

FINAL PERSEVERANCE (PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS)

“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame.”

Hebrews 6:4-6

THERE are some spots in Europe which have been the scenes of frequent warfare, as for instance, the kingdom of Belgium which might be called the battlefield of Europe. War has raged over the whole of Europe, but in some unhappy spots, battle after battle has been fought. So there is scarce a passage of Scripture which has not been disputed between the enemies of the Truth of God and the upholders of it—but this passage with one or two others has been the special subject of attack. This is one of the texts which have been trod under the feet of controversy and there are opinions upon it as adverse as the poles. Some assert that it means one thing and some declare that it means another. We think that some of them approach somewhat near the truth—but others of them desperately err from the mind of the Spirit.

We come to this passage ourselves with the intention to read it with the simplicity of a child and whatever we find therein to state it. And if it may not seem to agree with something we have up to now held, we are prepared to cast away every doctrine of our own rather than one passage of Scripture. Looking at the scope of the whole passage, it appears to us that the Apostle wished to push the disciples on. There is a tendency in the human mind to stop short of the heavenly mark. As soon as ever we have attained to the first principles of religion, have passed through Baptism and understand the resurrection of the dead, there is a tendency in us to sit still—to say, “I have passed from death unto life. Here I may take my stand and rest.”

The Christian life was intended not to be a sitting still, but a race, a perpetual motion. The Apostle, therefore, endeavors to urge the disciples forward and make them run with diligence the heavenly race, looking unto Jesus. He tells them that it is not enough to have on a certain day passed through a glorious change—to have experienced at a certain time a wonderful operation of the Spirit. Rather, he teaches them it is absolutely necessary that they should have the Spirit all their lives—that they should, as long as they live, be progressing in the Truth of God. In order to make them persevere, if possible, he shows them that if they do not, they must, most certainly be lost—for there is no other salvation but that which God has already bestowed on them and if that does not keep them—carry them forward and present them spotless before God—there cannot be any other. It is impossible, he says, if you are once enlightened and then fall away, that you should ever be renewed again unto repentance.

We shall, this morning, answer one or two questions. The first question will be, Who are the people here spoken of? Are they true Christians, or not? Secondly, What is meant by “falling away”? And thirdly, What is intended, when it is asserted, that it is impossible to renew them to repentance?

First, then, we answer the question, WHO ARE THE PEOPLE HERE SPOKEN OF? If you read Dr. Gill, Dr. Owen and almost all the eminent Calvinistic writers they all of them assert that these persons are not Christians. They say that enough is said here to represent a man who is a Christian externally but not enough to give the portrait of a true Believer. Now, it strikes me they would not have said this if they had not had some doctrine to uphold—for a child reading this passage would say that the persons intended by it must be Christians. If the Holy Spirit intended to describe Christians, I do not see that He could have used more explicit terms than there are here. How can a man be said to be enlightened, to taste of the heavenly gift and to be made partaker of the Holy Spirit, without being a child of God? With all deference to these learned doctors, and I admire and love them all, I humbly conceive that they allowed their judgments to be a little warped when they said that.

And I think I shall be able to show that none but true Believers are here described. First, they are spoken of as having been once enlightened. This refers to the enlightening influence of God's Spirit, poured into the soul at the time of conviction—when man is enlightened with regard to his spiritual state. When he is made to see how evil and bitter a thing it is to sin against God, made to feel how utterly powerless he is to rise from the grave of his corruption—and is further enlightened to see, that “by the deeds of the Law shall no flesh living be justified,” and to behold Christ on the Cross, as the sinner's only hope.

The first work of grace is to enlighten the soul. By nature we are entirely dark. The Spirit, like a lamp, sheds light into the dark heart, revealing its corruption, displaying its sad state of destitution and, in due time, revealing also Jesus Christ, so that in His light we may see light. I cannot consider a man truly enlightened unless he is a child of God. Does not the term indicate a person taught of God? It is not the whole of Christian experience—but is it not a part?

