

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

STRONG CONSOLATION.

A Sermon

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C. H. SPURGEON,

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“Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.”—Hebrews vi. 17, 18.

THE Lord's transactions with the patriarch Abraham are frequently used in Scripture as types of his dealings with all the heirs of promise. The Lord found him in an idolatrous household, even as he findeth all his people far off from him and strangers to him; but the Lord separated him by an effectual call, and brought him out from his country and from his father's house, even as he doth unto all his people when he visits them in mercy, and saith, “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing.” The Lord, then, was pleased to give to his servant a very gracious promise, the like of which, only yet more clear and bright, he is pleased to give to every heir of salvation; and after awhile, that the patriarch's faith in the midst of his increasing trials might come to a fulness of strength, the Lord was pleased to make a covenant with him, and to confirm that covenant by sacrifice of blood and by solemn oath. Even thus doth he reveal himself to us, unfolding the ancient covenant of grace which he hath made with us in Christ Jesus, and he bids us look upon the solemn seal of the Saviour's sacrifice, and of the oath of old which the Lord made unto his Son. As he led his servant a stranger in a strange land, but yet surrounded and enriched with innumerable mercies, even so are we sojourners with him, as all our fathers were, but yet endowed with boundless favour in the blessings of the right hand of the Most High.

No doubt, the great end of God in this, so far as Abraham's life on earth was concerned, was to produce in Abraham a model of unshaking faith. God taketh pleasure in the persons of his servants; he taketh a delight in the training and education of his children, in the creating of his own image in their characters. And especially if there be one thing in a saint which delighteth God more than another, it is the choice grace of faith. Hence Abraham, who is the “friend of God” more than any other, is also the most believing of men, and the father of the faithful. Now, beloved, the Lord who has dealt with us as he did

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with Abraham, has the same end which he would answer in us as in the patriarch. He would have us manifest all the graces which can adorn our character and make us imitators of God as dear children. Above all, he would have us strong in faith, giving glory to God. O that this end of God might be answered in you and in me, that we may be no more children, carried about with every wind of doctrine, may be no more puny in faith, tossed to and fro with anxieties and suspicions, but may become strong men who are able both to run in the race, to persevere in the pilgrimage, to contend in the fight, and to labour in the service, because the sinews of our strength are well knit, and the muscles of our faith are firm in reliance upon the living God, who is the strength of our life, and will be our portion for ever. How far, dear brethren, we have as yet reached to anything like the strong consolation and the vigorous faith of the text, it is for us to enquire; and if on enquiry we find ourselves deficient, let us plead mightily with God that he would continue his gracious work, that he would reveal himself more fully yet, that we may have a firm, unstaggering faith in him.

In order that we may have in ourselves the highest degree of assurance and confidence in God, the Lord is pleased to reveal himself to his servants as a God of truth and love very abundantly in multiplied promises, and, in addition to this, in the most solemn oaths. If we do not believe God, it is not because he has not plainly spoken. If we doubt him, it is not because he has left room for doubts, or given occasion for mistrust. His words are plain, often repeated, very positive, presented in the most assuring form, and ratified and settled with the most solemn assurances. Wherefore, then, should I doubt? Why should I not, since God is willing abundantly to show unto me the immutability of his counsel, be willing abundantly to rest in that immutability, giving glory to God, and enjoying peace in my own soul?

My discourse shall be aimed at the helping of God's servants to attain to a strong faith in him. May the Holy Spirit help my infirmities, and bless your souls.

First, this morning, we shall, by the help of the text, find out *the favoured people* who are the rightful owners of the strong consolations spoken of in the text; secondly, we shall speak upon *the condescending God*, who is pleased to give such overflowing comfort; and, thirdly, we shall speak upon *the strong consolation itself* which flows from these immutable things of God.

I. First, then, dear friends, may you be able to see yourselves as in a mirror, while we look into this text, to notice who are THE FAVOURED PEOPLE OF GOD. In the seventeenth verse, they are described as the "heirs of promise;" in the eighteenth verse, they are portrayed as those "who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."

