacons, and the peculiar emergency of the case—the severe and continued illness of your esteemed minister, I was considerably exercised in my mind about the engagement which I had thus made. This exercise of mind arose chiefly from two sources. The first was the sudden and unexpected change in the weather from great heat to much cold and wet, raising a fear in my mind lest, in my present delicate state of health, I might take a severe cold, and lay myself up just on the very eve of my engagement to preach at Gower-street. The second was that I was a stranger to the minister, the place, and the people, and they almost as much so to me, though I wish to add that your pastor was well known to me by report as a man sound in truth, and of a consistent, godly life. With these exercises upon my mind I retired to rest. I fell asleep, and towards the morning I dreamed a dream. Now generally I pay very little heed to dreams, as believing that for the most part they are but the loose, unchecked wanderings of our mind when our senses are locked up in sleep, or, as the wise man speaks, they come "through the multitude of business" (Eccl. 5:3); that is, are as if the reflex images of the multitude of our

daily occupations flitting confusedly through our brain. But in this dream, though it was doubtless in some way connected with the exercises of my mind, there seemed to be something peculiar. I seemed in it to be sitting in this pulpit, just as I now am, and the chapel and congregation, though I never was here before, appeared not very unlike what I now see before me. As then in my dream I was sitting in this pulpit, a hymn was given out and sung, the words of which have escaped my memory, but there was in them a striking and peculiar setting forth of the truths of the gospel. The subject of the hymn at once arrested my attention, and it seemed to be immediately suggested to my mind to preach from the words, "What is truth?" As it was not the text from which I had intended to speak, I took the Bible from the cushion to find the place, but could not do so; some confusion thence arising in my mind, soon after I awoke. Whether my dream came from God I could not tell then, and I cannot tell now. I must leave that point therefore undecided; but as the words thus came to my mind in connection with my preaching in this pulpit, and as on my waking thoughts the subject seemed suitable to the people, the place, and the occasion, I at once decided to speak from them. Thus much for the history of my text, and an explanation of the reason which has induced me to take it this morning.

It is now about twenty-eight years ago since I first spoke from it, for the place, time, and circumstances are fixed indelibly in my memory. In the spring of 1837, I assisted at the opening of a little chapel of truth at Calve, Wilts., and taking the words for my text, was I believe specially helped to preach from it the word of life; for not only did much power seem to attend the testimony from my lips, but as a special instance of that power, I may name that the sermon was signally blessed to a young woman in distress of soul for

her comfort and deliverance, who some little time afterwards died of consumption and made a most happy end. Now if the Lord should be but pleased to bless my sermon this morning from the same text as signally as he blessed it then, I shall think there was something in my dream more than a "multitude of business," and in my discourse from it something more than a multitude of words.

It runs, you will observe, in the form of a personal question, that is, a question asked by one person of another. A question, therefore, of this kind implies two persons: the person who asks the question, and the person of whom the question is asked. Who then was the person who asked this important question, "What is truth?" Was he a good man? No. Was he a bad man? Why, if he was not a good man, he must have been a bad man; and yet was he not the worst of men: at least, he was surrounded with, and hard pressed by worse men than he, for I think you will admit that to sin wilfully is a greater sin than to sin ignorantly, and that the greater the privileges the greater the crime of trampling them under foot. The man, then, who asked the question if not the worst of men, was but a poor, weak, vacillating creature, ground down between fear of his master Tiberius, a very monster of tyranny, cruelty, and cunning, and of the Jews by whom he was surrounded, and that not merely the wayward, impetuous mob, but their leaders, the chief priests and elders, and all the council, who were thirsting after the blood of Jesus. Now God was determined that his dear Son should be pronounced innocent of all charges by the very man in whose hands the administration of the law at that time lay. We read, therefore, that Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, "took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it." (Matt. 27:24.) Thus the very verdict of his own conscience was for saving Jesus, as an innocent

man, from a malefactor's death by crucifixion, if he could have done so without risking his own popularity and life. But the purposes of God must stand and the Scriptures be fulfilled. I need not tell you, then, that it was this very Pontius Pilate who asked the question, "What is truth?" And I need not tell you who it was of whom he asked it. Of no one less than the Son of God who stood before his tribunal, that he might, according to the purposes of God, bear our sins in his own body on the tree. And yet though he asked the question, he had no care or desire to hear the answer. It seems to have come out of his mouth in a sort of careless way, as if suggested to his mind by the Lord's words, "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." They fell upon his mind as something strange and new, and he therefore hastily asked, with a kind of careless infidelity, "What is truth?" Yet he seems to have been struck either with the majesty or the innocence of the speaker, for we read, "And when he had said this he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all."

But you may say, perhaps, "What! are you going this morning to preach from the words of a bad man?" No, I am not going to preach from the words of a bad man. I am going to give an answer to a question put by a bad man. Is not that scriptural? Is not that legitimate? Had the Lord never a question put to him by a bad man? And did he never answer that question when so put? Did not bad men, men whom the Lord himself called "hypocrites," ask him on one occasion, "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar?" And did not our Lord give a gracious and wise reply, "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things which are God's?" (Matt. 22:21.) And was he not asked on the same day by the infidel Sadducees whose wife the woman would be in the resurrection of the seven husbands who successively had had her? (Matt. 22:28.) And did not he give

them also a wise and gracious answer? May not I, then, in a similar way, and following his example, take for my text the question of a bad man, "What is truth?" and if I can give a right answer to the question, shall you find fault because my text came from unclean lips? If I do not rightly and scripturally answer it, I will give you full liberty to find fault with my answer, but do not blame me for taking the question as my text.

