

LYDIA'S CONVERSION.

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NOTE.

'Lydia's Conversion' is the former of two short treatises published in a small volume (18mo) in 1638. The general title-page will be found below.* Prefixed is Marshall's miniature portrait of Sibbes. The 'Rescue from Death; or, Return of Praise,' will be found in its place in Vol. VII. This little volume is exceedingly uncommon. G.

* THE
RICHES
OF
MERCIE.

In two Treatises;

1. *Lydia's Conversion.*
2. *A Rescue from Death.*

*By the late learned, and reverend
Divine, Richard Sibbs,
Doctor in Divinitie.*

Published by the Authors owne
*appointment, and subscribed
with his owne hand to prevent
imperfect Copies.*

1 Sam. 2. 6.

*The Lord killeth, and maketh alive;
hee bringeth downe to the Grave
and bringeth up.*

London

Printed by I. D. for *Francis
Egtesfeild*, and are to be sold by
him at the signe of the Ma-
rigold in *Paul's Church-
yard.* 1638.

LYDIA'S CONVERSION.

And a certain woman, named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, that worshipped God, whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended to the things that were spoken of Paul. And when, &c.—Acts XVI. 14, 15.

THE holy apostle, St Paul, a vessel of mercy, having found mercy himself of God, was a fit instrument to preach mercy to others.

Hereupon he was appointed to be a preacher to the Gentiles. Among the rest of the Gentiles, he was called to preach to them of Macedonia, and it was by a vision, as we see in the former part of the chapter. Verse 9: 'A man of Macedonia,' appeared to Paul by night, and said, 'Come to Macedonia and help us.' Indeed, the state of the people of Macedonia called for help; as now the state of many people doth. Though there be not such a vision as a man of Macedonia, yet their wretched estate, being under the kingdom of Satan, cries, 'Come and help us.' Though they do not cry with their mouths, yet their estate cries. The apostle upon this vision, takes his journey to come toward Macedonia; and he stayed there a good while; 'he abode certain days.'

Though God called him to Macedonia, yet God did not give him great encouragement for the present. This is the manner of God's carriage, not to discover at the present what he will do, but leads people on by gentle encouragements; and to humble them the more with little fruit at the first. He 'abode there certain days,' without any great fruit. Afterwards he goes out to Philippi, the chief city of Macedonia; and on the Sabbath day the people were gathered together, a company of women were resorted together, and there he preached to them. As indeed holy communion is never without a blessing. They met together on a good day, the Sabbath; and for a good end they were met together. Now Paul took the advantage of their meeting together on the Sabbath day. He cast his net, and he catcheth one with her family, namely, Lydia. The gospel was a sweet savour of salvation to her.

Hereupon there is a discourse of Lydia, a short story of Lydia, a story worthy to be thought of, which is in the words of my text.

'A certain woman named Lydia,' &c.

She is described, first, by her person and sex, 'a certain woman;' by her name, 'Lydia;' by her calling, 'a seller of purple;' by her city,

'Thyatira;' by her pious disposition, 'she worshipped God.' And then her conversion is set down by the cause of it: 'God opened her heart.' And what followed upon that opening of her heart: 'she attended to the things that were spoken by Paul;' and likewise, 'she was baptized with all her household. And then the sweet fruit that this conversion of her with all her household had, presently she shewed the love that she felt from God in converting her, to the blessed apostle and his company, 'She besought them, saying, If ye have judged me faithful to the Lord, come to my house,' &c., which words I shall unfold as I come to them.

'And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple,' &c.

First, here is a description of her person, and sex, and name, and calling, and city, and disposition.

God takes notice of all the particulars of those that are his. He delights to speak of them. Those that have their names written in the book of life, he knows their names, and callings, and persons. They are jewels in his eyes. They are 'written on the palms of his hands,' Isa. xlix. 16. He takes more special notice of them than of the rest of the world. Therefore the apostle is very punctual in the description of all particulars.

For her person I will be very short. I will give but a note or two, and so come to that I mainly aim at, her conversion.

'A certain woman named Lydia.'

For her sex, she and the rest were women that were gathered together, as we see in the former verse. 'In Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female,' Gal. iii. 28. Sin came in by a woman; and the means of salvation was by a woman too. Here were a company of women gathered together.

For the most part women have sweet affections to religion, and therein they oft go beyond men.

Reason 1. The reason is, religion is especially seated in the affections; and they have sweet and strong affections.

Reason 2. Likewise they are subject to weakness, and God delights to shew his 'strength in weakness.'

Reason 3. And thirdly, Especially child-bearing women, bring others into this life with danger of their own; therefore they are forced to a nearer communion with God, because so many children as they bring forth, they are in peril of their lives. Therefore the apostle here mentions a company of women that were gathered together, and among the rest, a 'certain woman named Lydia.'

What! a woman to be the foundation of the church of Macedonia; a poor woman! and then a jailor afterward, a rugged, rough jailor! For these to be the foundation of so famous a church as Philippi, and other churches in Macedonia! Oh yes! The kingdom of heaven is as 'a grain of mustard seed,' Mat. xiii. 31, small in the beginning. It is so in regard of the church itself; and in regard of the grace that every particular member hath. It is little and weak beginnings. Christians are not as the angels were, perfect at the first. The church grows by little and little. Therefore we should not be discouraged when the plantation of the gospel hath poor success at the beginning. We see in the church of Macedonia there was little success at the first. A woman and a rough jailor; a jailor that both by calling, and disposition, and custom, was a man hard and hardened too. Yet these two were the foundation of a great church.

