

CHRIST'S COUNSEL TO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH OF LAODICEA.

**The First of Christ's Counsel to
the Angel of the Church of
Laodicea, being a warning for
the ministers of these times.
Concerning our Redemption,
Reconciliation & Hope of
Glorification by HIM alone.**

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TO THE CHRISTIAN READER, Grace and Peace be multiplied.

Truth needs no patron, it is for error or suspected matter to seek for protection, for there was never less worth seen in writing since it hath been used as a means to beget a patron that is a friend, not to truth, but for other covetous ends. The constant sunshine of peace hath wrought so much dust into the common roads that it is justifiable to make a start over the other side, and if you follow too, it may prove the better for your eyesight, as long as you live. Indeed the author hereof is a very starter, you see he would not so much as set his name to his discourse, and his reason is that he would have no man know more of him than what is hereby discernible. The treatise itself required that the author's name should not be known, for that the author's name is enough to prejudice the reader, which the author finding true in himself and others, yielded an argument to conceal himself. He therefore that hath a mind endued with grace, let him read on without scruple or by-consideration. If it does him any good, that is most heartily desired; and surely if it does anyone harm, it must be by overmuch weakness. If anyone's learning do chance to spy it out, then the author is no scholar, much good may it do his wisdom, as indeed he wrote this hastily and without the book, which is the part rather of a master. It issued wholly from inward principles, and not from foreign acquisition, and was occasioned by an obscure difficult sermon preached upon the same words, wherein it was chiefly observed, that there is abundance of

riches, and most precious treasure in the hands of Jesus Christ, and therefore what would men do to get Christ? And he that obtained Christ, why he obtained Salvation, and all kind of Grace, and so went on in that common road which leads to mere uncertainties; and he that seeks for peace in that way, how brave and plausible soever it seems to be, shall be as far from his expectation, as he that is misled by a false and fleeting night fire, which is that which has so troubled the mind of the author, to see hay and stubble built on so golden a foundation; for what is it else, when preachers should be informing us of our peace and reconciliation, purchased by the merits of Christ fully and completely, to be telling us of salvation in the hands of Jesus Christ, and that it is their own responsibility and personal duty to obtain Christ before they can obtain salvation? Is anything their duty, but as ministers of this blessed reconciliation to persuade us in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God and to live in assurance thereof, with peace of conscience and joy in the Holy Ghost, and to tell us that we have nought at all to do but to be thankful to the LORD for his unspeakable gift of Christ? Musing thereupon this occasion, he undertook the same theme, through zeal to the truth of God and love to his brethren, to whom he wishes as to his own soul.

Farewell in the Lord and be cheerful.

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"I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." Rev.3:18.

It appears plainly by foregoing passages, that this was spoken by our Saviour Christ unto the angel of the church of Laodicea. The right understanding whereof may prove of great use, and very worthy of the most serious consideration in all times.

First then, let us consider the preceding, and the present state of this Church of Laodicea. The preceding state thereof, {doubtless,} was a state of integrity and sincerity, consisting of believers of the truth, and professors thereof. Their fault was want of perseverance, occasioned in them, {in all probability,} by rest and security, which we find by experience to creep by degrees into the most pious and devout minds. It being incident unto faith, through want of exercise to stag the wing and fly nearer and nearer to the earth, even till the wings thereof become wet and clammy with partaking of the fogs, and mists, and dust thereof, which is generally brought to pass by peace and plenteous prosperity. Want and persecution being ever the best preservers of faith, and occasions of a steadfast flight, for it is often in those times only, we have and truly find our only comfort in God; for when all other things fail, then we fly unto him, and continue our contemplations of his never failing goodness and infallible love which possesses the soul with

a hot and fiery zeal for the truth and glory of God. But through want of occasion, and want of necessity, we become remiss in our meditations, and suffer our spirits to gag, and to wander in the enjoyments of the pleasures, profits, ambitions, and other vanities of this life, by which our affections are alienated from things above, and take pleasure and contentment in things earthly and beneath.

Our affection being now altered, our judgment cannot fail to be corrupted, and so our faith, our light, becomes darkened and obscured, and hence proceeds a less love unto divine things, and a greater insensibility to the love of God, and then follows a wavering in the mind, an instability in the understanding, being tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine which necessarily produces a luke-warmness in the affection.