The question is "What is truth?" In answering that question, I shall so shape my answer as to bring truth before you under these three points of view:—

I.—*First*, Truth in its *purity*.

II.—*Secondly*, Truth in its *power*.

III.—*Thirdly*, Truth in its *products*, by which I mean its *fruits* and *effects*.

I.—We live in a lying world. Nor is the reason far to seek. Satan is its god and prince; and as "he abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him, for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44), the present world, being by the permission of God under his lordship and dominion, bears the impress which he has stamped upon it, and whereby he has made it a world of deception and falsehood. We ourselves went astray as soon as we were born, speaking lies. In lies we grew up; in lies we lived; and but for his grace, I speak now to those in whose heart God has wrought by his Spirit, in lies we should have died, either as professors or profane; for there are thousands of both who live and die with a lie in their right hand. Living then in a world of lies, where there is little else to be heard or seen, known or loved but false words and false deeds, false doctrines and false professions;

living surrounded by an atmosphere of falsehood, if there be any truth in the world, or any truth in our heart, lips, or lives, that truth must come from God, for he is the God of truth, as Satan is the father of lies.

But to come back to the question which I have undertaken to answer, "What is truth?" When Pilate asked that question of him who was the Truth itself, he had a reference, as I have already explained, to the Lord's preceding words: "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." The Lord's own words, therefore, afford the only true key to the question, and give a clue to the right answer. By "truth" the Lord meant beyond all doubt divine truth, heavenly truth, religious truth—not natural, or scientific, or even moral truth, though the last would be included, but the special truth which he came from heaven to teach, reveal, and exemplify by his life, death, and resurrection. Now in this sense ask yourself, *What* is truth? Can you define it in your own mind? Have you ever thought what truth is? Have you any distinct idea, which you can express in a few words, of its peculiar nature, its distinguishing features, or its essential character? Perhaps not; for few persons really think or examine any subject for themselves, even in these important matters. Let me then define it for you. According to my view of it, Truth, that is, divine truth, is a gracious revelation given by God himself of his character, of his mind, and of his will. This is as short and as clear a definition as I can give.

But *where* has God been pleased to give it? For he has given it that we may know, believe, and enjoy it. He has lodged it in three sacred depositories. He has lodged it primarily in the *Person* of his dear Son, who is the truth itself. (John 14:6.) He has lodged it, secondly, in the pages of his *holy word*, which is called "the Scripture of truth." (Daniel 10:21.) And he has lodged it, thirdly, in the *hearts* of his believing people,

whom he sanctifies by his truth. (John 17:17.) These, then, are the three depositories of divine truth; so that out of the Son of God, out of the Scriptures, and out of the hearts of God's people, there is no divine truth to be known, believed, or enjoyed. God would not let this world be given up wholly to the dominion of Satan. He was determined from all eternity, that there should be a revelation of his character, mind, and will to a people whom he chose out of the world for the express purpose that he should be glorified in them; and to place this revelation secure above all the storms of time and all the assaults of hell, to lay it up in those three sacred depositories which I have just named to you.

i. Now this brings us to Truth in its *purity*, which was the first point that I proposed to consider. I want truth in its purity. If I go to fill my glass at a fountain, I want pure water. I do not want water mixed with sewage. The purer and cleaner the water the better. The Lord said to the woman of Samaria, "If thou knewest the gift of God and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." This is the water I want—"living water"—the Lord's own gift, and in me too, as he said in the same blessed discourse, "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:14.) Of this living water, of its source and nature, we have a beautiful description in the last chapter of Revelation, where John saw "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." I do not mean to say that this river in its primary signification represents truth, for it rather represents divine life and love—the life of God and the love of God, but we may take it as an emblem of truth in its purity. For as the river of water of life proceeded out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, it may so far exemplify

truth as stored up and flowing out of the Person of Christ.

But let us look at this point, Truth in its *purity*, a little more in detail. There are certain grand foundation truths of our most holy faith, without holding which we cannot hold truth in its purity. Upon two or three of these points I shall briefly touch that I may answer the question, "What is truth?" in harmony with the oracles of God.

1. I commence, therefore, with *the Trinity*, that grand and glorious fundamental truth of three Persons in one God: a Unity of the divine Essence in a Trinity of three distinct Persons. This is a grand, cardinal, foundation truth, manifested in Christ as "the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his Person," (Heb. 1:3,) revealed in the Scriptures, and more fully in those of the New Testament, and made known to believing hearts by the teaching and testimony of the Holy Ghost. Upon this grand foundation truth the whole revelation of the character, mind, and will of God is based, and therefore every branch of divine truth stands fully and firmly in connection with it. He therefore that is unsound here is unsound everywhere, be it in doctrine, experience, or practice; and as no one can know the mysteries of the kingdom of God unless they are revealed to him from heaven, as the Lord told Peter (Matt. 16:17) and the rest of his disciples (Matt. 11:25; 13:11), we may boldly say that if a man know not the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost by some discovery of these three Persons in the glorious Godhead to his soul, he cannot be said to have a vital acquaintance with any one branch of gospel truth in its purity, or with any one mystery of the kingdom of heaven in its power.