Observe, then, that the favoured children of God are first described as "*the heirs of promise*," by which at once most solemnly are excluded all those who are relying upon their own merits. If there be any here present who think that they have led a blameless life, and have added thereto a careful attendance to the duties of religion, and to all the decencies and amiabilities of society, and that, therefore, they have

somewhat of claim on God, and something wherein to glory, they are evidently excluded from all the blessings of the covenant, for that is a covenant of promise, not a covenant of legal rewards. A promise is not a debt, but a grace, and if the blessing come by promise, then those who receive it are not those who put in a claim by reason of good things wrought by themselves. What sayest thou, dear hearer, is thy salvation based, and bottomed, and grounded, and founded upon the sovereign grace of God to thee an undeserving sinner? Dost thou confess that thou hast nothing of thine own wherein to boast, and dost thou hope alone in the mercy of God in Christ Jesus? Then let me hope thou art one of the heirs of promise.

“Heirs of promise,” again. Then this excludes those who are heirs according to their own will, who scoff at the mighty work of grace, and believe that their own free choice has saved them! The Lord said unto Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” And Paul adds in Romans ix. 16, “So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.” Dear hearer, here is a weighty question for thee. Whence came thy religion? Did it come entirely of thyself and spring from thine own inward promptings and nothing else, or art thou a Christian because the grace of God came athwart thy will, because the hand of grace took the helm of thy vessel and turned it in direction opposite to its natural inclining? Art thou rather the subject than the user of grace? Art thou rather sought of God than one who of himself did seek to God; in fine, is it thine own will or God’s will that has the honour of thy salvation? Remember they are not all Israel that are of Israel, “but in Isaac shall thy seed be called.” God makes here a distinction, and taketh Isaac and passeth by Ishmael. And yet again, as the apostle reminds us, “when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.” “Therefore,” again saith the apostle, “hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy.” It is a blessed mark of grace when we are willing to feel that it is just and right that pardon should be distributed according to God’s will rather than our will. The promise must be freely given of God, and who among us would interfere with his rights to give as he wills? Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? Shall he not do as he wills with his own? All heirs of promise will consent to this.

One more thought: “Heirs of promise,” then heirs, not according to the power of the flesh, but according to the energy of grace. Ishmael was the heir according to flesh, but he obtained not the inheritance: “They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God.” Isaac was born not through his father’s or his mother’s strength, for they were well stricken in years, but he was the child of promise, the fruit of divine visitation. Now what is your grace in your heart? Did it spring from the strength of nature? If so, it is but Ishmael, it will be rejected, it is but the bondwoman’s child, and will be cast out; but if your piety is the pure gift of God, an Isaac

born when human nature was incapable of anything that was good, and when your depravity could produce nothing that was acceptable in the sight of God; if it has been granted to you according to the power of the Holy Ghost, then is it such as shall surely bring you to heaven. The children of God, then, are heirs of promise, not heirs by merit, not heirs by their own will, not heirs by human power. Just in this manner does John describe believers as "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." John i. 13. Here are sharp distinctions. My soul, canst thou bear them? While listening to them, dost thou feel no rebellion, but rather feel a humble desire to sit down at Jesus' feet and hopefully say, "I trust I also am a child of the promise"? Ah! then is it well with thee.

A plainer description of the favoured people follows in the eighteenth verse. We will look at it. "*Who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.*" Then, dear hearers, all the people of God were once in danger. They have "fled for refuge." Men do not flee for refuge when they are in no distress. The vessel puts not into the harbour of refuge when winds and waves all favour her. A man does not escape out of a city like Lot out of Sodom, unless he be persuaded that the city is to be destroyed, and that he is likely to perish in it. Ah! indeed, we who are saved to day confess with gratitude to him who has delivered us, that we were once in danger. In danger, my brethren, is the word strong enough? in danger of eternal burnings! It was worse than that, for we are brands plucked out of the fire; we already burned with that fire of sin which is the fire of hell. We were already destroyed, already dead and corrupt. Our danger had overtaken us and overthrown us. The accumulated horrors of the tempest of divine wrath were gathering to pour themselves on our devoted heads. But we have fled for refuge. Blessed be God, no longer do we dread that lightning flash of wrath, no longer are we consumed with that flame of reigning sin; Christ has called us to shelter in his wounds, and we have fled from the wrath to come.