As to a people in this condition, so speaks our Saviour to these Laodiceans, a people that did not directly call evil good, and good evil; that did not directly take light for darkness, and darkness for light. Of such a people there had been more hope, it being more possible to persuade or work something upon such a people than upon these Laodiceans, who seem by these our Saviour's words, to be a people of such a strange qualification, that there was no use to be made of them; a kind of medley, a linsey-woolsey people that had a form of godliness, but no part of the power thereof.

And yet if any were so bold, as to go about to discover them to themselves, they took it in such a soul scorn that without expostulating or arguing, they pride and boast of themselves that they are rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and know not that they

are wretched and miserable, poor, blind, and naked, though indeed, and in truth, they are no otherwise.

And this may be the case and condition of many in our days, who yet are very confident of their good estate, of their own unquestionable ability to discern light from darkness, and darkness from light. But if so much could be gained of them, as that they would but question, or suffer themselves to be questioned, their principles would give way, and they would be found to be a people to whom these words of our Saviour were very proper and necessary, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, &c."

The goodness of the Spirit of God towards us is very evident in the use he is pleased to make of allegorical kinds of expressions in the Scriptures, whereby he speaks so plainly to our weakened capacities, that we are much to blame if we complain of difficulty in the understanding of anything that is fit for our understanding or consciences, and it will make very much to the right understanding of the meaning of the Holy Spirit in this place, if we follow and make progress upon the allegory or similitude. Here might then be observed many things concerning the seller, and the buyer, and the commodities to be bought, which may imply something of value in consideration; but it is a better choice to neglect methods than to neglect what is most necessary.

Certainly, in these few words is contained all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and it may be truly said of him that experimentally knows and is possessed of those excellencies therein contained, that the kingdom of God is within him; that he hath assurance of the love

of God, that he hath peace of conscience, and abundance of joy in the Holy Ghost; for as this will prove to all those that shall become traders in this holy traffic, the most profitable exchange that ever was. It is a trade you see, that is proposed to make bankrupts rich, to make very beggars gratuitous.

By the angel may be understood the minister, the pastor, he it was that for all his proud boasting and confidence, was found in this wretched condition, a mere neutral man, neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm; but how hateful, and how wretched condition is this in the sight of God. And how sad a condition is it, to have such a misleading shepherd? Needs must the flock perish and run to ruin, as our Saviour said, "if the blind lead the blind, shall not both fall into the ditch?" If the ministers err, that does beget our knowledge, and form our understandings, what prejudice must remain upon our judgments, if they mislead us by their evil examples into covetousness and licentiousness, to frequenting taverns and ale houses, to a dotage upon superfluities and a fanatical esteem of honours, and of fine clothes, and dainty food, to an insensibility and time serving wretchedness, to an unfaithful, perfidious inconsistent demeanour. What a lamentable case are we in! And yet this must be no excuse for any slothfulness in ourselves, because we should and ought to be so true to ourselves, so watchful over our own souls, so fervent in spirit, that we should be able to try the spirits, whether they be of God or not; we should be steadfast, immovable, always stirring up the grace of God that is in us, and ever abounding in this work of the Lord. We are not to be excused, though our angel fall away; but

we see it is the angel that shall be sure to be questioned, and thereby we see how great a consequence it is to be furnished with either a good, or an evil minister, for Christ here blames only the angel, as the cause of all the evil of that church, and intending good unto the church, takes this way of counselling of the angel, who being recovered of this woeful condition, those pertaining to his charge would soon partake of so blessed an alteration, he being made rich, and happy, and blessed, they should not, could not remain long miserable, poor and naked. And you see what he is counselled to do, he must buy, &c., hath any man wherewith to give unto God? The whole earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.

This trade is to be understood spiritually, the commodities thereof being altogether spiritual; for certainly, by this gold tried in the fire is meant the righteousness of Christ, which only endures and gives comfort to our souls in our fiery trials; for when our consciences afflict us with a sense of sin, made out of measures sinful by the operation and violent working of the Law, denouncing wrath and everlasting torments on everyone that continues not to do all things that are written therein; in this distraction of mind and horror of conscience, what is there that can afford the poor soul any comfort, but only the righteousness of Christ, who was made sin for us, that knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him; who was made of a woman, and made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law; who hath loved us, and washed away our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests to God and to his Father, so that now I say, {the Lord bearing me witness,}

that he beholdeth as in Israel, no sin; as Jacob, no transgression in me; for who shall separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus my Lord? It is God that justifieth, who shall condemn? It is Christ that died! Shall I condemn myself? Yes, I shall, if I look upon myself as in myself, and upon my extreme nakedness! But this thou oughtest not to do, this being frailty and extreme weakness. Is not this gold and white raiment? Is not this perfect righteousness of Christ thine own? Wherein thou mayest be so bold as to wrap and cover thyself all over. And thou art not now to consider thyself as in thyself, for thou art not to consider thyself as a son of man, but as a son of God, and heir and co-heir with Christ Jesus. Such is his infinite love, such is thy unspeakable happiness!