2. *The Person of the Son of God*—by which I mean his complex Person, uniting essential Deity with a pure, holy,

and sacred humanity, having two natures, yet being but one Person—is another foundation truth of our most holy faith, a cardinal branch of truth in its purity. His essential Deity is so closely and intimately connected with that vital, fundamental doctrine of his eternal Sonship, without which, in my judgment, the Trinity itself cannot be rightly or scripturally maintained, that, not wishing to speak controversially, I unite them for the present together as one. When, therefore, I now speak of the Person of Christ, I mean not so much his divine Person, as the Son of God from all eternity, as his complex Person, as the great and glorious God-Man, Immanuel, God with us. In his Person thus constituted as all truth was by the Father eternally lodged, so in him as manifested all truth necessarily centres, and from him as revealed all truth essentially flows. Truth therefore in its purity embraces all the covenant offices and gracious relationships of our most blessed Lord—everything in fact that Christ is in himself, and everything that he is to the Church of God. It embraces him therefore in his incarnation, as taking into union with his own divine Person in the womb of the virgin the flesh and blood of the children. It embraces him in all his course though life, from the manger at Bethlehem to the cross at Calvary, throughout which he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, with all that obedience which he rendered to God's law, and whereby he wrought out a perfect righteousness in which the Church of God might stand for ever justified. It embraces and comprehends his dolorous sufferings in the garden, when the weight of sin imputed to him and the hiding of God's face forced from his surcharged brow that terrible sweat which fell in great drops (or, as the word means literally, "clots") of blood. It comprehends and embraces more especially that sacrifice and blood-shedding for sin which he accomplished upon the cross, when he offered up his sacred humanity upon the altar of his essential Deity, and thus as the Holy Ghost testifies, "put away sin by

the sacrifice of himself," and "by one offering perfected for ever them that are sanctified." (Heb. 9:26;10:14.) It therefore embraces that sacred and solemn giving up of the ghost, or the voluntary yielding up of his life, which he had taken for that very purpose, whereby he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, and which was an integral part of his sacrifice; for the death of the victim was needful that the sacrifice might be completed. It embraces his lying in the sepulchre, where he was entombed, not only that he might fulfil the Scriptures and especially the type of Jonah, but that he might perfume the grave for us; that we might not only die with him mystically in soul, and thus know what it is experimentally to be buried with him in death spiritually by vital union, but die also with him in body, and be thus buried with him literally and corporeally in the bowels of the earth. It embraces and comprehends his glorious resurrection from the tomb, when he was declared to be the Son of God with power, God setting his own attesting stamp upon his meritorious sacrifice, blood-shedding, and death by raising him from the dead. It embraces and comprehends his ascension up on high, in the sight of his disciples, when a cloud received him out of their sight. It follows him up as they did in heart and affection into the courts of God, and embraces him where he now is, as the great High Priest over the house of God, the Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. Thus truth in its purity, as stored in the Person of Christ, embraces all those sacred transactions which were carried on in the days of his flesh by the Son of God, and are now being carried on upon our behalf by him in the very courts of heaven. It embraces, therefore, and comprehends also all that the risen Son of God is to his Church now. It embraces his *priesthood*, for he is now a priest, as the Holy Ghost declares: "Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the

Majesty in the heavens; a ministry of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." (Heb. 8:1, 2.) Observe the words, "we *have* such a high priest," that is, have now. And you will bear in mind that this is one part of the peculiar blessedness of the priesthood of the Lord Jesus that he is executing it *now*, even now, for us who are still here below. The high priest under the Law, you will recollect, performed two special offices for the people. First, he offered the sacrifices, and particularly on the solemn day of atonement, when he killed the goat of the sin offering outside the veil. But secondly, he offered intercession for the people when he took the blood within the veil and sprinkled it upon and before the mercy seat. Christ, as the great anti-type of the high priest under the law, executed one part of his priesthood here below when he offered himself as a sacrifice for sin; but the other part of his priesthood he is executing now, having gone himself within the veil, and, by the virtue and efficacy of his blood once shed upon earth, there ever liveth to make intercession for us. It embraces him also as our *prophet*—our prophet for the present, as well as for the past and the future: for our Lord's teaching as a prophet not only embraces the days of his flesh and his gracious words as preserved in the New Testament, but his present teaching when, as our ever-living prophet, he still communicates to us from time to time sweet instruction, by opening our understanding to understand the Scriptures, and especially by sending the Spirit down into our hearts to testify of himself, to reveal himself to our souls, and to make himself near, dear, and exceedingly precious. It embraces also his *kingly* office, whereby he sits enthroned as Sovereign Lord in the courts of heaven; for "all power is given unto him in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18), and "he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet." (1 Cor. 15:25.) Truth, therefore, in its purity embraces his kingly sceptre, which he sways from time to time over believing hearts, and

his sovereign rule and dominion which he exercises over the Church and the world—over all men, all things, and all circumstances. It looks also into the future, for it embraces his second coming, when he will "appear the second time without sin unto salvation," and "shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." (Heb. 9:28; 2 Thess. 1:10.)