Having enlightened us, as the text says, the next thing that God grants to us is a taste of the heavenly gift, by which we understand the heavenly gift of salvation, including the pardon of sin, justification by the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, regeneration by the Holy Spirit and all those gifts and graces in which the earlier dawn of spiritual life convey salvation. All true Believers have tasted of the heavenly gift. It is not enough for a man to be enlightened—the light may glare upon his eyeballs—and yet he may die—he must taste as well as see that the Lord is good. It is not enough to see that I am corrupt—I must taste that Christ is able to remove my corruption. It is not enough for me to know that He is the only Savior—I must taste of His flesh and of His blood and have a vital union with Him.

We most certainly think that when a man has been enlightened and has had an experience of grace, he is a Christian. Whatever those great divines might hold, we cannot think that the Holy Spirit would describe an unregenerate man as having been enlightened and as having tasted of the heavenly gift. No, my Brethren, if I have tasted of the heavenly gift, then that heavenly gift is mine. If I have had ever so short an experience of my Savior's love, I am one of His. If He has brought me into the green pastures and made me taste of the still waters and the tender grass, I need not fear as to whether I am really a child of God.

Then the Apostle gives a further description, a higher state of grace—sanctification by participation of the Holy Spirit. It is a peculiar privilege to Believers, after their first tasting of the heavenly gift, to be made partakers of the Holy Spirit. He is an indwelling Spirit. He dwells in the hearts, souls and minds of men. He makes this mortal flesh His home—He makes our soul His palace and there He rests. We do assert (and we think on the authority of Scripture), that no man can be a partaker of the Holy Spirit and yet be unregenerate. Where the Holy Spirit dwells there must be life and if I have participation with the Holy Spirit and fellowship with Him, then I may rest assured that my salvation has been purchased by the blood of the Savior. You need not fear, Beloved—if you have the Holy Spirit, you have that which ensures your salvation. If you, by an inward communion, can participate in His Spirit and if by a perpetual indwelling the Holy Spirit rests in you, you are not only a Christian, but you have arrived at some maturity in and by grace. You have gone beyond mere enlightenment—you have passed from the bare taste—you have attained to a positive feast and a partaking of the Holy Spirit.

Lest there should be any mistake, however, about the persons being children of God, the Apostle goes to a further stage of grace. They “have tasted the good Word of God.” Now I will venture to say there are some good Christian people here who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have never “tasted the good Word of God.” I mean by that, that they are really converted, have tasted the heavenly gift, but have not grown so strong in grace as to know the sweetness, the richness and the fatness of the very Word that saved them. They have been saved by the Word—but they have not come yet to realize, love and feed upon the Word as many others have.

It is one thing for God to work a work of grace in the soul—it is quite another thing for God to show us that work. It is one thing for the Word to work in us—it is another thing for us really and habitually to relish, taste and rejoice in that Word. Some of my hearers are true Christians but they have not got to that stage wherein they can love election and suck it down as a sweet morsel. They have not got wherein they can take the great doctrines of grace and feed upon them. But these people had. They had tasted the good Word of God as well as received the good gift—they had attained to such a state that they had loved the Word, had tasted and feasted upon it. It was the man of their right hand. They had counted it sweeter than honey, yes, sweeter than the droppings of the honeycomb. They had “tasted the good Word of God.” I say again, if these people are not Believers—who are?

And they had gone further still. They had attained the summit of piety. They had received “the powers of the world to come.” Not miraculous gifts which are denied us in these days but all those powers with which the Holy Spirit endows a Christian. And what are they? Why, there is the power of faith, which commands even the heavens themselves to rain and they rain, or stop the bottles of Heaven, that they rain not. There is the power of prayer, which puts a ladder between earth and Heaven and bids angels walk up and down, to convey our wants to God and bring down blessings from above. There is the power with which God girds His servant when he speaks by inspiration, which enables him to instruct others and lead them to Jesus. And whatever other power there may be—the power of holding communion with God, or the power of patiently waiting for the Son of Man—they were possessed by these individuals.