Objection. These things are apparently true, but surely all is not done by Christ, for something must be done by us, for if we must lay all the burden on Christ, for, {as an ancient father is often cited,} he that made us without us, will not save us without us; and, as others have commented upon that father, will save us indeed, without our act, but not without our faith. Others go further and say, not without thy repentance, thy humiliation, self-denial, weeping, fasting and mourning and prayer, and the use of the ordinances; of hearing, reading, and the use of the sacraments, and the observation of the Sabbath, and doing in all things, as one would be done unto you. For except we do or endeavour to do, or do desire to do these things, and have a general desire to keep all of God's commandments, and to yield universal obedience thereunto, and hate all sin, we shall never be saved.

Answer. If thou argue thus seriously, be assured that the last counsel belongs as well unto thee, whosoever thou art, minister or people, as it did unto the angel here spoken of, for by this thou dost show thyself neither hot nor cold; that thou art unstable in all thy ways, and that thou dost grope at noon-day, and hast indeed need to anoint thine eyes with eye slave, that thou mayest see, for thou sayest, and unsayest; thou believest, and doubttest and fearest, all in one instant, not seeing, that therein thou makest thyself a very monster. Thou dost believe that thy sins are remitted, that thou art reconciled unto God, thou art justified in his sight, and thou believest that this thou art, through the satisfaction made by Christ, and yet thou conceivest that he hath not done it so fully and perfectly, but that there are certain things left to thee to be done, and being not done, all is to no purpose that Christ hath done. Thou wilt be both under the Law and under Grace at one instant; nay, thou wilt yet invent more mischief for thyself. And being beaten from the Law, thou wilt yet find out an Evangelical Law, exercised in the use of the ordinances, wherein, if thou do not exercise thyself, thou mayest have perished everlastingly, and if it be possible to drive thee off from this, yet still, except thou believe thou hast no lot in this matter. I, that's a condition without which thou, nor any shall ever be saved. "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you," "I would they were even cut off which trouble you." 'Tis the envious man that hath sowed these tares, whilst the husbandman slept. Once the ministers consult

more with books, with art and arguments, rather than with the Spirit of God, which is the true eye slave, giving sight to the blind, and understanding to the simple.

It's apparent what this angel wanted, and what thou thyself hast most extreme need of. But what is meant by this buying? Here indeed is the jewel, but where is a price in the hand of a buyer? Why here, the angel, minister or whomsoever must do as the wise merchant, who when he had by the light of the Spirit of God, who never fails man in his distraction of mind, to light and guide him out of darkness, and thralldom into the paths of life and liberty. When this merchant had by this heavenly light found out, what, and where this gold and precious raiment was, {which he never could until he had anointed his eyes,} then what does he do? Why, he sells all that he ever had, he renounces all hope in himself, or in anything he was able to perform; he sees himself in the state of nature, as a child of Adam; to be dead in sins and trespasses, in both soul and body and all the parts and faculties thereof, {though employed to the utmost of his power, towards his performance of all that the most just God required most justly in his most righteous Law,} I say, he sees him even in this his best natural condition, to be nothing but a mass and lump of sin, and that his very best works, endeavours and desires to come so extremely short of what is required in the Law, that it is impossible for him to attain to righteousness thereby. And finding himself thus deceived by the Law, which now he sees was not given for righteousness, but to make sin apparent, and finding himself thus accused, condemned, and killed by the Law, he hates and abhors himself in dust and

ashes; as he sees his best works, {which were his riches and only garments to cover his nakedness,} to be very filth itself, and thus he puts off the old man, which he sees now plainly was crucified with Christ, and puts on the new man, even the man Christ Jesus, accounting all things as loss and dung to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, which is of the Law, but the righteousness which is of God, in him. The Holy Ghost hath begotten this faith in his heart, by which he knows his union with Christ, even as our Saviour signified in the 14th chapter of John's Gospel, from the 14th to the 20th, saying, "at that day shall ye know, that I am in the Father, and you and me, and I in you." This is the work neither of man nor angel, but only of the Spirit of God, to beget this holy and blessed faith, which is a light supernatural, enlightening our understandings, by which we are able to understand and apply to our own particular comforts, all the comfortable passages of the Gospel, for thereby alone do we come to know that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness. That he is our peace, that he by his one oblation once offered, hath made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, and satisfaction for the sins of all the elect in Christ. That he hath borne our sins in his body on the tree, that he by his blood shedding on the cross hath reconciled us unto God. So as now whosoever finds in his heart, this faith, {by which he hath assurance that these things are so,} may as justly, and as confidently as Paul himself, cry out, "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 to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." "Wherefore