Thus I have endeavoured to show you briefly, yet summarily, how Truth in its *purity* is stored up in the glorious Person of Christ, and therefore embraces all that he has been, all that he now is, and all that he ever will be to the Church of God. But how little is he known, believed in, resorted unto, and lived upon as the truth, the living, incarnate Truth—not truth as a thing, a doctrine, a creed, but truth as a Person; and O, what a Person! none less than the Son of God, and as such containing in himself all truth as the sun contains in itself all light and heat, and is ever giving them out of its inexhaustible fulness as the very nature and character of its existence. O how few so know, believe, and feel this, as to live daily unto and upon him, and thus be continually receiving grace out of his fulness, so as to drink truth from the Fountain head in all its divine purity, sweetness, and blessedness. And yet how tenderly he invites us to come to him and drink. "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, if any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." (John 7:37.) And again, "Whosoever will let him take of the water of life freely." (Rev. 22:17.) Even to the poor woman of Samaria, he could say, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink: thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." (John 4:10.) Encouraged by these invitations, may we leave those earthly streams which men have fouled with their feet (Ezekiel 34:19), and by prayer and supplication, with continual reading of the

Scriptures and secret meditation, may we ever seek to drink into truth in all its original purity as stored up in the glorious Person of the Son of God.

3. But if Truth in its purity centres in the Person of Christ, it must be in perfect harmony with all that *grace* which is eternally in him, and which he came to reveal to us; for "the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." It was therefore in him that this grace was manifested to believing eyes and hearts, according to that testimony: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14.) Truth therefore in its purity embraces all the doctrines, or as I prefer to call them, the truths of grace. It thus comprises *election*, for the remnant who are saved are chosen according to "the election of grace" (Rom. 11:5); special *redemption* also, for "in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7); *Justification* also, for "we are justified freely by his grace" (Rom. 3:24), and to sum up the whole, the fulness and *fixedness* of salvation, or certainty of *perseverance* unto the end, for "by grace we are saved." (Eph. 2:5.)

ii. But I stated that Truth in its purity was lodged and stored not only in the Person of Christ, but in the *Scriptures* which have been given to us by the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, as a gracious revelation of the character, mind, and will of God, which I gave as a simple definition of truth. It is indeed primarily in Christ that this character, mind, and will of God are revealed to us; for he is not only "the brightness of the Father's glory," but "the express image of his Person," where the word translated, "express image" is literally "character," or stamped impression. In him, too, is the mind

of God seen, for he has made known to us the thoughts of God's heart, and the will of God also, for he came to do it and reveal it to us. But that this revelation of the character, mind and will of God should be preserved safely for all ages, and be made known to each successive generation of believers, it has pleased the God of all wisdom and grace to write it down for their instruction. O how blessed it is to have the word of God—the inspired Scriptures, free from all intermixture of error, as a special, infallible revelation, that in them truth may shine forth in all its purity, and that we may daily read and search them, understand their meaning by divine teaching, and drink into their spirit by a personal, experimental application of them to our heart.

II.—But this brings me to my second point, which was to lay before you Truth *in its power*.

i. You may receive all that I have said and much more; you may in a certain sense and to a certain extent believe it; you may stately and regularly hear it preached, and be fully satisfied with thus receiving, thus believing, and thus hearing it. But all this will not prove you to be a child of God. There is a "form of knowledge and of the truth," as the apostle speaks (Rom. 2:20), as well as a "form of godliness;" and a man may have a form of knowledge without vitally, savingly knowing the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, as he may have a "form of godliness," whilst he denies the power thereof. Many a man has the form of truth, its outside shape and body, in his judgment, in his brain, who never felt the power of truth, as a real, vital substance in his heart. It is therefore not sufficient for me, in answering the question, What is truth? merely to unfold truth in its *purity*. I must unfold truth in its *power*, if I am to answer it as a servant of Christ, if I am to "study to show myself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed,

rightly dividing the word of truth," or if I am in any way by it effectually to reach your consciences.

We thus come to what I intimated as the third depository of the truth of God in which he is pleased to lay up his truth, viz., the *hearts of his believing people*.

The Scriptures I pointed out as the second sacred depository of God's truth; for it is through the scriptures, the Holy Ghost enlightening our understanding to apprehend them, touching our conscience to feel them, quickening our hearts to believe them, that we come to know truth in its purity. In this day when the verbal inspiration of the Scripture is disputed or denied, and that not as formerly by avowed infidels only, but by men sitting in high places as leaders and teachers in Church and Dissent, it will be our wisdom and mercy to believe and cleave to what God has himself said of his own word. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." (Tim. 3:16, 17.) If "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God," it must be a verbal inspiration, that is, the very words in and by which divine truth is revealed must be as much inspired as the truths themselves. Truths which are certain must be expressed by words which are certain; or else you have certain truths and uncertain words; and if you can explain to me how certainty of truth can be conveyed by uncertainty of expression, you will be able to convince me that a stream of water can flow straight through a crooked pipe, and that clean water can come out of a dirty pipe. The testimony of God to his own word is, "Every word of God is pure" (Prov. 30:5.); "The words of the Lord are pure words." (Psa. 12:5.) Indeed it is this purity of the word, this perfect freedom from the least intermixture of error, which makes us love our

Bible; for it both enlightens our understanding and warms our heart. "The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." (Psa. 19:8.) "Thy word is very pure; therefore thy servant loveth it." (Psa. 119:140.) But take away this purity and this perfection, and the Bible sinks down at once into a common book, of no value and of no authority, for truth in its purity is lodged in the word of God; and if we are to receive it as purely as it is revealed we must receive it from the word of God, as made life and spirit to our souls. If then truth in its purity is in the Person of the Son of God as the Fountain, truth in its purity is in the Scriptures as the stream; for as Christ is the personal, the Scriptures are the written revelation of the character, mind, and will of God.