Was it not so strange ourselves? The church of later times, in the time of reformation, how began it? By a child and a woman; King Edward the sixth, and Queen Elizabeth of famous memory. Therefore as the prophet saith, 'Who art thou that despisest the day of little things?' Zech. iv. 10. Despise not little things. There is nothing less than grace at the first. But as Christ the stock of Jesse, rose from the dead, and rose up to heaven, and overspreads the world now; so every Christian riseth of mean beginnings; and so doth the church itself. 'A certain woman named Lydia.' She was the foundation of a famous church.

Then she is set down by her calling.

'A seller of purple.'

God allows callings.

The calling of Christianity is shewed in particular callings, which are sanctified by God to subdue the excess of corruptions. Men without callings are exceedingly vicious, as some gentlemen and beggars. In this I may rank them together. Those that have no callings, nor fit themselves for a calling, and that are out of a calling lawful.

Callings are lawful; and so this calling of commerce and trade, 'a seller of purple.' Though for the most part men gather a great deal of soil and corruption, by co-mixture of manners with those they deal with, yet there must be commerce, and this particular commerce of 'selling of purple.'

The body of man needs many callings. There is not a part of man's body, not one member, but it sets a particular calling on work. Therefore this life is a life of many necessities; and there must be callings and trading, and this particular trading, 'selling of purple.' It may seem superfluous, but it is not altogether; for garments are for three ends:

For necessity, ornament, distinction.

Now purple, however it be not for necessity, it is for ornament and distinction; for magistrates and the like, persons of great quality. However the pride of the times hath bred a confusion, that one will go as well as another; yet God that allows distinctions of callings and persons, allows distinction of habit and attire. Therefore selling of purple is lawful, and the wearing of rich attire. 'Kings' daughters' went in such, as it is said of David's daughters,

So there be not over-much delicacy; for delicacy in this in these times is fatal, as there be many in the city and in the countries that are given to over-much nicety and sumptuousness in this kind. It is a fore-runner of ruin.

Otherwise it is lawful, for those that may, to wear purple, as it is lawful to sell purple. So that, as he said to the great emperor (*a*), they do not consider the purple, so much as that the purple covers dust and base flesh, that must turn to dust and ashes and rottenness ere long; so that people be not lift up in that that is borrowed from the poor creature, from worms. It is a strange thing that men should be so sick in their fancy, as to think themselves the better for that they beg of the poor creature. So a man take heed of fancy and pride, it is lawful to use purple. 'She was a seller of purple.' So much for her calling.

'She worshipped God.'

She was perhaps a Jew, and looked for a Messiah. There were three sorts of people before Christ. The Jews, and those which we call proselytes, and religious persons fearing God. She might be one of the three;

it is not certain what she was. Certainly she was one that feared God. She had some religion in her. Though yet she was not ripened in the true religion, she was a woman that 'feared God.'

From such kind of places as this, we have occasion to speak of works of preparation. St Paul was sent to her; she was a woman that feared God. To speak a little of works of preparation.

It is true God usually prepares those that he means to convert, as we plough before we sow. We do not sow among the thorns; and we dig deep to lay a foundation; we purge before cordials. It is usual in nature and in grace preparations; therefore preparations are necessary. There is such a distance between the nature and corruption of man and grace, that there must be a great deal of preparation, many degrees to rise by before a man come to that condition he should be in. Therefore preparations we allow, and the necessity of them.

But we allow this, that all preparations are from God. We cannot prepare ourselves, or deserve future things by our preparations; for the preparations themselves are of God.

And, thirdly, though we grant preparations, yet we grant no force of a meritorious cause in preparations to produce such an effect as conversion is. No. Only preparation is to remove the hindrances, and to fit the soul for conversion, that there may not be so great a distance between the soul and conversion as without preparation there would be.

Quest. But when is preparation sufficient?

Ans. When the soul is so far cast down as it sets a high price on Christ, and on grace, above all things in the world. It accounts grace the only pearl, and the gospel to be the kingdom of heaven. When a man sets a high price on grace more than all the world besides, then a man is sufficiently prepared.

Some poor souls think they are never prepared enough; but let them look to the end that God will have preparation for, that is, that a high price be set upon the best things, and value all things but grace meanly in their own rank. When a man is brought to that pitch that by the light of the Spirit he esteems all nothing but Christ, and that he must be had, and he must have saving grace, let him never talk whether he be prepared or no. This disposition shews that he is prepared enough, at least to bring him to conversion.

Now, God in preparation for the most part civiliseth people, and then Christianiseth them, as I may say; for the Spirit of God will not be effectual in a rude, wild, and barbarous soul; in men that are not men. Therefore they must be brought to civility; and not only to civility, but there must be a work of the law, to cast them down; and then they are brought to Christianity thereupon.

Therefore they take a good course that labour to break them from their natural rudeness and fierceness; as by nature every man is like 'a wild ass colt.' There cannot be more significant words, 'a colt, an ass colt, and wild,' Job xi. 12. Now, there is no sowing in the sand or on the water. There is no forcing of grace on a soul so far indisposed, that is, not brought to civility. Rude and barbarous souls therefore, God's manner is to bring them in the compass of civility, and then seeing what their estate is in the corruption of nature, to deject them, and then to bring them to Christianity, as we see here in Lydia.

For however there is no force of a meritorious cause in preparations to grace, to raise up the soul to grace; for, alas! that cannot be. It is not

in it to produce such a blessed effect. Yet notwithstanding it brings a man to a less distance than other wild creatures that come not within the compass of the means. Therefore usually to those that use the talents of their understanding and will, that they have, well, God after discovers himself more and more.