henceforth know we no man after the flesh." Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now, henceforth know we him no more; therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, {not to be discerned by the eye of reason, or by any human force or power, but only with a spiritual eye of faith,} all things are passed away, behold all things are become new, and all things are of God who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but now is made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.

Objection. Yes, will some say, no doubt the state of a believer is a most blessed and happy estate, for he that believeth is justified, and without faith it is impossible to please God. But I find so much frailty in myself, so much doubtfulness, sin and wickedness, that it would be presumptuous on my behalf to say that I have any measure of this most excellent grace of faith, which you declare to be so blessed and comfortable. And though I know there is in Christ sufficient virtue to save to the uttermost, yet except I apply him to myself, by my own particular faith, I shall have no more benefit by his merits than he who is presented with an all-curing medicine, and hath not a hand to apply the same unto his malady.

Answer. How miserable are we when we forsake the dictates of the Spirit of God and fly unto man's commentaries. Man being in his lost condition in Adam, in the fullness of time, Christ came and redeemed, laying down his own life a

ransom for his church, which consisted of men, women and children that were dead long before his coming; and of men, women and children that lived in his time; and of men, women and children that were to have life, and to live in all ages, as in our present age, and even to the end of the world. And then did he purchase remission of sin and forgiveness for all the sins that ever shall be forgiven, freely, without any condition to be performed on anyone's part. So infinite is his love, and he that shall say that anything is required of us to be done, or to be believed, without which we cannot be saved, doth by such doctrine so far make ineffectual the blood of Christ. For let it be clearly considered, to what purpose Christ should die for our sins, and work our redemption fully, and yet put us to performances of conditions, having no life in us, but are dead, quite stone dead in sins and trespasses. Nay, further consider, is it likely that God having found us so dead to all things that are legally good, and not exceeding or transcending the Law, and that we had lost our ability to perform those conditions therein justly required by him, that now having redeemed us, he should put us upon a condition altogether supernatural, as is faith, and that we should have no part in the death of Christ, except we believe, seems very difficult, and not like the proceedings of his sovereign and effectual determination to save to the uttermost all that are given of the Father unto him, of his reign of grace, of the government of our salvation being entirely upon his shoulders, of his fatherly affection towards us in Christ, &c. Alas, he knows whereof we are made, and he considers that we are but dust, &c. Can a rotten tree yield fruit, or can a dead man speak? Even

so, can the most wise understanding man, {considered in a state of nature,} bring forth faith? And is it likely that Christ should die for this natural man, that he would by his death redeem him from the curse of the law, sin, death and hell, provided he believe in him, and not else? A heart condition, which shows rather to be of man's inventing, that judges God as he finds himself, that because when his brother hath run into his debt, and lies at his mercy, he cannot be brought to forgive him, but upon conditions, of {at the least} acknowledgments and thankfulness; and even so thinks he of God, and wrests God's truths to prove his own imaginations; thereby deluding himself, and depriving his brethren of those infinite comforts intended unto him, and conferred on them, through Christ.

Objection. Yea, but say what you will, or can say, faith will be found a condition which must be in us or we shall never be saved.

Answer. Thus will we ever perplex ourselves and our consciences, denying our own mercies, and making resistance to the Spirit of God, and will not conceive the right end, for which he hath wrought faith in our hearts.

Objection. I sir, but you surely mistake us, for though we maintain that faith is a condition required in everyone that shall be saved, yet we do acknowledge that it is not of man's power, but it is the gift of God, and that God doth not require it, before he gives it; but to everyone that shall be saved, at one time or another he doth give it, otherwise how can they lay hold on Christ, having not this hand of faith? How can they apply his merits to their own souls, and without application, how can they have any benefit thereby? Therefore say what you will, it

is indeed a condition, and must be met by everyone that calls himself by the name of Christ.

Answer. Stay a little, for he that runs so fast, needs first to know if he be running in the right way, or he may find himself lost in the woods of uncertainty before he is aware. He that misapplies anything whatsoever, loses the use thereof, be it in itself ever so valuable and precious; nay, the busier he is with it, the worse it is with him, and therefore, it cannot but prove very profitable to our consciences to discover the right and proper end whereunto the particular blessings of God are to be referred, especially these particular and choice mercies.