Now when the Holy Ghost takes the truth as it is personally and primarily in Christ, and makes it known unto us, for it is his sacred and blessed office to take of the things of Christ, and to show them unto the Lord's own family, and as the Spirit of truth to guide them in to all truth, (John 16:13), then truth in its *purity* becomes truth in its *power*. Thus out of the fulness of Christ, through the holy Scriptures, the blessed Spirit lodges and lays up truth in its third sacred depository—the *believing heart*. But let us look at this a little more in detail. I like to work a subject out—not to leave text and subject, preacher and hearer, all alike in confusion, but to present to the people a clear, distinct, compact representation of the truth, that I may not only be an interpreter of the mind of the Spirit, so as to clear up any dark and doubtful points, but shed a distinct and blessed light upon his teachings and operations in their hearts.

ii. What then is our first experience of truth in its power? Is it not the *entrance* of truth into the heart? "The entrance of thy words giveth light." (Psa. 119:130.) "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power." (1 Thess. 1:5.)

"They themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you." And what was that entering in? "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." (1 Thess. 2:13.) This is a divine begetting—a new birth: "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." (James 1:18.) "The word of God is quick, (or "living," and as such giving life,) and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword." (Heb. 4:12.) The entrance of this enlightening, quickening word, is to make truth in its purity become truth in its power. Until God the Spirit was pleased thus to work with a divine power upon your soul, you lived in lies, you loved lies; your religion, if one you had, was a lying religion, for there was no truth in it, no reality, no power. It might look well in the opinion of men, well in your own; for until our eyes are spiritually opened we see neither our nakedness nor our rags, neither know the truth nor care to know it; but as poor, self-deceived creatures you would have lived, and as such you would have died but for the sovereign, distinguishing, superabounding grace of God, which plucked you as a brand from the fire made by the sparks of your own kindling. But when God has purposes of eternal mercy toward one of his chosen people, and to carry out these purposes, deigns to lodge his truth in that vessel of mercy, he commences by shooting a ray of light out of his own divine fulness into the soul. Now as "it hath pleased the Father that in Christ should all fulness dwell" (Col. 1:19), for "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9), this ray of divine light is out of the fulness of Jesus. Divine light and divine truth go together. "O send out thy light and thy truth." (Psa. 43:3.)

1. But what do we see, what do we feel in this first

communication of God's truth to the heart? *That there is a God.* Thousands and tens of thousands have risen this day in this vast metropolis who do not know that there is a God. Do you or I know that there is a God? If we do, why and how do we know it? Because God has in some measure shined into our souls, to give us the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ; because he has taken the veil of unbelief and ignorance from off our heart, and shown us light in his own most blessed light. Now this beginning, in many cases, may not be very powerful nor very deep, yet there is a reality in it; and there must be a reality in it if it be God's work, for God's work is real work. When God said, "Let there be light" there was real light. It tarried not, but burst forth at the creative fiat, and, to use the Lord's own words of the sea, "it broke forth as if it had issued out of the womb." (Job 38:8.) As real is the light of God in a sinner's heart, as really, as truly, as clearly enlightening the soul, as the natural primeval light enlightened the original darkness.

2. But when the light and life of divine truth thus first come into a sinner's conscience, this quickening ray shows him not only that there is a God, but reveals to him also the true *character* of God. Did I not define truth as a revelation of the character, mind, and will of God? What is the character of God, or rather that part of his character with which we are first made acquainted? That he is just, that he is holy, that he searcheth the heart and trieth the reins; that he hates sin with a perfect hatred, and will sentence to eternal punishment every transgressor with whom he comes into judgment. This is truth in its *purity* made truth in its *power*. For what is the effect? Fear, guilt, trembling, an apprehension of the wrath to come; because now, for the first time in our lives, we have a real apprehension of the truth of God, for the first time in our lives feel the power of God's truth in our soul. You may have heard the truth of God

for years; your fathers may have brought you to this place to hear the word of life from childhood; it may have been a kind of family creed for several generations, as well known as the family pew or the family Bible. Thus you may have never heard anything else but truth, and you thought perhaps that you knew something about truth, and would have been highly offended had your knowledge of it been questioned. But there was a day never to be forgotten, as long as life has being, when a something came with the word into your conscience, which produced such feelings as you had never known before. An arrow shot from the bow of him who never misses the mark; an arrow of truth came right into your heart. And as that arrow coming from his unerring bow was lodged in your conscience, it brought with it this conviction, that there was a God, and that you were a sinner before him; that there was a holy law by which you were condemned, for an awful curse was attached to it; and that living and dying as you were, there was no hope for your guilty soul. This more or less was the working of your mind as a consequence of the entrance of divine truth into your conscience; and you thought perhaps, and that for weeks, months, or years, there was little or no hope for you. And so you went on doubting and fearing, seeking and crying, begging and praying for mercy, never fighting against but falling under the power of truth—for truth was now your meat and drink, as having got firm possession of your heart and conscience.