My brethren, every true child of God, not only was in danger, but he felt it; for, alas! if I say the child of God was in danger, why, so were all alike, children of God and children of the devil too. Oh, how some of you are in danger this morning; you have but a step between you and death, and it may be you will never enter this house, or any other house of prayer again, but within the next seven days you will have to stand before the Judge of all the earth! You are in peril; but the mark of the child of God is that he has felt his danger; for a man must feel a danger before he will flee for refuge. Do you feel it? Dear hearer, have you felt it not merely as a transient fright that passed over you for a moment, and then you wiped away your tears and went back to your carnal security, have you felt the danger so that the fear haunted you by day and by night, and would not let you rest till you escaped for your life? I have nothing to say to you as a child of God unless you have so felt. I cannot address you as one that has fled for refuge unless you have also felt that you needed a refuge, felt it solemnly with broken heart before God, and confessed that you could not fight out the battle yourself nor could you endure the storm alone, but must find a shelter other than your own doings or resolutions could afford you.

Still, even this does not quite describe the child of God. He was in danger, and he felt his danger, but the text says, he has "fled for refuge." I have no doubt that the words here point to the old Jewish institution of the Cities of Refuge. A man had slain another at misadventure, and the next of kin would be quite sure to avenge the blood; but the manslayer fled with all his might to the appointed City of Refuge. When once he passed between the portals of that sanctuary, he was secure. So, brethren, the children of God have by nature provoked the just vengeance of heaven. They have been guilty against the law, and Justice, red-handed and swift, was fast behind them. This they knew, and being moved with fear, they took to their heels with a solemn repentance and an eager faith, and they sped away to Jesus Christ, the appointed City of Sanctuary, and they have found protection in him. I say *they have* found it. Dear hearer, hast thou found it? Nay, it is nought to say, "I hope I shall." What if the avenger of blood smite thee with his killing sword even now? *Hast* thou found it? Remember, thou art this day either a saved man, or not! There are no middle places between these two. The wrath of God pursues thee, or else thou art at the altar's horn, secure through the sprinkled blood. Thou art this day condemned already, waiting for execution, or else thou art absolved, and vengeance can never strike thee. Which of the two is it? Oh, I know that many of us can say, "By grace I have fled for refuge. Jesus Christ, I have looked to thee, and to thee alone. Thou art my only confidence. If a soul can perish trusting in Christ, I shall perish." If there be anything wanted besides thee, O Jesus, I shall perish, for I have nothing besides thee. But if simple faith in the once crucified Saviour can save the sinner, then I am a saved man, for I have so believed, and so I will, God helping me, to life's latest hour.

You have, then, reached the refuge. What a mercy this is! You can now walk at peace as a sinner saved. Sin is pardoned, the wrath of God is turned away from you. But the text goes on to describe these favoured people as running for a crown. There is a commingling of metaphors here, and yet at the same time no confusion. The first metaphor is over, they have "fled for refuge," and now they continue to run, but for another reason, "to lay hold upon the hope set before us." Beloved, every child of God is pressing forward towards the hope of life everlasting, and glory undefiled, beyond the stars. Is it so with us? God has promised to us a "crown of life that fadeth not away," and our life is a getting ready for that crown, a pressing forward towards that unfading bliss. We are daily blessed with inward aspirations after it, hungry longings for it, divine impulses towards it, and moreover, we hope we are purifying ourselves by his Spirit, even as he is pure, that when he shall appear, for whose coming we are looking, we may be found of him in peace, made ready to enter into the marriage-supper of the Lamb.