Well then, the end for which Christ came was that he should bear witness unto the truth, and every one that is of the truth will hear his voice, he came to fully satisfy his Father's justice, to lay down his life for the redemption of his sheep, to purchase remission of their sins, and to reconcile them unto God, and all these he did freely, upon no condition; fully and perfectly, leaving nothing undone, or to be done by way of application, for in performing thereof, he fully and perfectly applied it, for he took upon him our nature, so as what he did, we may be truly said to have done, with him and in him, and by virtue of this, our human nature in the person of Christ, we are made truly the sons of God, heirs, and co-heirs with him.

The end for which the Holy Spirit was given, or was sent by Christ unto his Church, and to continue with them to the end of the world, is manifest by the title our Saviour gives unto him, saying, "I will send you another Comforter." So the end for which he came is to comfort the children of God, of which there are

two sorts, for some live to years of understanding, and full age, and some die before. So the question is, how, or by what means the Holy Spirit doth comfort those that belong to Christ? And that is by working faith in their hearts, which is a divine and supernatural principle, informing the mind and understanding of those truths, of which reason and nature, were in no ways capable of grasping; and, for which of all the philosophers, {the wisest and most considerate men of the world,} did ever so much as guess at the reconciliation accomplished by Christ. This faith then is to us the evidence of things not seen, and the substance of things hoped for, and is wrought in us, to assure us that our sins are remitted, that we are saved, that we are reconciled unto God, that we are righteous in his sight and justified.

When sin distracts our consciences, faith tells us that he is the propitiation for our sins. When the Law works havoc in our hearts and clamors for obedience, faith tells us that we are not under the Law, but under Grace. When any affliction troubles our rest, faith tells us that all things fall out and are even now working together, and always working together, whether it be observed or not, prosperity and adversity, whether in things temporal or spiritual, God causing all things to work together for good of those that love and are continually looking to Christ for supplies. When the world tempts us with baits and allurements, faith tells us that here we have no abiding city but are as pilgrims, and passengers, and are to use the world, as if we used it not. If death suddenly affright us, faith presently sweetens its approach, saying to me, to live is Christ, and to die is an advantage, and whether I live or die, I belong unto the Lord;

and that neither death, nor life, nor any other thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That all was mistaken before, but now he sees that when he thought himself in a damnable and wretched estate, it was only for want of this eye of faith, to show him his peace, which was wrought fully and effectually by the death of Christ, long before he was born; but now seeing himself thus clearly discharged, thus freely acquitted, the same faith forms and fills the soul with love which breaks out into exaltations of thankfulness unto God, and now he lives, he lives the life of faith. His conversation is daily in heaven, and he is ever with Christ in the bosom of the Father, where he finds fullness of joy, and pleasures for evermore. And in our conversation here below faith effects also, working by love, doing all good unto his neighbour, so that look how love is described, and that is the believer's character, for he suffereth long, is kind, envies not, does not vaunt himself up, is not puffed up, doth not behave himself unseemly, seeks not his own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil, rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the Truth; he bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, &c. Faith tells us that we are the body of Christ, and members one of another; and that the love of God hath appeared, teaching us to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, godly and soberly in this present world, and that our conversation must be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ, &c.

Thus we see also the end for which the Holy Spirit came, which is to comfort, and he comforts by creating faith in our hearts; and we

see also, how faith hath its effects, bringing peace of conscience and joy in the Holy Ghost. Thankfulness unto God for his so infinite unspeakable love, and love to our neighbour, as to our fellow members in Christ; and thus we see how the Holy Spirit by faith comforts, and how faith is a comfort, a shield and buckler to the children of God that live in years to understanding. For faith, as hath been showed, enlightens the understanding, and so the heart is freed from distraction and comforted in Christ.