Therefore let all be encouraged to grow more and more to courses of civility and religion, and wait the good time till God shine on them in mercy. For though those courses can never produce religion, yet it brings men to a proximity and nearness to God and Christ, more than those that stand further off. But I will not force this point further at this time. 'She was a woman that feared and worshipped God.' She was faithful in that light she had; 'and to him that hath shall be given,' Mat. xiii. 12.

'She worshipped God.'

Not in any sight of her own. She had the grace of God from the Spirit of God. All fear comes from the Spirit of God, initial fear and ripened fear; all fear is from God, But I will not conflict with adversaries at this time. You see the person, a woman; her calling, 'a seller of purple;' and her pious disposition, she was such a one 'as worshipped God,' 'and she heard Paul.'

The sweet providence of God brings those that belong to election under the compass of the means at one time or other. Let the devil, and the instruments of the devil, rage and oppose, and do what they can, those that belong to God, God will have a time to bring them within the compass of his calling, and effectually call them by his Spirit. As here Lydia, there was a sweet preventing* providence that she never thought of. God brought an apostle for the salvation of her soul. She heard Paul, and was converted. To come to the description of her conversion in the next words.

'Whose heart the Lord opened to attend to the things that were spoken of Paul.'

God opened her heart. To what purpose? 'To attend to the things spoken of Paul.'

'God, by the word preached,' opens the hearts to attend to the word. By the word we are fitted to the word. The Spirit and the word draw us to themselves; the Spirit and the word draw us to regard the word; by the word her heart was opened to attend to the word.

First, I will speak of the opening her heart. And then of her attending upon the word preached by Paul, 'God opened her heart.' She was a religious woman, yet her heart was shut before God opened it. She was religious in her kind, yet her heart must be further opened before she could be saved. There is no staying in preparations in this or that degree, as many abortives in our times that make many offers. They have the Spirit of bondage, and are cast down; but there they stick, and never come to proof. But those that will attain to salvation must not rest in religious dispositions, in good affections, and gracious offers. They must go on further and further, as we see here: 'God opened her heart.'

Observe then in the opening of the heart these things.

1. First, *The heart is naturally shut and closed up*, as indeed it is to spiritual things. It is open enough to the world, and to base contentments here; but it is shut to heaven and heavenly things. Naturally it is clean locked up.

* That is, 'going before,' = anticipating.—G.

Partly in its own nature, being corrupt and earthly; partly because Satan he besiegeth all the senses, and shuts up all. There is a spirit of deafness and blindness, and a spirit of darkness and deafness in people, before God hath brought them by the powerful work of the gospel from the kingdom of Satan, that possesseth every man naturally. Naturally therefore our hearts are not open, but locked and shut up. That is supposed here. So that except God be merciful to break the prison, as it were, whereby by unbelief and the wickedness of our nature we are shut up, there is no hope of salvation at all. God opens the heart.

2. The second thing is this, that as our hearts are shut and closed up naturally, *so God, and God alone, opens the heart*, by his Spirit in the use of the means. God opened Lydia's heart.

God hath many keys. He hath the key of heaven to command the rain to come down. He hath the key of the womb; the key of hell and the grave; and the key of the heart especially. 'He opens, and no man shuts; and shuts and no man opens,' Rev. iii. 7. He hath the key of the heart to open the understanding, the memory, the will, and affections. God, and God only, hath the key of the heart to open that. It is his prerogative. He made the heart, and he only hath to do with the heart. He can unmake it, and make it new again, as those that make locks can do. And if the heart be in ill temper, he can take it in pieces, and bring it to nothing as it were, as it must be before conversion; and he can make it a new heart again. It is God that opens the heart, and God only. All the angels in heaven cannot give one grace, not the least grace. Grace comes merely* from God. It is merely from God. All the creatures in the world cannot open the heart, but God only by his Holy Spirit. For nature cannot do above its sphere, as we say, above its own power. Natural things can do but natural things. For nature to raise itself up to believe heavenly things, it cannot be. Therefore as you see vapours go as high as the sun draws them up, and no higher, so the soul of man is lift up to heavenly things by the power of God's Spirit. God draws us and then we follow. God, I say, only openeth the heart.

(1.) Because there is not only want of strength in the soul to open itself, but likewise there *is enmity and poison in the heart to shut itself, and shut out all goodness*. A man hath no senses to spiritual things, no eyes, no ears, no taste, no life. Nay,

(2.) *There is an opposition to all*. 'A natural man perceiveth not the things of God, neither can he,' 1 Cor. ii. 14. He wants senses, and those senses he hath are set against goodness, as the apostle saith, 'he esteemeth them foolishness.' I need not be much in so easy an argument, that you are well enough acquainted with. Naturally the heart is shut, and God only must open it.

Use. This should teach us patience, when we can do little good with those that are under us by all our instructions and corrections, wait the due time. Grace is not of thy giving. The heart is not of thy opening, or of any man's opening. Therefore as it is 2 Tim. ii. 23, *seq.*, wait and bear 'with patience men of contrary minds,' waiting when God in due time gives them grace to repent. Grace is God's creature. It is none of our own. Therefore take heed that we be not short and angry spirited. If we cannot have all we would have of those that are under us, children or servants, let us wait God's time. He opens the heart in his time.

And if we find not grace wrought in our own hearts at the first, or second,

* That is, 'altogether.'—G.

or third sermon, let us do as he at the Pool of Bethesda, lie there till the angel stir the water, till God be effectual by his Spirit. God doth it, and he only doth it, only we must wait. He will do it in his good time. Be not over short-spirited. This we ought to observe out of these words, 'God opened the heart of Lydia.'