I shall not detain you longer with the description, but I shall press upon you all to ask yourselves whether you have fled for refuge and are pressing onward to the hope that is set before you? For upon this question everything must hinge. If it be so, brethren, the strongest consolation in the word of God is not denied you, the richest promise and the rarest blessing of the covenant you may grasp without any

interference, for everything belongs to you. But if not, and you do not answer to this description, so far from wishing to administer any consolation to you, we fear lest we should say a word that might lull you into a deeper and more dangerous peace. For you, no dulcet notes of consolation, but the shrill cornet must be sounded in Gibeah, and we must lift up the voice of alarm in Zion; for out of Christ, not having fled for refuge, wrath cometh upon you even to the uttermost, and there shall be no escape. If they that despised Moses' law perished without mercy, of how much sorer vengeance shall you be counted worthy that shall despise the Son of God? How shall you escape if you neglect so great salvation?

II. But we must pass on to our second head. Let us humbly look for a minute to the ways and dealings of OUR CONDESCENDING GOD to these favoured people; hoping that we belong to their number.

Notice each word, "*God willing.*" Whenever God does anything in a way of grace, he does it as we say *con amore*, he does it in the highest sense willingly. In a certain sense, all the acts of God are willingly done, but there are some which in another sense he doth unwillingly. "He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men." It is not the will of God that sinners should perish; he has declared it, he had rather that they turn unto him and live; but when he reveals himself to his saints, he doeth it with a sacred alacrity, a divine cheerfulness. It is an occupation divinely suitable to his generous nature. "God willing."

"*Willing more abundantly.*" Do notice that expression. It has in the Greek the sense of more than is necessary, and is secretly meant to answer the objection concerning the Lord's taking an oath. God is willing to reveal himself to his people, and he is willing to do that "more abundantly," up to the measure of their need. He would let them know that his counsel is immutable, and he would not only give them enough evidence to prove it, he would give them overwhelming evidence, evidence more than would be or could be possibly required by the case itself, so that their unbelief may have no chance to live, and their faith may be of the strongest kind. The word "to show" is remarkable; it is the very word used in the Greek when our Lord showed his disciples his hands and his side, as if the word would say that God would lay bare the immutability of his nature, would as it were strip his eternal purposes, and let his people look upon them, handle them, and see their reality, their truth and certainty. "God is willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel." Beloved, oftentimes a man will not give further assurance of the truth of what he states, when he believes he has already given assurance enough. Nay, he standeth on his dignity and he saith, "Do you not believe me? I have already given you a promise, I have given that promise again and again, why seek more? My character in all past life has been such that I am entitled to be believed. I have given you what I conceive to be overwhelming proof of my fidelity and honesty; if you ask more, you shall not have it. I do not feel called upon to repeat my words as if I were suspected of untruth." Observe with wonder that our ever gracious God never standeth on his dignity in this style at all, but he looketh not so much

at the dignity of his own person as at the weakness of his people, and therefore being willing more abundantly to show unto his poor feeble trembling people the immutability of his counsel, he not only gives one promise, but he adds another and another and another, till to count the promises were almost as difficult as to count the stars or number the sands on the sea shore. Yea, and when he has done all this, he comes in with a master clap to crown it all, and confirms every promise by an oath, that by not one immutable thing but by two, the promise and the oath, in both of which it is impossible for Jehovah to lie, his people might never dare to doubt again, but might have strong consolation.