It remains for us to speak of those redeemed ones that die before years of understanding, whether they are comforted; or, {which is all one,} whether they may be said to believe; to which purpose it will need no more than to inquire, whether it be needful for them to have faith; and surely we find where there is no knowledge, {as in children, &c.,} there can be no discourse, no consideration; where there is no knowledge, or sense of sin, there can be no consideration of a sinful condition, nor any apprehension of wrath for sin, because indeed, the judgment is not of strength to discourse upon the Law, and where these are not, there can be no disturbance of conscience, no affliction of mind, no horror, no amazement. What need is there then of comfort? What cause, that faith should be wrought in a mind so qualified, {as are all children,} for they cannot know or understand, and if they cannot conceive or know they cannot believe, for who believes more than he knows, or who knows that which he doth not believe, all which duly weighed will it not appear that there is an impossibility that a child should have any measure of faith; and that there is no need that he should have any

faith, in any kind of capacity, whether actual, potential, or habitual, as is too much disputed, and all upon this foundation, that faith is a necessary condition required in everyone that shall be saved, and that without faith there is no salvation; whereas it plainly appears that faith is wrought in us by the Holy Spirit to comfort us by enlightening our understandings, and by showing us, assuring us, and certifying us of our peace and reconciliation with God in Christ, and it does not appear to be required as a condition, and then children may no doubt be saved without it.

And if it be true, that if we belong to Christ we are all redeemed before we are born, and that children are saved without faith. Then is not salvation tied unto belief, or faith a condition without which we cannot be saved; for, it is proven that all men, women and children, that are the whole Church of God, are all saved, only saved, and completely saved by the merits of Christ, and that his merits are applied to us sufficiently and effectually too, by his own assumption of our nature, by which we are incorporated into him. It is proved also, that faith is an effect of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, by which he comforts us; not of our Redeemer, who is an absolute Redeemer, and perfect, having left nothing to be done by us, before or after faith to consummate an unconsummated redemption. It is apparent that faith was given for another end, so as it may be truly said of faith, that without faith, there is no comfort, no peace of conscience, no joy in the Holy Ghost; but to say, that without faith, there can be no salvation, deserves good caution.

It is very likely that the angel of the church of Laodicea was thus truly informed of

the truths of the Gospel, which is the glad tidings of peace and reconciliation, and no doubt, did for a time live therein and possess the same; but afterwards through sluggishness and pride did fall into an insensibility of those truths, being also deluded by the subtlety of false teachers and sophists, forsook the living waters, and did dig to himself broken pits that held no water.

The apostolic counsel therefore is very good, saying, boast not thyself, but let him that standeth take heed lest he fall, for the best of God's children, {if one be better than another,} through the want of the exercise of their faith, are apt and prone to fall, even as this good angel or minister did, into a mere lukewarmness; teaching and living in such sort, as that those committed to his charge, and the very truth of God are extremely prejudiced thereby. Nor can God take any pleasure therein, but even vomits them out of church and service, and gives them up to Satan to buffet them; and suffers these prodigals to feed amongst the swine, on husks, acorns, false doctrines, heresies, and such mixtures of Law and Gospel, as that for a time, they live in as great trouble of mind and distraction of spirit, as they did before they had received faith, and have no peace or joy at all, and remain so long in this distemper, till at the last, with the spouse in the Canticles, this poor soul cries out, "by night in my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth," in the drowsy time of rest and security, and in the dark mists of errors and misinterpretations, and false apprehensions, "I sought him, but I found him not." Then she says, "I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth," I

will see, if I can recover and re-establish my wavering and unsettled mind, by the general approved doctrines, applauded in the open streets, and by the great and large discourses, who confine all knowledge and appropriate to themselves the resolution of all doubts and fears; those that have art, and all learning in its very excellency, "I sought him amongst these also, but I found him not," "the watchmen that go about the city found me."

Those blessed wakeful servants of God that continually attend the spiritual good and welfare of their brethren in Christ. Those that suppress not the Spirit, but continually by their exercise do stir up the grace of God that is in them. To these it is said, "saw you him whom my soul loveth?" Yea, doubtless they saw him continually, even as he is, the very light of their eyes and breath of their nostrils, the life of their life; and, having somewhat meditated on those clear, un-mixed truths that passed from them, it was but a little that I passed from them, but "I found him whom my soul loveth." Darkness, error and superstition, and all fear vanished away, and I found myself the same new creature, as in the time of my initial awakening from death unto life, from self unto Christ. "I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me." I lived the life of faith, and would no more be diverted from my assurance of his love by any insinuations of my frail reason, or by any allurements whatsoever. Here was I born of God, here will I rest and abide forever, in the sweet and comfortable assurances of the Gospel of grace, made now manifest again unto me, by the lively operation of the Spirit of God, and it

shall be a warning unto me, how I give ear to those false teachers that mix the Law and Gospel together, those that make redemption conditional, and make it to depend on duties. I see now that a believer's estate is the most free of all estates; nothing at all is required of him, and they are but deceivers that teach otherwise in any respect. What is required of him for whom Christ died? Consider all the particulars forenamed, the first is faith, and that, {as hath been sufficiently cleared,} is so totally a gift that it cannot in any respect be truly called a condition; then for repentance, humiliation, self-denial, weeping and mourning, fasting and prayer; the use of ordinances, of hearing, reading, the sacraments, and the observation of the Sabbath, and doing as one would be done unto, and the rest, &c.