The heart is put for the whole soul. He opened her understanding to conceive; for all things begin with heavenly light of the understanding. All grace comes into the soul by the understanding.

There is no sanctifying grace in the affections but it comes by enlightening the understanding. We see the grounds of it in the understanding first. God opens the understanding, and then he opens the memory to retain. That the memory may be as the pot of manna to hold heavenly things, he opens and strengthens it with retention to keep them, and he opens the will to close with holy things, and the affections to joy and delight in them. So the heart is the whole inward man. He not only enlightens the understanding, but infuseth grace into the will and affections, into the whole inward man. We must take it in that extent, for else if God should only open the understanding, and not through the understanding flow into the will by the power of his Spirit, the will would alway rebel, as indeed it is a poisonous thing. There is nothing so malicious, next the devil, as the will of man. God will have one way, and it will have another. Therefore God doth not only open the understanding to conceive, but he opens the will to close with and to embrace that that is good; or else it will take arms against the understanding in that that is good, and never come to the work of grace. Therefore take it so. He opened the will and affections as well as the understanding, though whatsoever is in the will and affections comes through the understanding, as well as heat comes through light. God opened her heart, to what end?

'To attend to the things that were spoken of Paul.'

The word signifies to apply and set her mind to the things that Paul said, to join and fasten the mind to what Paul said (*b*).

First, You see then, here is *the opening of the heart before there is attending*. Before there can be any attending and applying of the mind, the mind must be sanctified and strengthened. The soul must be sanctified before it can attend.

The reason is, nothing can flow but from a suitable faculty, and ability to attend is a power and act of the soul. It must come from a sanctified power of the soul. The heart must first be opened, and then the heart attends. God saith, he will circumsise the heart, and then we shall love him. He sanctifies the heart, and then it loves him. God changeth and altereth the frame of the soul, and then holy actions come from it. First, grace begins with the abilities and powers of the soul. The heart is opened, and then come holy actions suitable. There is no proportion between holy actions and an un sanctified soul. The heart must first be opened, and then it attends.

'Whose heart the Lord opened that she attended,' &c.

You see then, in the next place, that God opening the heart of any Christian, it is to carry the attention to the word. God by grace carries the heart to the word. 'She attended to what Paul spake.' Where true grace is wrought, it carries not to speculation, or to practise this or that idle dream; but where the heart is open, grace carries to attend to the word, especially to the good word, the gospel of Christ. As grace is wrought by the word, so it carries the soul to the word.

Use. And therefore it may be a use of trial, to know whether we have our hearts wrought on by the grace of God or no; whether God by his Spirit have opened our hearts or no, if our hearts be carried to the blessed word of God to relish that. If they be, God hath opened our hearts to attend to the word. And there is no better evidence of a child of God, than that that is fetched from the affection that he carries to the word and blessed truth of God. Oh, he relisheth it as his appointed food. He cannot be without it. Take away that, and you take away his life. 'My sheep hear my voice,' John x. 3. You are none of mine, because you hear not my word. A delight in the blessed truth of God is an argument that God hath first opened the heart.

Therefore poor souls, when they want good evidence, when they doubt whether their estate be good or no, let them consider what relish they have of divine truths; whether it be co-natural to the word* or no; whether it be savoury or no; whether they could be without the means of salvation or no; and let them judge of themselves by their delight in God's truth. Her heart was opened 'to attend to the word.'

'She attended to the things which were spoken of Paul.'

Which were the blessed truths of salvation, the forgiveness of sins, the free mercy of God in Christ. The particulars are not set down, but it was the gospel, and she believed upon it. Therefore it must needs be the word of faith. We see here then that

The seed and ground of faith is the gospel.

Her heart was opened to attend to that that Paul spake, which was the gospel. And indeed so it is. The foundation of faith, the word of faith, is the gospel. Nothing can breed faith but the word of God; for how can we hope for heaven and happiness, but by the mind of God discovered? Can we look for anything but God must discover his mind to bestow it? And where have we the mind and bosom of God opened to us? Is it not from the Scriptures, the word of God, from the good word especially? It is called the 'word of grace,' and 'the word of the kingdom,' and 'of glory,' the 'word of life;' because by it all these blessed things are conveyed to us.;

Now it is not the word simply here, but the word 'spoken by Paul;' that is, the word preached by an authorised minister is the usual means of faith. Her heart was opened to attend to what was spoken by Paul, an authorised minister. So the word preached is the ordinary, though not the sole foundation of faith. Therefore the apostle saith, that God by that converted the world, 'by the foolishness of preaching,' 1 Cor. i. 21. And in the ladder of heaven, in Rom. x. 14, *seq.*, 'How shall they call on him of whom they have not heard? . . . and how shall they preach except they be sent?' So there is no faith without teaching. The point is plain. You hear it oft. The word is the ground of faith; and the word especially as it is preached by a Paul, by a minister unfolding it.

Use. Therefore be stirred up, as ye favour the souls of God's people, to pray to God 'to send labourers into his harvest,' Mat. ix. 38; and to pray that the gospel, and the preaching of it, may have a free passage, that God would set up lights in all the dark corners of the kingdom, and everywhere to 'those that are in darkness, and in the shadow of death,' Ps. cvii. 10. And blessed are their endeavour that labour that the gospel may be preached in every part of the kingdom. For we see here it is the word unfolded, 'the unsearchable riches' of Christ spread open, the tapes-

* Qu. 'heart'?—Ed.

try laid open, that usually beget faith. The mine must be digged; people must see it familiarly laid open.