The first immutable thing upon which our faith is to stay itself, is *the promise*. How badly we treat our God! If a father should give a promise to any of you, being a child, you believe your father. I know, dear wife, you would count it a great dishonour if any one assumed that you doubted your husband's word. I know, dear sister, that you would think it sad discredit to your brother if you had cause to doubt his word. Oh, no, we readily believe and accept the truthfulness of those we love, and yet our God, our Father, Christ our brother, our dearest friend, O wherefore, wherefore do we not believe him? But it may be whispered in times of darkness, "Yes, but God may have given a promise that he will save those who fly to Christ, and I hope I have fled to Christ, but suppose he should change his mind, and retract his promise!" Nay, but he has told you it is an immutable promise, and when a man says, "I will never alter my word," we do not expect he will; if he be an honest man, he cannot. If his promise were only intended to be broken, why, he is playing the fool with us; but when it is given with an intent to be kept, as God says his is—for he calls it an immutable promise—let us not entertain suspicions against it. The text implies that if God were to break his promise he would lie. He cannot take back his promise without lying, and let not the thought even flit across our soul that God should lie. "Hath he said and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Beloved, when you are conscious that you are great sinners, and have no good thing in yourselves, it is easy to yield to the dark suspicion, "Suppose, after all, I believe in Christ, and yet my faith should not be enough. Suppose this which has been set before me in the word of God as the groundwork of a sinner's hope should turn out to be too little?" At such times, it really appears that the gospel plan is too simple, and we are tempted to think it may prove to be insufficient; but the text will not allow such a supposition, for there is the promise of God, "He that believeth and is baptised, shall be saved;" and he tells us that is an immutable promise, consequently if he did change it, if he did shift the system of his grace, he would lie. But he cannot lie. Oh, what consolation is this, then, our refuge is secure, our confidence is firm! Look ye here, ye people of God. This promise of God was not made in a hurry. A man makes a promise on a sudden, and he cannot keep it afterwards, but through the everlasting ages the promise was on Jehovah's heart before he spoke it with his lips. Men sometimes make promises that they cannot fulfil, they are in circumstances which do not permit them. But can God ever be in a difficulty? Can he ever lose his power to do

what he wills? He is omnipotent. The heavens and the earth are his. "All power belongeth unto God." Men sometimes make promises which it would be unwise to keep, and perhaps it is better to break them; but the Lord cannot be unwise, his is infinite wisdom as well as infinite strength. The promise, then, because of its wisdom, will surely stand. Beside, my brethren, the promise he has made is to his own honour. It redounds to his glory to show mercy to the unworthy. Moreover, his promise is made to his own Son, and his love to him is intertwined and interwoven with his promise. He could not break his word to one of us without breaking it to his dear Son, since we are in him, and trust in him. O my brethren, the divine promise must stand good. Show me where it was ever broken! I will tell you where it has been kept even to the end, in the ten thousand times ten thousand of the blood-washed, who with white robes are this day surrounding his throne with never-ceasing songs. It has never been broken even to us on earth. Here stand some of us, the witnesses of divine fidelity. Why, then, should we mistrust a promise which has hitherto been immutable, and has never been for a moment treated by God as a thing to be tampered with? Wherefore should we begin to doubt him?

" O for a strong, a lasting faith,
To credit what th' Almighty saith,
T' embrace the message of his Son,
And call the joys of heaven our own."

But, brethren, it is added that God, in order to prevent our unbelief effectually, has taken *an oath*. An oath, if it be allowable—and I think our Lord Jesus has for ever forbidden all Christian men every oath of every sort—an oath, if ever allowable, as it was under the old dispensation, should never be taken except upon the most solemn business, and in the most solemn manner. An oath of a man is a thing at which an angel might well tremble. What greater dishonour or shame could you pour upon a man than to convict him of perjury? We count such men the pariahs of the human race, we put them henceforth outside the social scale as unworthy to be communed with. Their breath is pestilence, and leprosy is on their brows. Perjury! the man is no man, he has sunk below the level of manhood when he comes to that. But God has with an oath sworn by himself that all the heirs of promise shall be blessed for ever, saying, "Surely blessing I will bless thee." Now, brethren, who among us dare doubt this? Where is the hardy sinner who dares come forward and say, "I impugn the oath of God"? Oh! but let us blush the deepest scarlet, and scarlet is but white compared with the blush which ought to mantle the cheek of every child of God to think that even God's own children should, in effect, accuse their heavenly Father of perjury. Oh, shame upon us! Forgive us, great God, this deep atrocity; and from this hour may we hold it certain that as thou hast sworn, that he that flees for refuge to Christ shall be safe; that as thou hast promised that he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, we who have so believed are secure beyond all question. Let us no more doubt our salvation than our existence, and no more think ourselves in jeopardy in the darkest and the most terrible hour