Observe now, how, {as is manifest in the particulars spoken of faith,} that in every one of these, there is palpable mistakings, all of them are made duties by almost all teachers, and they teach that we must exercise ourselves in them, or shall have no part in Christ.

Faith, {as hath been declared,} is a supernatural grace wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, by which we come to know that we are reconciled unto God, and of enemies are become his friends, his beloved children. This clear apprehension of God's love works in us an exceeding love unto God, who hath been so good unto us, and this love works in us an earnest endeavour to show ourselves thankful unto him for all his kindness and goodness towards us; which, our faith tells us, we cannot better do than by living godly, righteously and soberly in this present world, and to love our brethren in Christ as God hath loved us. Now,

whilst we continue in this life, faith is not perfect in us, but, is as we exercise it; for if faith be strong and vigorous, so will love be also, which will appear in our life and conversation. If we carelessly suffer our spirits to be drawn aside by the allurements of this world, and abate in our contemplation of God's love in Christ, and fall into any ill-beseeming action such as our very reason itself would be ashamed of, how is it possible but the believer in such a case will vex and grieve and torment himself in that he hath dishonoured his God, scandalized his brethren, and has caused the name of the Lord to be blasphemed amongst lewd and vicious people? Yea, in this sad condition, his frailty may work so upon him, as to cause him to question his estate and so to interpret those fatherly chastisements, which God, as a loving Father inflicts upon him to draw him home and near unto himself, {"whom I love I chastise, &c.,"} and to give him occasion to raise and rouse up himself by faith; he, I say interprets to be marks of his vengeance and cries out in the bitterness of his soul, "will the Lord nevermore be entreated? Shall his wrath burn like fire? Has he forgotten to be gracious, and will he shut up his loving kindness in displeasure?" But at length faith gets the victory, and then he sees all is but his own confounding. Shall this now, this grief and vexation, this horror and amazement; shall this repentance, which is an effect of the grace of God, and cannot but be otherwise? Is it possible it should be otherwise, shall it be pressed and preached as a duty to be performed at all times and seasons, that we must thus repent and mourn and grieve? No, doubtless it ought not to be, rather, rejoice in the Lord always, and again, I say rejoice, for we have not

received the spirit of bondage to fear again, but the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba Father, and have boldness to the throne of grace, where Christ sitteth at his Father's right hand, and we in him. Fear indeed hath painfulness, and he that fears is not perfected in love, for perfect love casts out all fear. What should trouble or grieve, or make afraid the children of God who have sought refuge in Christ, and have abandoned all to be found only in him? It is God that justified them, who is he that dares to condemn? He ought not to do it himself, nor any man else, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers. What, because his frailty will sometimes get the upper hand shall it be countenanced? Shall it be commanded as a duty? What gets he by it, or what doth any other of the like, {falsely named,} duties get us? Hath he not given us his Son, and with him all things?

As it is in repentance, so runs it in all that follows. It is in vain to bid the believer to humble himself, for there is none so meek, so humble as one who finds himself possessing nothing in himself, but all in Christ. He sees no difference between himself and any other man upon earth, for he knows there is no cause in himself but that God may as justly save any man as he, for he was dead in trespasses and sins and at enmity with God, and more indisposition can there not be in any man, even the vilest on earth. So you see by this that he denies himself, far more so than others, and you need not bid him do it, for it is impossible for him to do otherwise.

As for weeping, mourning, and fasting; when by his frailty the Bridegroom seems to be taken from him, or that his faith, which is his

light, is clouded, you need not then bid him do any of these, for he is then too apt, too prone to wrong himself thereby as was instanced in the matter of repentance; and if thou be a true minister of the Gospel thou hast cause to reprove him for his weakness and to help to strengthen his own heart in Christ.