Therefore saith he here, Lydia's heart was opened, 'and she attended to the words spoken by Paul.'

Let this teach us to set a price upon the ordinance of God. Doth God set up an ordinance, and will he not give virtue and power to it? Yes. There is a majesty and a power in the word of God to pull people out of the kingdom of Satan, to the blessed light of God's kingdom. It was the word, and the word opened by the ministry of Paul.

But it was the word, and the word opened and attended to. She mixed it with her attention, and her heart closed with it. There are these three go together; the word, and the word preached, and then attending to the word preached. That was the ground of her faith; these three meeting together.

There are these four things must always be in the senses of our body. If we will see, there must be an object to see, we must see something; and a faculty to see, our eye; and then a light whereby we see; we cannot see in the dark. And then there must be an application of the eye to see the object by that light. So in spiritual things there is the blessed truth of God, the mercy of God in Jesus Christ. That we may see these things, we must have a light by which we may see them. And there must be a power to see, which is the sanctified, opened understanding. When the understanding is opened, then there is an application of the soul to attend to the word of God by the light of the word. So that there must be application and attention to the word. Before the word can do us good, it must be applied to the object, the taste to the thing tasted; and so in all the other senses.

Attention is a special thing. How many sermons are lost in this city, that are as seed drowned, that never come to fruit! I think there is no place in the world where there is so much preaching, and no place where there are so many sermons lost. Why? Because people want a retaining power and faculty to attend, and retain and keep what we hear. She '*attended to the word preached.*'

To give a little direction in this point of attending and applying the mind. Not to speak much, I will name two or three principal things that I think fit at this time.

1. If we should come, as we should, to the word preached: *Let us search our wants before we come, and all the occasions we shall have to encounter with; all temptations that we are like to encounter with, let us forecast by presenting to our souls.* I am weak in knowledge, and I want such graces. I am like to encounter with such temptations, I am too weak for it; I shall meet with such adversaries, I know not how to answer them; I am plunged in such businesses, I shall be lost in them without grace. Then the soul comes with a mind to be supplied; and then it will attend, and will pray for the preacher. Oh, Lord, direct him that he may speak fitly to me; somewhat for my understanding; somewhat for my affections; somewhat to help me against such and such a temptation. This is wanting; and therefore we profit no more by the word than we do.

2. Then when we come to hear the word, let us hear it *with all spiritual subjection, as that word that hath power to command the conscience.* This is the word of God. The minister of God speaks in the place of God to me. I must give an account of it. I will subject my conscience to it. It is spoken with evidence, and proved; I will stoop to it. Thus we should

come with subjection of soul and conscience to whatsoever is taught ; and not come to judge and censure, or to delight in it as music, as if we came to a play, to hear some pretty sentences. But come to hear God, as to the ordinance of God, come as to that word that shall judge our souls at the latter day. That is the way to attend.

3. Then again, if we would attend when we have heard the word of God, *let us labour by all means to bring it near to us, that it may be an 'engrafted word,'* James i. 21 ; that the soul may be leavened by it, that it may be so engrafted in the understanding and affections, that we may think the better in the virtue of it, and love, and speak, and do the better, as a scion* savours of the plant it is put into. Let us labour that the word of God may be written in our souls, in the tables of our hearts, that the truth of God may be near us, as any temptation shall be near us, or any corruption near us. What is the reason we yield to corruptions and temptations ? They are near and the word is far off. We never attended to the word to bring it near home. If the word were as near as corruptions and temptations, that it were engrafted and invested into the soul, we should have the word ready for every temptation. There should not be a temptation offered, nor a corruption arise, but we should subdue it and beat it down with the blessed truth of God accompanied with the Spirit. Let us labour to get it near us, that the reasons of the word and our reason, that the judgment of God and our judgment, that the will of God and our own will may be all one ; and so to have it incorporated and naturalized into our hearts, that we may speak, and think, and do nothing but that which is divine ; that is, to have the word written in our hearts, our attention should be to that end. Therefore, when we hear, we should do as nature doth with the meat we eat. It sucks out a strength suitable for every part. Every part hath a power to draw out nourishment, what is suitable to itself. So when we hear the word of God, we should be able to say, this is good for such and such an end ; and never leave thinking of the word of God when we have heard it, till we have turned the word into our souls, till we have it fixed in our understandings, that we can say, now I know it ; till we have subdued our hearts to it, and we be moulded and delivered up to it, that we can say, now I have it, now the word is mine. Let us never leave the truth we hear till we be brought to that. Alas ! to what purpose is it to hear except we make it our own, as nature makes the meat our own that we eat. There is a second or third digestion that goes before digestion be perfectly made, and the meat turned into it. It is ruminating and meditating, and altering of that we hear, and working on it ; that makes spiritual nourishment. Thus we should do to attend to purpose.

4. And that we may do it, *let us add some meditations to these practices.* Consider first of all whose word it is. It is the word of the great God, and the word of God for my good. It is the good word of God, and the word of God that brings me much good, eternal salvation, if I obey it. It is the word of God that brings eternal damnation, if I obey it not.