They were not simply children, but they were MEN—they were not merely alive but they were entitled with power. They were men whose muscles were firmly set, whose bones were strong. They had become giants in grace and had received not only the light, but the power also of the world to come. These, we say, whatever the meaning of the text must have been, were beyond a doubt none other than true and real Christians.

II. And now we answer the second question, WHAT IS MEANT BY FALLING AWAY? We must remind our friends that there is a vast distinction between falling away and falling. It is nowhere said in Scripture that if a man fall he cannot be renewed. On the contrary, “the righteous falls seven times, but he rises up again.” And however many times the child of God does fall, the Lord still holds the righteous. Yes, when our bones are broken He binds up our bones again and sets us once more upon a rock. He says, “Return, you backsliding children of men, for I am married unto you,” and if the Christian does backslide ever so far, still Almighty mercy cries, “Return, return, return and seek an injured Father’s heart.” He still calls His children back again.

Falling is not falling away. Let me explain the difference. A man who falls may behave just like a man who falls away and yet there is a great distinction between the two. I can use no better illustration than the distinction between fainting and dying. There lies a young creature—she can scarcely breathe—she cannot, herself, lift up her hand and if lifted up by anyone else, it falls. She is cold and stiff, she is faint, but not dead. There is another one, just as cold and stiff as she is, but there is this difference—she is dead. The Christian may faint and may fall down in a faint, too. And some may pick him up and say he is dead—but he is not. If he falls, God will lift him up again, but if he falls away, God Himself cannot save him. For it is impossible, if the righteous fall away, “to renew them again unto repentance.”

Moreover, to fall away is not to commit sin under a temporary surprise and temptation. Abraham goes to Egypt. He is afraid that his wife will be taken away from him and he says, “She is my sister.” That was a sin under a temporary surprise—a sin, of which, by-and-by he repented and

God forgave him. Now that is falling—but it is not falling away. Even Noah might commit a sin which has degraded his memory even till now and shall disgrace it to the latest time—but, doubtless, Noah repented and was saved by Sovereign Grace. Noah fell, but Noah did not fall away. A Christian may go astray once and speedily return again—and though it is a sad, woeful and evil thing to be surprised into a sin—yet there is a great difference between this and the sin which would be occasioned by a total falling away from grace.

Nor can a man who commits a sin which is not exactly a surprise, be said to fall away. I believe that some Christian men—(God forbid that we should say much of it!—let us cover the nakedness of our brother with a cloak)—but I do believe that there are some Christians, who, for a period of time, have wandered into sin and yet have not positively fallen away. There is that black case of David—a case which has puzzled thousands. Certainly for some months David lived without making a public confession of his sin, but, doubtless, he had achings of heart, for grace had not ceased its work. There was a spark among the ashes that Nathan stirred up which showed that David was not dead, or else the match which the Prophet applied would not have caught light so readily. And so, Beloved, you may have wandered into sin for a time and gone far from God—and yet you are not the character here described, concerning whom it is said that it is impossible you should be saved. Wanderer though you are, you are your Father's son still, and mercy cries, "Repent, repent! Return unto your first husband, for then it was better with you than it is now. Return, O Wanderer, return."

Again, falling away is not even a giving up of profession. Some will say, "Now there is So-and-So, he used to make a profession of Christianity and now he denies it—and what is worse, he dares to curse and swear and says that he never knew Christ at all. Surely he must be fallen away." My Friend, he has fallen, fallen fearfully and fallen woefully—but I remember a case in Scripture of a man who denied his Lord and Master before His own face! You remember his name—he is an old friend of yours—our friend Simon Peter! He denied Him with oaths and curses and said, "I say unto you that I know not the man." And yet Jesus looked on Simon. He had fallen, but he had not fallen away—for, only two or three days after that, there was Peter at the tomb of his Master running there to meet his Lord, to be one of the first to find Him risen!

Beloved, you may even have denied Christ by open profession and yet if you repent there is mercy for you. Christ has not cast you away, you shall repent yet. You have not fallen away. If you had, I might not preach to you—for it is impossible for those who have fallen away to be renewed again unto repentance.