than we think God's throne itself in jeopardy, or God's truth itself in peril. O believer, stand to it that the Lord cannot lie. How I have rolled those words over in my thoughts; they have rung in my ears like a bell. "*Impossible* for God to lie." Of course it is. Next, "*Things* in which it is impossible for God to lie," as if there were some things more impossible than others. "*Immutable* things, in which it is impossible for God to lie;" and then the finale, "*Two* immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie." I do not know whether you catch the accumulation of the meaning, the tidal wave of reassuring thought. If you do, there is a force about it which is rather excessive than deficient, as though a huge battering ram were brought to crush a fly, or ocean stirred to tempest to waft a feather. We have too much, surely, instead of too little evidence for our faith. Here is more evidence than faith can want. Beloved, here is sea-room for you; were you the vilest sinners; your vessels which draw the most water may float here. Here is room for all the navies of sinners that ever swam the sea of sin. Leviathan may come here, and though he could make the ocean to be hoary, and to boil like a pot, in these immutable things, wherein there is an impossibility for God to lie, there is room for him. Here is unshaken ground for a confidence that never shall for a moment dare to mistrust God.

III. But I must turn away to the third point, and note THE STRONG CONSOLATION WHICH FLOWS OUT OF ALL THIS. This is setting the wine bottles at the taps of the vat to catch the flowing juice from these rich grapes of Eshcol, these mighty clusters which we have been flinging into the wine-press.

There is strong consolation, says the text, for the heirs of grace, which implies that the children of God must expect to have trouble. They have a promise and an oath, but then these are given that they may have consolation. Now, God would not give them consolation if they were not to have tribulation. Wherever the Lord gives a man comfort, it is because he will want it. You will want it, dear brother, Write that down in your tablets, then: "In the world ye shall have tribulation." The text says "strong consolation." If you are an heir of heaven, you may look for severe trials.

"Crosses each day and trials hot
The Christian's path has been,
And who has found a happy lot
Without a cross between?"

All the followers of the Great Cross-bearer are cross-bearers too; but then there is the strong consolation for the strong tribulation.

What is strong consolation? I shall occupy but two or three minutes in bringing that out; I think strong consolation is that which does not depend upon bodily health. What a cowardly old enemy the devil is! When we are strong and vigorous in body, it is very seldom that he will tempt us to doubt and fear, but if we have been racked with hours of pain and sleepless nights, and are getting to feel faint and weary, then he comes in with his horrible insinuations: "God will forsake you. His promise will fail!" He is vile enough to put his black paws on the brightest truth in the Bible, ay, upon even the very

existence of God himself, and turn the boldest believer into the most terrible doubter, so that we seem to have gone bodily over to the army of Satan and to be doubting every good thing that is in the word of God. Strong consolation, even at such times, enables us still to rejoice in the Lord though every nerve should twinge, and every bone should seem melted into jelly with pain. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Let him crush me, but he shall get nothing out of me but the wine of resignation. I will not fly in his face, but still say, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt." O may you have such strong consolation, my dear brethren.

Strong consolation is that which is not dependent upon the excitement of public services and Christian fellowship. We feel very happy on a Sunday here when we almost sing ourselves away to everlasting bliss, and when the sweet name of Jesus is like ointment poured forth, so that the virgins love it. But when you are in colder regions, how is it? Perhaps you are called to emigrate, or go into the country to a barren ministry where there is nothing to feed the soul. Ah, then, if you have not good ground for your soul to grow in, what will ye do? Those poor flowers which depend altogether upon being watered, how soon they fade if they are forgotten for a little while! May we have root in ourselves and drink of the dew of heaven, and be like the "tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season, whose leaf also shall not wither." This is to have strong consolation. Ministries are blessed, but oh! we must live on surer bread than ministries if we would have the highest form of life. We must use the means so long as God gives us the means, but we must have a spiritual life that could live even if means were denied us, in fact, a grace that would become the fountain of the means of grace to others if we were banished to any distant land. May we have such a consolation.