It is the word of the great King, a proclamation, a law whereby I shall be judged, and perhaps that word that I shall not hear another time. Perhaps the Spirit may work more now than at another time. Therefore I will be wise, and give way to the Spirit of God, and not beat it back. Perhaps I shall never have such a gale of the Spirit offered again. It may be the last sermon I shall hear while I live. We should have such meditations, we that speak, as if it were the last time we should speak ; and you

* Spelled 'sience.'—G.

that hear, as if they should be the last things that ever you should hear. For how do we know but it may be so? It is another manner of matter to hear than we take it. 'Take heed how ye hear,' saith our blessed Saviour, Luke viii. 18. We hear nothing but it sets us forward in the way of grace to heaven, or forward to hell. We are helped by it to heaven, or else hardened by it further to hell. We had need to take heed how we hear. We must be judged by that we hear; and that that we hear now negligently and carelessly, God will make good at the day of judgment. We may shake off, as profane spirits do, the minister's exhortations; but will you shake off 'Depart, ye cursed,' at the latter day? Matt. xxv. 41. Will you shake off that sentence, 'You would not hear me, and I will not hear you'? Oh no. Therefore shake not that off now that will be made good then. If thou entertain the gospel now, God will make it good then; if thou receive mercy now, he will shew that thou art acquitted then before devils, and angels, and men. Let us regard this, and let it make us hear the word with attention, as this good woman here. God opened her heart, 'and she attended to the things that were spoken of Paul.'

Quest. But you will ask, How shall I know a man whose heart is opened, and attends better than another man doth?

Ans. 1. I will give two or three brief rules of discerning. He that by the Spirit of God attends to the good word of God to purpose with an opened understanding, he not only knows the words, and the shell in preaching the word of God, *but the things*. He knows not only what faith and repentance is in the words, but he hath a spiritual light to know what the things are, what repentance is, and faith, and love, and hope, and patience; he knows the things. And likewise he that hath attended to purpose, he can do the things. He not only knows what he should do, but by the grace of the Spirit, and attending upon the word of God, he knows how to do them. Grace teacheth him not only that he should deny himself and 'live soberly, and righteously, and godly,' Titus ii. 12, but it teacheth him how to live soberly, and righteously, and godly. Grace, when we attend upon the word as we should, teacheth us to do the things, not only that we should repent and pray, &c., but to do them. It opens the things, and gives ability to do them.

And in the next place, those that attend as they should do, *there is a spiritual echo in their souls to everything that is taught*; that is, when they are exhorted to believe, they answer, Lord, I will believe; Lord, I will hear, I will repent, and I will take heed of such sins by thy grace. When God saith, 'Seek my face,' 'Lord, thy face will I seek,' Ps. xxvii. 8. This is the answer of a good conscience, this echo. Where there is attention to the word of God by the Spirit, there is an echo to that the Spirit speaks. Lord, it is good, and it is good for me if I yield to this; if I do not, it is naught* for me to put off repentance till another day; I desire to yield now, and Oh that my heart were directed! If it be rebellious, and not yielding, there is a desire that the heart may be brought into subjection to every truth revealed, there is a gracious echo in them that attend to purpose.

3. Then again, those that do attend from a sanctifying grace, they see things by another light, by a spirit of their own, by a heavenly light, by a *species* in their own kind, spiritual things with a spiritual light. Many come and hear sermons, and can discourse, and wrangle, and maintain janglings of their own, and all this out of natural parts, and out of pride

* That is, 'naughty,' = wicked.—G.

of heart ; but a gracious holy man sees spiritual things by a spiritual light in their own kind.

A man that is born in a dungeon, and never saw the light, when he hears discourse of the sun and stars, and earth, and flowers, and plants, he hath imaginations what they should be, but he fancies other things. So a man that never had spiritual eye-sight to see spiritual things in their kind, he fancies them to be this and that, but he sees them not by their own light. Many speak and talk of good things, but it is by the spirit of other men, out of books and hearing, and not by a spirit of their own. He that attends by grace, speaks out of a spirit of his own, and not out of other men's spirits. He sees spiritual things in their own colours. Thus we see how to discern spiritual attention.

4. And he that knows what this means, what it is to have his heart opened to attend, when he goes from hearing the word, *he judgeth of his profiting by it, not by what he can say by heart, but by how much the meeker he is, how much more patient, how much more able to bear the cross, to resist temptations, and to have communion with God.* So he values his attending upon the means and hearing the word by the growth of his grace, and the decay of his corruptions : 'she attended to the things that were spoken of Paul.'

'She was baptized, and her household.'

She had the means of salvation, and she had the seal likewise, which is baptism. We have all need of seals. We have need to have our faith strengthened. God knows it better than we ourselves. We think baptism and the communion small matters, but God knows how prone we are to stagger. He knows that all seals are little enough. Therefore it is said here, 'she was baptized, and all her household.' Baptism is a solemn thing ; it is the seal of the covenant of grace. You are well enough acquainted, I imagine, with the thing ; therefore I will not enter into the commonplace. It is needless. As the whole Trinity was at the baptism of Christ, so every infant that is baptised is the child of Christ. And it is a special thing that we should meditate of.

We slight our baptism, and think it needless. You see the holy woman here would be baptized presently ; she would have the seal of the covenant. There are many that are not book-learned, that cannot read, at least they have no leisure to read. I would they would read their book in their baptism ; and if they would consider what it ministers to them upon all occasions, they would be far better Christians than they are.