ii. But by and by, in some unexpected hour and in some perhaps unexpected way, another ray of light was shot into your soul—a ray of divine truth out of the same fulness, and yet revealing the character of God in a different relationship. It might have been a sweet promise, an encouraging invitation, a gracious word, a loving look, a still small voice, a gentle breaking in of light, a soft whisper, a healing touch, or it might have been a blessed revelation of the Son of God to

your soul, shining into your heart like the sun in his strength. Now that was truth in its power; for it was the voice of truth in your soul attended with the firm conviction that God spoke in and by it through his word. Now directly that the truth of God began to be thus opened up to your soul by the power of the Holy Ghost, now you embraced and laid hold of it as thus divinely presented to the heart. How sweet it was; how it dropped like honey and the honeycomb; how plain it appeared, how clear, and how powerful. I have drawn your case as if you were long a hearer of the truth before you became a believer in it. But I will now assume another. You might have been prejudiced, as many are, against the doctrines of grace, hated the very word "election," and fought desperately against the sovereignty of God as controlling every minute event. But when the precious truths of the everlasting gospel were let down into your soul as from the Lord himself, and the word of his grace began to open itself in its sweetness, blessedness, and power upon your heart, then what you once loathed you now loved, and what you had despised and rejected was now fed upon as the very truth of God. You could say with Jeremiah, "Thy words were found and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (Jer. 15:16); with David: "How sweet are thy words unto my taste; yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth" (Psa. 119:103); and with Job: "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." (Job 23:12.) You could have gone through fire and water in defence of God's truth. Husband, wife, children, money, character—all were nothing compared with God's truth in your estimation, for you had felt its power in your heart. You had openly or secretly despised, it may be, those who preached, and the people that professed God's truth. But when truth was opened in your soul in both its purity and its power, such was its sweetness and savour, such its influence and effects, that you could say, "This people shall

be my people, and their God my God." Such or similar were the effects of truth on my heart when more than thirty years ago I first felt its power. It called upon me to make great sacrifices—as great, perhaps, if not greater than have been made by any one here present. Could I have been content to hold truth in impurity, in insincerity, in unrighteousness, I might have held the gospel, or rather half the gospel, in one hand and the world in the other; but when truth in its purity became truth in its power, then, like Moses, I chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt." (Heb. 11:25, 26.)

iii. But we have to learn the power of God's truth upon the heart in various ways; and there are two particular effects of the power of truth which every living soul is sooner or later taught to know and feel. 1. One is its *liberating* influence. Our blessed Lord said on one occasion, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31, 32.) There is a liberating power in God's truth as made vitally and experimentally known to the heart. It unbinds the fetters and shackles in which the soul is bound by the law; it removes slavish dread of man; takes away the apprehension of death and judgment; liberates from a thousand fears and a thousand foes; and breathes a sweet liberty into the soul wherever it comes; for "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Now if you have experienced any sweet inflowing of the truth of God, and it has come with a liberating power, and a blessed influence which set you free from fears of death and apprehensions of the wrath of God; if it removed a load of guilt from your conscience, and with it a thousand doubts and fears that your mind was exercised with, so that you could bless and praise God for his manifested mercy, you

know something not only of truth in its purity but of truth in its power; for it has done for you what nothing else could do but that gospel which is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth (Rom. 1:16); and you have proved for yourself that "the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power." (1 Cor. 4:20.)

You should bring your heart to a sound and strict examination on this point. Have you then any experience of either bondage or of liberty; of either law or of gospel? You should compare your experience with the word of God; and as the servants of Christ open up his truth in your ears, and show you from it the various marks and tests of divine life, you should, as it were, hold up your experience to the light. Let the word of truth and your personal experience of its power be like the two scales of a balance. The tests and marks of divine life are the weights which the servant of God puts into one scale; you put your experience in the other, and then you have to look and see whether the whole be good weight. I have put one weight into the scale—the liberating efficacy and influence of God's truth. Is it good weight? Is it a sound scriptural test? I have already given you scripture proof for it; so that point seems firmly settled. Now can you put into the opposite scale any liberating influence which you have ever felt from the power of God's truth in your heart? Any sweet liberty which you have ever enjoyed, any blessed deliverance from guilt, wrath, fear, and bondage into the glorious liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free? (Gal. 5:1.)

But take here a cautionary remark. Do not at once conclude that you have never felt the liberating power of truth, because you have not been fully delivered from all doubt and fear, or because your deliverance was not so clear and signal, or so marked and decided as some are favoured with

of whom you have read, or with whom you have conversed. Rather examine *how* the liberty came, and what were its *effects* than its exact measure; for it is a fact that many of the dear children of God walk habitually in much bondage of spirit who have at times been blessed with the sweetest deliverances, and have often to cry, "Bring my soul out of prison that I may praise thy name" (Psa. 142:7), "I am shut up and cannot come forth," even when at favoured seasons their feet have been set in a large room, and they have walked at liberty, in real enjoyment of the promise, and in gracious obedience to the precept. (Psa. 31:8; 119:45.) Now, bearing this needful caution in mind, can you say, as in the sight of a heart-searching God, that it is good weight, and that your experience does not prove light in the scale? If so, you need not fear your soul's being weighed in the balance in the great day, and then found wanting; nor need you tremble now as Belshazzar trembled, when "the joints of his loins were loosed and his knees smote one against another," as the fingers came forth of that mysterious hand which wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of his palace, among other words, that fatal one, "Tekel, Thou art weighed in the balances, and found wanting." (Dan. 5:5, 27.)