A child that knows that his Father loves him, when he wants anything, shall you need to tell him that he ought in duty to ask it of his Father? As much need there is to preach prayer as a duty, a believer cannot want much, nor many things, for he already hath eternal life; he is in Christ, and he hath remission of sin; he is justified, he is not under the Law, he is not under wrath, nor sin, condemnation, nor death, for he hath peace of conscience and joy in the Holy Ghost. He accounts all temporal things as loss and dung in comparison of these, and having food and raiment he hath enough; the vanities, honours and superfluities of the world are no part of his portion, he is freely abated therein, nor knows he how a believer can possess more than what is merely necessary; for there are so many opportunities of doing good, and so many of his brethren that lack things needful. A rich Christian, richly clad, {except in a spiritual sense, as here in the text,} is to him a wonder, a mere riddle, and a very impossibility, implying an absolute contradiction.

In reference to prayer, surely a very short prayer is sufficient, as our Saviour well knew when he taught us how to pray, and reproved long prayers, tautologies, and vain repetitions, asking those things, which we say we do believe to already possess in Christ, as remission of sin, &c., crying out of the burden of sin, when we

believe that Christ hath borne our sins in his body on the tree, and that his blood cleanses us from all sin. And in one and the same instant to personate a man extremely affrighted with sin, and a man giving thanks, for remission of sin by Christ, and also of a man that is afraid, even of the sins of his present prayers, and of one that hath a victory over sin, death and hell. Also of a man that is delivered from under the Law into the glorious liberty of the sons of God, and yet again puts himself under the Law; for though he knows that faith informs more powerfully to good works and a good life than ever the Law could do, yet without the Law, and his observation thereof, he is as dead, as if there were no life in faith, nor peace in Christ; and all this, though it be no other but mere contradiction, yet nothing is more usual in prayers, nor more plainly discernible. Whereas, surely prayer is another thing than it is commonly taken to be, even the supreme life of faith, an utter state of dependence upon God's rich mercies in Christ, and abandonment of mind and heart as submitted to his grace, a continual walking with God, and enjoyment of our heavenly conversation; the which rightly to understand, we must divest ourselves of all human thoughts, but how easily and inconsiderably do men fall into errors, and being once engaged therein, how earnestly do they maintain them, even as if they were saving truths.

A strong healthy man that keeps himself in breath and heart by good exercise, shall you need to tell such a man that it is his duty to feed himself? Even so is it needful to tell a believer that it is his duty to hear sermons, read the Scriptures and frequent the Lord's table, these

being his proper and natural food, by which his faith is strengthened and increased? Yet in what a sad and fearful manner are these as duties pressed upon men's consciences upon pain of having no part in Christ, and of everlasting damnation in hell fire forever? And they put us upon these to try and prove ourselves by marks and signs drawn from our performances of these. But we have need to try these spirits whether they be of God or not. Indeed, we never had more cause to try all things, and to hold nothing but that which is good, to take nothing for gold but what is tried in the fire, and will endure in the fiery trial of affliction, and pass for current in the court of a distressed conscience, and is of full value to discharge all our debts, and to make us completely rich, and forever blessed in Christ.

The true believer submits himself to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; and as for the observation of the Sabbath, so exceedingly pressed and preached as a duty to be exactly performed in the worship and service of God, all days are to him this Sabbath, for he lives and abides in that rest which was typified out by the old Sabbath, he having his constant rest in Christ, saying with David, "my heart is fixed O God, my heart is fixed, I will sing and give praise." Take care to keep faith in heart and breath, and faith will make every day a Sabbath. Withal his liberty is to be judged of no man, for, saith he, one man esteems one day above another, another esteems every day alike, so let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind, for he that regards a day regards it to the Lord; and he that regards not the day, to the Lord he does not regard it. Let no man judge you in meats, or in drinks, or in respect of a holy day,

or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath, which were shadows of things to come, but the body is Christ, who hath fulfilled for us all righteousness, and is made unto us of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. Thus free is a believer in himself; yet, rather than his freedom shall offend his weaker brethren, he will for their sakes observe days, times, or any other indifferent thing, but if you press them as absolutely necessary to salvation, he knows that you err, and though he cannot persuade with you, he can with himself, and though for peace sake he may submit the outward man, yet the inward man cannot be beguiled of his freedom, or of his rest and peace in abiding in Christ.

Our blessed God, who is goodness itself, and who delights in the cheerfulness of his children, anoint our eyes with his blessed eye-slave that we may have eyes to see and hearts to understand what is this gold tried in the fire, and this white and most precious raiment, that we may comprehend with all saints, what is the length, breadth, the height and depth of the riches of the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord and blessed Saviour, and thereby recover and preserve us all from neutrality, lukewarmness and mixtures of deceivable errors, that the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ may ever be bright and shining in our hearts by faith. Amen, Amen.

FINIS