Think of thy baptism when thou goest to God, especially when he seems angry. It is the seal of the covenant. Bring the promise : Lord, it is the seal of thy covenant ; thou hast prevented* me by thy grace ; thou broughtest me into the covenant before I knew my right hand from my left. So when we go to church to offer our service to God, think, by baptism we were consecrated and dedicated to God. We not only receive grace from God, but we give ourselves to God. Therefore it is sacrilege for persons baptized to yield to temptations to sin. We are dedicated to God in baptism. When we are tempted to despair, let us think of our baptism. We are in the covenant of grace, and have received the seal of the covenant, baptism. The devil is an uncircumcised, damned, cursed spirit. He is out of the covenant. But I am in the covenant. Christ is

* That is, 'anticipated.'—G.

mine; the Holy Ghost is mine; and God is mine. Therefore let us stand against all the temptations of that uncircumcised, unbaptized, damned spirit. The thinking of our baptism thus will help us 'to resist the devil,' James iv. 7. He is a coward; if he be resisted, he will flee; and what will better resist him than the covenant of grace and the seal of it? When we are tempted to sin, let us think, What have I to do with sin? By baptism I have union with the death of Christ; he died to take away sin, and my end must be his. I must abolish sin in my nature. Shall I yield to that that in baptism I have sworn against? And then if we be tempted to despair for sin, let us call to mind the promises of grace and forgiveness of sins, and the seal of forgiveness of sins, which is baptism. For as water in baptism washeth the body, so the blood of Christ washeth the soul. Let us make that use of our baptism, in temptations, not to despair for sin. And in conversing among men, let us labour to maintain the unity of the Spirit 'in the bond of peace,' Eph. iv. 3, to live peaceably. Christians must not fall to jar. Why? 'There is one faith, and one baptism;' have we 'not all one Father,' ver. 5, one inheritance, one baptism, one religion? and shall we break one with another for trifles? They forget their baptism that are so in quarrels. Thus if we would think of it, it is such a book as would be ready at hand for all services.

And then for our children, those that God hath committed to us, let us make use of baptism. Do they die in their infancy? Make this use of it: I have assured hope that my child is gone to God. He was born in the covenant, and had the seal of the covenant, baptism; why should I doubt of the salvation of my child? If they live to years of discretion, then be of good comfort, he is God's child more than mine; I have dedicate him to God and to Christ, he was baptized in the name of Christ, Christ will care for him as well as for me. If I leave my children behind me, they are God's and Christ's children. They have received the seal of the covenant, baptism. Christ will provide for them. And he that provides heaven for them will provide all things in the way to heaven necessary. God hath said, 'I will be the God of thee and of thy children,' Ps. cxxxii. 12. They are in covenant. Thine they were, Lord. A man may commit his children to God on his deathbed: Thou gavest them me, and I commit them to thee again, as before I did by baptism. All this we have by thinking of our baptism. If we look no further, as profane spirits do not, than the water and the elements, we can have no comfort by these things; but we should consider God's blessed institution and ordinance to strengthen our faith. And to our children when they come to years, baptism is an obligation to believe; because they have received the seal beforehand, and it is a means to believe. 'She was baptized.'

'And her household.'

So good is God, where the governor of the family is good, he gives all the family good, because he makes conscience in governing and instructing them. God crowns their endeavours with success, that they shall be all good. As we see Abraham and his household, the jailor and his household, Zaccheus and his household. Oh, it is a blessed thing to be a good governor in a family. He brings a blessing upon his house, the church of God is in his house. There cannot be a more honourable title to any house than to say it is the church of God; that the governor of the family brings all in subjection to God; that as he will have all serve him, so he will have all serve God; that he will not have a servant but he shall be the servant of God, nor a child but he shall be the child of God; and he labours

to make his wife the spouse of Christ. Thus it should be said of every Christian family, and then they are churches.

Alas! in many places now they are hells, because there is little regard had of instructing of them. Beloved, many poor souls have had occasion to bless God for ever that they have been grafted into such good families. And put case sometimes thou hast instructed them and taken pains, and there is no good done. When thou art dead, and twenty years after, it may come to their minds all those instructions when they are in worse families. Oh! in such a place, with such a master, I had such instructions, but I had no grace to take good by them, but now I call them to mind. So the seed that was sown long before may take effect then. This should encourage those that are governors of families to be good. 'Lydia was baptized, and her household.'

'And she besought them, saying, If you have judged me faithful to the Lord, come to my house, and abide there.'

Here is the fruit of Lydia's conversion. When she was converted and baptized, she entreated the apostles to come to her house and abide there; and she prevailed. She constrained them by a moral kind of violence; they suffered themselves to be overcome.

'If you have judged me faithful, &c., come to my house, and abide there.'

Here is her invitation, and the argument that she foreeth it by. 'If you have judged me faithful to Christ, then come to my house.'

To speak a little of her argument, whereby she forced the blessed apostle and the rest to her house.

'If ye have judged me faithful.'

It is a most binding argument. If you judge me faithful, you must judge me a child of God, an heir of heaven, the spouse of Christ; you must judge me all these and the like. 'If you have judged me faithful, come to my house.' And if you judge me so, can you deny me this courtesy? It is a conjuring, wondrous forcible argument. 'If you have judged me faithful.'

It implies that St Paul and holy men would be more strange else; and so there should not be intimate familiarity—converse there may be, but not familiarity—with those that are not faithful. Indifferent carriage to all alike shews a rotten heart: those that make no difference between good Christians and formal hypocrites. No. But 'if you have judged me faithful, come to my house.' As if she had said, I know your spirits are such, that except you judge me faithful, you will not take this courtesy at my hands.

Again, she supposed, if Paul judged her faithful, he would not deny her that courtesy. Those that upon good grounds we judge faithful, we should be gentle to them and easy to be entreated. 'The wisdom that is from above is so,' James iii. 17. Grace sweetens the carriage and alters a man's disposition. Those that have felt pity from God are merciful to others. 'Therefore, if you have judged me faithful,' &c.

It was an argument of a great deal of sincerity to appeal to their knowledge and judgment. 'If you have judged me faithful.'