But someone says, "What is falling away?" Well, there never has been a case of it yet and therefore I cannot describe it from observation. But I will tell you what I suppose it is. To fall away would be for the Holy Spirit entirely to go out of a man—for His grace entirely to cease—not to lie dormant, but to cease to be—for God, who has begun a good work, to leave off doing it entirely—to take His hand completely and entirely away and say, "there, Man! I have halvesaved you, now I will damn you." That is what falling away is.

It is not to sin temporarily. A child may sin against his father and still be alive. Falling away is like cutting the child's head off clean. Not falling merely, for then our Father could pick us up—but being dashed down a precipice where we are lost forever. Falling away would involve God's grace changing its living nature, God's immutability becoming variable, God's faithfulness becoming changeable and God Himself being undefied—for all these things falling away would necessitate.

III. But if a child of God could fall away and grace could cease in a man's heart—now comes the third question—Paul says, **IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR HIM TO BE RENEWED**. What did the Apostle mean? One eminent commentator says he meant that it would be very hard. It would be very hard, indeed, for a man who fell away, to be saved. But we reply, "My dear Friend, it does not say anything about its being very hard—it says it is impossible and we like to read our Bible just as a child would read it." It says it is impossible and we say that it would be utterly impossible, if such a case as is supposed were to happen—impossible for man and also impossible for God—for God has purposed that He never will grant a second salvation to save those whom the first salvation has failed to deliver.

Methinks, however, I hear someone say, "It seems to me that it is possible for some such to fall away," because it says, 'It is impossible, if they shall fall away, to renew them again into repentance.' "Well, my Friend, I will grant you your theory for a moment. You are a good Christian this morning. Let us apply it to yourself and see how you will like it. You have believed in Christ and committed your soul to God and you think that in some unlucky hour you may fall entirely away. Mark you, if you come to me and tell me that you have fallen away, how would you like me to say to you, "My Friend, you are as much damned as the devil in Hell! For it is impossible to renew you to repentance"?"

"Oh, no, Sir," you would say, "I will repent again and join the Church." That is just the Arminian theory all over—but it is not in God's Scripture. If you once fall away you are as damned as any man who suffers in the gulf forever. And yet we have heard a man talk about people being converted three, four, and five times, and regenerated over and over again. I remember a good man (I suppose he was) pointing to a man who was walking along the street and saying, "That man has been born again three times, to my certain knowledge," (I could mention the name of the individual but I refrain from doing so) "and believe he will fall again," said he. "He is so much addicted to drinking that I do not believe the grace of God will do anything for him, unless he becomes a teetotaler."

Now, such men cannot read the Bible, because in case their members do positively fall away, here it is stated as a positive fact that it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance. But I ask my Arminian friend, does he not believe that as long as there is life there is hope? "Yes," he says—

*"While the lamp holds out to burn,
The vilest sinner may return."*

Well, that is not very consistent—to say this—and in the very next breath tell us that there are some people who fall away and consequently fall into such a condition that they cannot be saved. I want to know how you make these two things fit each other? I want you to make these two doctrines agree and until some enterprising individual will bring the north pole and set it on the top of the south, I cannot tell how you will accomplish it. The fact is you are quite right in saying, "While there is life there is hope"—but you are wrong in saying that any individual ever did fall into such a condition that it was impossible for him to be saved.

We come now to do two things—first to prove the doctrine, that if a Christian falls away, he cannot be saved. And, secondly, to improve the doctrine, or to show its use.

Now I am going to prove the doctrine that if a Christian FALL AWAY—not fall—for you understand how I have explained that—but if a Christian ceases to be a child of God and if grace dies out in his heart—he is then beyond the possibility of salvation and it is impossible for him ever to be renewed. Let me show you why. First, it is utterly impossible, if you consider the work which has already broken down. When men have built bridges across streams, if they have been built of the strongest material and in the most excellent manner and yet the foundation has been found so bad that none will stand, what do they say? Why, "We have already tried the best which engineering or architecture has taught us, the best has already failed. We know nothing that can exceed what has been tried. And we do, therefore, feel that there remains no possibility of ever bridging that stream, or ever running a line of railroad across this bog or this morass, for we have already tried what is acknowledged to be the best scheme."