Brethren, the strong consolation which God gives his people is such as no mere reasoning can shake. Persons are often afraid that new infidelities will upset our holy religion, that diggings in the earth, or searchings in the skies, will cast suspicion on the word of God; now, beloved, I bear witness that I have never seen, so far as I recollect, any attack which touched in the slightest degree the central soul of Christianity. All the attacks I have ever heard of in my short life have always been upon what carnal men could discern, namely, the outskirts of religion, such as the correctness of the numbering in the book of Genesis, or the geology of Moses. But, my dear friend, how is it that they do not attack the spiritual life of the believer? Why are there none who touch the root of the matter by denying the fact of spiritual life, and showing that spiritual phenomena are to be otherwise accounted for? Let them prove that there is no such thing as prevailing prayer, and that God does not hearken to the voice of a man; let them show that there is no such thing as joy in the Lord, no abounding of the consolations of the Holy Ghost within the spirit. No, they do not try to disprove these facts, because the only answer that the church of God would give to them, if they once attacked her real strength, would be this, "The virgin daughter of Zion hath shaken her head at thee, and laughed thee to scorn." If I cannot defend the book

of Genesis against the arithmetic of a prelate, if I cannot defend certain dogmas against the sneers of a clever unbeliever, I yet believe that I could do so if I were better taught; but if the reasoners will come to battle with me about my blessed Lord and Master, and the power of his blood, and the secret of the Lord that is with them that fear him, I will cut them in pieces as Samuel hewed Agag before the Lord, for my own experience makes me strong. Oh, it is sweet contending here, for reason is laughed to scorn. You might as well reason me out of the tooth-ache, or convince me that I do not exist, as reason me out of my consciousness that I love Christ, and that I am saved in him. They cannot touch the essentials of vital godliness, and this is a strong consolation which reasoning no more woundeth than men come at leviathan with spears and swords, for he laugheth at them, and accounteth their spears as rotten wood.

Strong consolation, again, because it will bear up under conscience, and that is a harder pressure than mere reasoning can ever bring. Conscience saith, "Ay, but thou art a wretch indeed! See what thou didst before conversion! and what hast thou been since? Those good works of thine are all spoiled, rotten like apples with the maggot in them, though they be bright red to look upon." Oh, do you not know what it is to see your prayers, and your preachings, your givings, all tumble to pieces, and all blown away like dust before the March winds? Ah, then, it is blessed to have a strong consolation which enables you to say, "I know all this, and I know a great deal more. I, the chief of sinners am, but Jesus died for me; and if I were blacker still, Jesus would wash me; if I were more of a devil than I am, he could make me a saint. I rest in him, and in him alone, and not in self nor anything within, but wholly on the work of Jesus, and the perfect righteousness of my atoning Lord." Oh, this is strong consolation which can quiet the clamours of conscience!

Ay, and we can deal with Satan with his horrible insinuations and blasphemies, and still can say, "I will trust in the Lord and not be afraid." It is a strong consolation that can deal with outward trials when a man has poverty staring him in the face, and hears his little children crying for bread; when bankruptcy is likely to come upon him through unavoidable losses; when the poor man has just lost his wife, and his dear children have been put into the same grave; when one after another all earthly props and comforts have given way, it needs a strong consolation then; not in your pictured trials, but your real trials, not in your imaginary whimsied afflictions, but in the real afflictions, and the blustering storms of life. To rejoice then, and say, "Though these things be not with me as I would have them, yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure;" this is strong consolation.

And it will be proved to be so by-and-by with some of us, when we shall be in the solemn article of death, for I doubt not that the message will come to many of us, ere long, "The pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel at the cistern, and the spirit must return to God that gave it." Ah! then to lie quiet on the bed, and look death in the face and call it friend, and look into an eternity so surely ours, with all its natural gloom and all the alarm which this poor flesh and blood

naturally feels at the parting pang, and yet calmly to prepare ourselves for undressing, expecting to be satisfied when we wake up in his likeness ; this needs strong consolation. And to do even more than this, as many of God's saints have done, to go down into the river, singing as they go, "Glory ! glory ! glory ! hallelujah ! through him that loved us, we are more than conquerors. O death, where is thy sting ? O grave, where is thy victory ? The sting of death is sin ; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be unto God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." This is strong consolation indeed. Dear brethren and sisters, by these two immutable things, wherein it is impossible for God to lie, may you have strong consolation from this time forth, even for ever and ever. Amen and amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON.—Hebrews vi.