2. But take another mark, another scriptural test that you know not only truth in its purity but truth in its *power*. Whenever truth comes into the soul in its vivifying power, it has a *sanctifying* influence. "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth," was a part of that wondrous prayer which our great High Priest offered up when on the eve of his sufferings and death, he sanctified himself to that gracious office that those who should believe in his name might be sanctified through the truth. (John 17:17, 19.) We therefore read that "Christ loved the church and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water

by the word." (Ephes. 5:25, 26.) This "washing of water by the word" is the cleansing, sanctifying influence of the word of truth upon the heart when received in power; and it is the same thing as "the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which is shed upon us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that being justified by his grace we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:5-7.) When the gospel comes "not in word only but also in power," it comes "in the Holy Ghost" (1 Thess. 1:5), that is, in and with the teaching and testimony of the Holy Ghost. It is this coming "in the Holy Ghost" which gives truth in its power such a sanctifying influence on the heart. But you will ask perhaps, What is a sanctifying influence? It is the communication of holy feelings, heavenly desires, and gracious affections; in a word, it is the breathing into the soul of that sweet spirituality of mind which is life and peace. If we are among the people of God, he chose us in Christ "before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." (Eph. 1:4.) If he chasten us in this time-state, it is "for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." (Heb. 12:10.) It is this holiness of heart, this heavenly mindedness which I mean when I speak of the sanctifying influence of truth in its power. Now did truth ever come into your soul with any measure of this sanctifying influence? Did you ever long to get away from the chapel, go home to your room, fall upon your knees, and have blessed fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ? And were you ever so favoured when you did get home? Or sometimes when alone, in reading, or meditation, or secret prayer, did the word of God ever come into your soul with that sweet unction, savour, and dew that it seemed to make the very room in which you were holy ground? I remember when God was pleased to reveal his dear Son to my soul in my sick room many years ago, I was afraid almost to go out of my room lest I should lose the

sweet, holy feelings and blessed spirituality of mind which I then and there enjoyed. Depend upon it, there is a holiness of heart and affection, an inward holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord; and depend upon it, whenever truth comes into a believer's soul, it comes with that sanctifying influence, which not only gives him a meetness for, but is a blessed foretaste of the inheritance of the saints in light.

"Saints" are sanctified persons—sanctified by God the Father by his eternal will (Jude 1; Heb. 10:10), sanctified by God the Son with his own blood (Heb. 13:12), and sanctified by God the Holy Ghost, who makes their bodies his temple (1 Cor. 6:19), sheds abroad the love of God (Rom. 5:5), makes them abound in hope (Rom. 15:13), and sets up the kingdom of God in their heart. (Rom. 14:17.)

Truth, then, in its power, does not lead, or leave a man to become a lawless, licentious Antinomian. It does not leave him in the mud and mire of sin; it does not leave him, still less lead him to be a carnal, sensual, proud, covetous wretch, with a mere profession of religion, having a name to live when dead. Wherever it comes it sanctifies. And it cannot be the truth of God in its power unless it do this. We judge, and that rightly, of things by their influence and effects. We had, for instance, lately a very cold March, with a long and almost uninterrupted succession of piercing east winds, chilling all early vegetation and shutting up the earth, as it were, in a cold embrace, out of which she durst not look up. By and by a change came, and April was as unusually hot as March was unusually cold. The wind came round to the genial south. The sun broke forth in all the warmth of his beams, and we were almost melted with the heat. What was the consequence? Why, nature put forth a new face; vegetation burst out from its prison; every tree at once clothed itself with leaves, and one scene of beauty almost immediately flushed into view. It is just now the middle of May, and I who

am not young never saw a more early or a more beautiful season. There was the effect of a warm April sun. Now if the Sun of righteousness arise upon a soul, with healing on his wings, shall there be no effect? Can the sun shine warm in the sky, call forth sleeping vegetation and clothe every tree with leaf and some as now with flowers; and shall there be a shining in of the Sun of righteousness upon a soul, and leave it locked up in the frozen embrace of death? Again, we have had a very dry season lately, for cold March and hot April were both very dry. But during the last week copious showers have fallen. Do we not already see the effect? How fresh and green everything is; how earth seems to rejoice under the genial showers which have so thoroughly watered it. Now shall there be a pouring out of the Spirit of God upon a man's soul like the showers of the early and latter rain, and he be as dead and dry as the London pavement, with no more fruitfulness in him than the very stones over which we walk or drive! Amidst the trees of righteousness which the Lord has planted that he may be glorified, will you stand as a dead tree in a London square, or be one of these trees of which Jude speaks, "whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots?" (Isa. 61:3; Jude 12.) Surely, if you know truth in its power, and the Spirit of God water your soul with the rains and dews of his grace, there will be some analogy between the natural and the spiritual rain; and there will be in you some spiritual fruitfulness, as in earth there is a fruitfulness under the falling showers.

III.—This brings me to my third point, which is, Truth in its *products*, or its fruits and effects.

I said that God had lodged his truth in three depositories: the Person of his Son, the Scriptures of truth, and the hearts of his people. Now, was his truth dead or dormant in his dear Son? Or is his truth dead and dormant in the word of his

grace? How, then, can it be dead and dormant in believing hearts? If, then, God has lodged his truth in the hearts of his people, it is his will that they should manifest the fruits and effects of his grace in their lips and in their lives. I have no opinion of a loose and careless profession; and I have a worse opinion of a loose and careless life. Depend upon it a loose and careless walk, conduct, and conversation never bore the stamp of God upon it. A man may slip and fall, and be by the grace of God recovered; but if there be anything more than another which has cast discredit upon truth in its purity, upon the doctrines of grace, it has been the loose, licentious, careless, ungodly lives of many of its professors. Therefore look to it. If you hope you know truth in its purity, and if you have felt truth in its power, look to it, and examine well whether there are corresponding fruits and effects manifested in your lips and lives. Time and opportunity will allow me to name only a few of them.