As the Apostle says, "These people have been once enlightened. They have had once the influence of the Holy Spirit revealing to them their sin—what now remains to be tried? They have been once convicted—is there anything superior to conviction? Does the Bible promise that the poor sinner shall have anything over and above the conviction of his sin to make him sensible of it? Is there anything more powerful than the sword of the Spirit? If that has not pierced the man's heart—is there anything else which will do it? Here is a man who has been under the hammer of God's Law but that has not broken his heart—can you find anything stronger? The lamp of God's Spirit has already lit up the caverns of his soul—if that is not sufficient, where will you borrow another?"

Ask the sun—has he a lamp more bright than the illumination of the Spirit? Ask the stars—have they a light more brilliant than the light of the Holy Spirit? Creation answers No. If that fails, then there is nothing else. These people, moreover, had tasted the heavenly gift—and though they had been pardoned and justified, yet pardon through Christ and justification were not enough (on this supposition) to save them. How else can they be saved? God has cast them away. After He has failed in saving them by these, what else can deliver them? Already they have tasted of the heavenly gift—is there a greater mercy for them? Is there a brighter dress than the robe of Christ’s righteousness? Is there a more efficacious bath than that “fountain filled with blood”? No. All the earth echoes, “No.” If the one has failed, what else does there remain?

These persons, too, have been partakers of the Holy Spirit—if that fails what more can we give them? If, my Hearer, the Holy Spirit dwells in your soul and that Holy Spirit does not sanctify you and keep you to the end, what else can be tried? Ask the blasphemer whether he knows a being, or dares to suppose a being superior to the Holy Spirit! Is there a being greater than Omnipotence? Is there a might greater than that which dwells in the Believer’s new-born heart? And if already the Holy Spirit has failed, O, Heaven, tell us where we can find anything that can excel His might?

If that is ineffectual, what next is to be tried? These people, who had “tasted the good Word of Life,” had loved the doctrines of grace. Those doctrines had entered into their souls and they had fed upon them. What new doctrines shall be preached to them? Prophet of ages! Where will you find another system of Divinity? Who shall we have? Shall we raise up Moses from the tomb? Shall we fetch up all the ancient seers and bid them prophesy? If, then, there is only one doctrine that is true and if these people have fallen away after receiving that, how can they be saved?

Again, these people, according to the text, have had “the powers of the world to come.” They have had power to conquer sin—power in faith, power in prayer, power of communion. With what greater power shall they be endowed? This has already failed—what next can be done? O you angels! Answer, what next? What other means remain? What else can avail, if already the great things of salvation have been defeated? What else shall now be attempted? He had been once saved—but yet it is supposed that he is lost. How, then, can he now be saved? Is there a supplementary salvation? Is there something that shall overtop Christ and be a Christ where Jesus is defeated?

And then the Apostle says that the greatness of their sin which they would incur, if they did fall away, would put them beyond the bounds of mercy. Christ died and by His death He made an atonement for His own murderers. He made an atonement for those sins which crucified Him once, but do we read that Christ will ever die for those who crucify Him twice? But the Apostle tells us that if Believers do fall away, they will “crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame.” Where, then, would be an atonement for that? He has died for me. What? Though the sins of all the world were on my shoulders, still they only crucified Him once and that one crucifixion has taken all those sins away. But if I crucified Him again, where would I find pardon? Could heavens, could earth, could Christ Himself with His heart full of love, point me to another Christ—show to me a second Calvary—give me a second Gethsemane? Ah, no! The very guilt itself would put us beyond the pale of hope, if we were to fall away!

Again Beloved, think what it would necessitate to save such a man. Christ has died for him once, yet he has fallen away and is lost. The Spirit has regenerated him once and that regenerating work has been of no use. God has given him a new heart (I am only speaking, of course, on the supposition of the Apostle)—He has put His Law in that heart—yet He has departed from him—contrary to the promise that He should not. He has made him “like a shining light,” but he did not “shine more and more unto the perfect day,” he shone only unto blackness. What next? There must be a second incarnation, a second Calvary, a second Holy Spirit, a second regeneration, a second justification, although the first was finished and complete—in fact, I know not what. It would necessitate the upsetting of the whole kingdom of nature and grace and it would, indeed, be a world turned upside down, if after the gracious Savior failed, He were to attempt the work again.