If she had not been sincere she would not have done so. But sincerity makes a man bold to appeal to God himself. 'Lord, thou knowest that I love thee,' saith St Peter, John xxi. 15; and 'If there be any iniquity in my heart,' saith David, Ps. lxxvi. 18. They dare appeal to God and to God's people: 'If ye have judged me faithful.'

In this speech, likewise, she desires to have confirmation of her estate from the apostles. And indeed it is a great confirmation of weak Christians to have the judgment of strong Christians that they are good, 'If you have judged me faithful,' do me this courtesy. And would it not comfort her soul to have the judgment of so strong a man as Paul?

It is a great strengthening, not only to have the Spirit of God witness for us, but the Spirit of God in others. And sometimes in temptations, the judgment of others will do us more good than our own in a dark state. Therefore we should appeal to those that fear God to judge us faithful, though we be in a mist and in darkness sometimes, that we are not able to judge of our own condition.

And indeed, when we judge the people to be truly good and true-hearted to God, we owe them this duty: to think them good people, and to shew it, it is a debt. We wrong good persons when we take wrong conceits of them. Shall we not affect* and love them that God loves? It is as if she had said, God hath taken me into his family, and will admit me to heaven, and will not you come to my house? When Christ shall take men to be members of his body, shall not we take them into our company. It is a wrong to good people to be strange to them. Sometimes there may, by way of censure in some sin, be a little strangeness, but ordinary strangeness becomes not Christians. It becomes not that sweet bond, 'the communion of saints.' 'If you have judged me faithful.' That is the bond. Her invitation is,

'Come to my house, and abide there.'

You see many sweet graces presently after she believed. Here is a loving heart. Why did she desire them to come to her house? To express the love she did bear to them for their work's sake. She felt the love of Christ by their ministry; and now she desired to express the fruit of her love in maintaining them.

And not only so, but she desired to be edified by them. She was youngly planted, and she desired to be watered from them. She knew Paul would drop heavenly things, and give her that that might stablish her; therefore she desired that they would stay at her house, that she might have benefit by their heavenly discourse, and be built up and edified further and further.

So you see these two graces especially upon believing, a bountiful, loving heart. She entreated them not only to come to her house, but to abide there a good while, as they did. And here was her desire to be edified, and a boldness to appear to own Christ and his ministers in dangerous times. For in those times it was a dangerous thing to appear to be a Christian. They were worse hated than the Jews were. Though both were hated, yet Christians were above all. Therefore false Christians would be 'circumcised,' they would be Jews to avoid the cross, that they might not be accounted Christians.

You see in general true faith, that works love, and works by love. It works love in the heart, and by love it works all duties of hospitality and bounty by love. When it hath wrought that holy affection, it works by that holy affection. You see here it is never without fruit; presently faith brings forth fruit. As soon as she was baptised, she shews her love to the apostles, and their company, and her bounty and her boldness in the cause of Christ.

We say of a graft, it is grafted to purpose if it take and bring forth fruit;

* That is, 'choose.'—G.

so she being a new scion* graft into Christ, she took presently. As soon as she was baptised into Christ, here is the fruit of love, and bounty, and boldness in the cause of Christ. Zaccheus, as soon as ever he believed, 'Half my goods I give to the poor,' Luke xix. 8. So we see the jailor afterwards, presently upon believing he entertained the apostles with a feast, and washed their wounds.

Take heed of a barren, dead faith. It is a false faith. If thou believe indeed, faith will work love, and work by love, as it did in this blessed woman. Her faith knit her to Christ in heaven. Her love was as the branches of the tree. Her faith knit her to the root; but love as the branches reached to others; her branches reached fruit to the apostle and his company. So it is the nature of faith that knits us to Christ. The same spirit of love knits us to others, and reacheth forth fruit to all we converse with.

As we desire to have evidence of the soundness of our faith, let us see what spirit of love we have, especially love to these three things.

1. *Love to Christ*, to whom we are engrafted, and,

2. *Love to the ministers of Christ*. We cannot shew kindness to Christ. He is in heaven. But his ministers and his poor are upon the earth; when we can, buy ointment to pour on Christ's feet, his poor members, and his ministers.

3. And *love to the word of God*. They are the three issues of a gracious, believing heart, and where they are not there is no faith at all.

I beseech you, let us imitate this blessed woman. You see here the name of Lydia is precious in the church. The name of Lydia, as it is said of Josiah, it is a box of ointment poured out. The name of Lydia cannot be named in the church, but there is a sweet savour with it. As soon as she believed, the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of God blowing upon the garden of her heart, where the spice of grace was sowed, stirred up a sweet scent of faith, and of bounty, and liberality in the cause of Christ.

Let not this be in vain to us, but every one of us labour to be like Lydia. You see what loadstone drew Paul here to go unto her house; she had faith, and she expressed it in love.

Let us labour to have faith, and to express it in love to God, unto Christ, to his people, and word, and ordinances, that have his stamp on them; and let us boldly own the cause of Christ; let us not regard the censures of vain men that say thus and thus. Faith and love forget danger; it is bold. She forgot all the danger that she was in by countenancing Paul and such men.

Let us labour for faith and love, and we shall not say this and that. 'There is a lion in the way,' Prov. xxii. 13; but we shall go on boldly until we do receive the end of our faith and love, 'the salvation of our souls.'

* Spelled 'sience.'—G.

NOTES.

(a) P. 521.—'Purple.' Probably the reference is to Tertullian. Cf. footnote, page 89.

(b) P. 525.—'The word signifies to apply and set her mind,' &c. The word is *προσέχω*, on which cf. Dr Robinson's interesting article in his *Lexicon*, *sub voce*. Literally here = to apply the mind; but often in the Classics with the accessory idea of believing, giving credence. G.