1. What, then, is the first main fruit and effect of receiving truth in its power? *Separation from the world*. The first precept to which a promise is attached is this: "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor. 6:18.) Where, then, there is no separation from the world, there is no manifested interest in that promise; and if you believe that you are a son or daughter of the Lord Almighty, and have not yet come out from the world, whether dead in sin or dead in profession, you do but hold a lie in your right hand if such a faith be in it. Such a faith and such a profession, if Scripture be true, are not of God; "for whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." (1 John 5:4.) But how can we be said to have overcome the world unless we are

separate from it? Separated from it, we overcome it; united to it, it overcomes us. Separation, therefore, full, lasting, unqualified separation must ever be a fruit of God's work upon the soul—the sure effect of receiving truth in its power. I know what God's grace did for me in separating me more than thirty years ago from the world, and from everything dear to nature and the flesh. I know, too, what sacrifices this separation entailed upon me, and how it compelled me to sacrifice my position in life and all my prospects in life, and abandon the prizes of all my studies and labours for many years at a public school and the university when just within my reach—prizes which were my just due, and on which my eyes had long been fixed. Yet I was compelled so to speak and act as to separate me eventually from all the cherished projects and prospects of my worldly ambition, and to give up everything through feeling the power of the truth of God in my soul. I always therefore contend that separation from the world and everything worldly is one of the first fruits and effects of the grace of God in the heart.

2. The *fear of God*, as manifested by the possession and actings of a tender conscience, is another fruit and effect of truth in its power. And O what a blessing it is to have the fear of God in a tender conscience! It is spoken of in the Scriptures as being "a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death." (Prov. 14:27.) If, then, you have the fear of God in your breast, you have a fountain of life; and what is that fountain but the "well of water" of which our Lord spoke as "springing up into everlasting life?" (John 4:14.) Having then that fountain of life you depart from the snares of death; and as this fountain is not a muddy pool but a springing well, it will water your own soul, it will water the souls of others, it will make you fruitful in every good word and work, and will at last issue in all the bliss and blessedness of everlasting life.

3. *Cleaving* to the truth of God, his people, his cause, his ordinances, his servants, his house, his promises, his precepts, and everything connected with God and godliness, and that in a spirit of love and affection from a deep sense of their value and a warm realisation of their preciousness, is a mark also and fruit of knowing the truth of God in its power. Wherever the Lord by his own secret work upon the heart makes his truth precious, the very first effect is love—love to the Lord and to his people. "Whom not having seen ye love." "We know we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." There is such a love to the Lord and his people in that spring-time of the soul when Jesus first makes himself known and precious. O there is a spring-tide of the soul like our present May month. How beautiful the country looked yesterday as I came up by the train from Croydon. Nature, like a young blooming bride, shone and glittered in all the greenery and bravery of her new apparel. So is there a spring in the soul when every grace of the Spirit shines and glitters with an unspeakable beauty and freshness—the day of its espousals, when the first embrace seals the happiness of its virgin love. And in that spring-tide of the soul, what love there is to God's dear people, what love to God's truth, what love to everything connected with God and his word!

4. *Uprightness of conduct*, integrity before God and man, honorable actions and transactions in our business (if in business), obedience to God's revealed perceptive will, in all the various relations of life, are fruits also of receiving the truth of God in its power. Where grace lays hold of a man's heart and comes into his conscience in purity and power, it must make him an upright, consistent man. He must be an honest man, or he is nothing. And if an honest man, he will carry his honesty into his business; he will carry his integrity into all the walks of life; he will make it manifest day by day

by his conduct and conversation that uprightness and integrity are stamped upon him by a divine hand; and even the world itself will acknowledge it. This recalls to my mind a good man, a deacon of a church in the country, though but a farm labourer, who was called under my ministry when I was in the Church of England. The farmer, and he was in a large way of business, came to him one day with tears in his eyes and said, "O, you are the only man I can trust upon my farm. They are robbing me in all directions. Will you take the oversight of the men?" He hated the man's religion, but the only one he could trust of all those by whom he was surrounded was this godly deacon now gone home. Was not that a testimony to a despised religion that its possessor was alone worthy of trust? So if grace has laid hold of our heart, it will make us upright in our conduct, in the church and in the world, and influence our movements at home and abroad. And though in these days perhaps a man who truly fears God can scarcely live, or at least much thrive, when all around are engaged in dishonest or dishonourable practices, yet to part with his integrity is to part with both his conscience and his hope; he will therefore and must be an upright man, come what will. And so in the various relationships of life—as a father, as a husband, as a friend—he will be an affectionate father, a loving husband, and a faithful friend. Thus you may follow him through the walks of life and say, "Here is grace; see one who fears God above many; it is stamped upon the man. You can see he is what he professes to be, and that the grace of God is in him of a truth."

Thus I have endeavoured in a feeble way to give you an answer to the question—"What is truth?" I have endeavoured to show you truth in its purity, truth in its power, and truth in its products, or its fruits and effects. Can you set to your seal that these things are true? Are they things, the life, reality,

and power of which you have felt in your own breast, so that you can say, "Yes, I do know these things or some good measure of them by vital experience; for blessed be God I have felt them in my soul, and I am glad to have heard this morning the answer to "What is truth?" so as not only to receive it from your lips, but to be able to bear witness that it is a right answer from God's own attestation to the power of his truth in my heart."