If you read the 7th verses, you will see that the Apostle calls nature in to his assistance. He says, "The earth which drinks in the rain that comes often upon it and brings forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receives blessing from God: But that which bears thorns and briars is rejected and is nigh unto cursing; whose end it is to be burned." Look! There is a field. The rain comes on it and it brings forth good fruit. Well, then, there is God's blessing on it. But there is, according to your supposition, another field on which the same rain descends, which the same dew moistens. It has been plowed and harrowed as well as the other and the farmer has exercised all his craft upon it and yet it is not fertile.

Well, if the rain of Heaven did not fertilize it, what next? Already all the arts of agriculture have been tried, every implement has been worn out on its surface and yet it has been of no avail. What next? There remains nothing but that it shall be burned and cursed—given up like the desert of Sahara and resigned to destruction. So, my Hearer, could it be possible that grace could work in you and then not affect your salvation? That the influence of Divine Grace could come down, like rain from Heaven and yet return unto God void? There could not be any hope for you, for you would be "nigh unto cursing," and your end would be "to be burned."

There is one idea which has occurred to us. It has struck us as a singular thing that our Friends should hold that men can be converted, made into new creatures, then fall away and be converted again. I am an old creature by nature. God creates me into a new thing. He makes me a new creature. I cannot go back into an old creature for I cannot be uncreated. But yet, supposing that new creatureship of mine is not good enough to carry me to Heaven. What is to come after that? Must there be something above a new creature—a new, new creature? Really, my Friends, we have got into the country of Dreamland—but we were forced to follow our opponents into that region of absurdity for we do not know how else to deal with them.

And one thought more. There is nothing in Scripture which teaches us that there is any salvation, save the one salvation of Jesus Christ—nothing that tells us of any other power, super-excellent and surpassing the power of the Holy Spirit. These things have already been tried on the man and yet, according to the supposition, they have failed, for he has fallen away. Now God has never revealed a supplementary salvation for men on whom one salvation has had no effect. And until we are pointed to one Scripture which declares this, we will still maintain that the doctrine of the text is this—that if grace is ineffectual, if grace does not keep a man, then there is nothing left but that he must be damned. And what is that but to say, only going a little round about, that grace will do it? So that these words instead of militating against the Calvinistic doctrine of final perseverance, form one of the firmest proofs of it that could be afforded.

And now, lastly, we come to clarify this doctrine. If Christians can fall away and cease to be Christians, they cannot be renewed again to repentance. "But," says one, "You say they cannot fall away. What is the use of putting this 'if' in, like a bugbear to frighten children, or like a ghost that can have no existence?" My learned Friend, "Who are you that replies against God?" If God has put it in, He has put it in for wise reasons and for excellent purposes. Let me show you why.

First, O Christian, it is put in to keep you from falling away. God preserves His children from falling away. But He keeps them by the use of means—and one of these is the terrors of the Law—showing them what would happen if they were to fall away. There is a deep precipice—what is the best way to keep anyone from going down there? Why to tell him that if he did he would inevitably be dashed to pieces. In some old castle there is a deep cellar where there is a vast amount of fixed air and gas which would kill anybody who went down. What does the guide say?

"If you go down you will never come up alive." Who thinks of going down? The very fact of the guide telling us what the consequences would be, keeps us from it. Our Friend puts away from us a cup of arsenic, he does not want us to drink it, but he says, "If you drink it, it will kill you." Does he suppose for a moment that we should drink it? No. He tells us the consequence and he is sure we will not do it. So God says, "My child, if you fall over this precipice you will be dashed to pieces." What does the child do? He says, "Father, keep me. Hold me up and I shall be safe." It leads the Believer to greater dependence on God, to a holy fear and caution, because he knows

that if he were to fall away he could not be renewed and he stands far away from that great gulf, because he knows that if he were to fall into it there would be no salvation for him.

It is calculated to excite fear and this holy fear keeps the Christian from falling. If I thought as the Arminian thinks, that I might fall away and then return again, I should pretty often fall away. For sinful flesh and blood would think it very nice to fall away and be a sinner—go and see the play at the theater, or get drunk—and then come back to the Church and be received again as a dear Brother who had fallen away for a little while. No doubt the minister would say, “Our Brother Charles is a little unstable at times.” A little unstable?! He does not know anything about grace—for grace engenders a holy caution, because we feel that if we were not preserved by Divine power we should perish.

We tell our friend to put oil in his lamp, that it may continue to burn! Does that imply that it will be allowed to go out? No, God will give him oil to pour into the lamp continually. Like John Bunyan’s figure—there was a fire and he saw a man pouring water upon it. “Now,” says the Preacher, “don’t you see that fire would go out, that water is calculated to put it out and if it does, it will never be lighted again?” But God does not permit that! For there is a man behind the wall who is pouring oil on the fire—and we have cause for gratitude in the fact that if the oil were not put in by a heavenly hand, we should inevitably be driven to destruction. Take care, then Christian, for this is a caution.

It is to excite our gratitude. Suppose you say to your little boy, “Don’t you know, Tommy, if I were not to give you your dinner and your supper you would die? There is nobody else to give Tommy dinner and supper.” What then? The child does not think that you are not going to give him his dinner and supper—he knows you will—and he is grateful to you for them. The chemist tells us that if there were no oxygen mixed with the air, animals would die. Do you suppose that there will be no oxygen and therefore we shall die? No, he only teaches you the great wisdom of God, in having mixed the gases in their proper proportions.

Says one of the old astronomers, “There is great wisdom in God, that He has put the sun exactly at a right distance—not so far away that we should be frozen to death and not so near that we should be scorched.” He says, “If the sun were a million miles nearer to us we should be scorched to death.” Does the man suppose that the sun will be a million miles nearer, and, therefore, we shall be scorched to death? He says, “If the sun were a million miles farther off we should be frozen to death.” Does he mean that the sun will be a million miles farther off, and therefore we shall be frozen to death? Not at all. Yet it is quite a rational way of speaking to show us how grateful we should be to God. So says the Apostle. Christian—if you should fall away, you could never be renewed unto repentance—then, by His grace, He keeps you—

“See a stone that hangs in air, see a spark in ocean live:

Kept alive with death so near, I to God the glory give.”

There is a cup of sin which would damn your soul, O Christian. Oh, what grace is that which holds your arm and will not let you drink it? There you are, at this hour, like the bird-catcher of St. Kilda—you are being drawn to Heaven by a single rope—if that hand which holds you let you go, if that rope which grasps you breaks—you are dashed on the rocks of damnation. Lift up your heart to God, then, and bless Him that His arm is not wearied and is never shortened that it cannot save. Lord Kenmure, when he was dying, said to Rutherford, “Man! My name is written on Christ’s hand and I see it! That is bold talk, Man, but I see it!” Then, if that is the case, His hand must be severed from His body before my name can be taken from Him. And if it is engraved on His heart, His heart must be rent out before they can rend my name out.

Hold on, then and trust, Believer! You have an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast, which enters within the veil—the winds are bellowing, the tempests howling—should the cable slip, or your anchor break, you are lost. See those rocks on which myriads are driving?—You are wrecked there if grace leaves you. See those depths in which the skeletons of sailors sleep?—You are there if that anchor fails you. It would be impossible to moor you again, if once that anchor broke, for there are no other anchors. There can be no other salvation—if that one fails you, it is impossible

that you ever should be saved. Therefore thank God that you have an Anchor that cannot fail and then loudly sing–

*“How can I sink with such a prop,
As my eternal God
Who bears the earth’s huge pillars up,
And spreads the heavens abroad?
How can I die, when Jesus lives
Who rose and left the dead?
Pardon and grace my soul receives
From my exalted Head.”*