

THE FORM OF SOUND WORDS

by J. K. POPHAM

"Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 1:13)

"The form of sound words" is a Divine form. It descended out of heaven from God. It expresses the mystery of God's will and good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself. It is the new covenant which he will make, whereby the first covenant waxes old, and is "ready to vanish away." It embraces the whole doctrine of Christ. Its very words were spoken in the counsel of peace, and given to the eternal Son to speak when, in the fullness of the time, he came to seek and save the lost (John 8:28). By special revelation the Apostle Paul received and wrote it in wondrous fullness and beauty to the Ephesians. It was implicit in the prophecy and promise of the Seed of the woman, and enlarged in the promise and covenant with Abraham. Indeed, "the form of sound words" shines throughout the inspired Scripture in the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth. The ocean of infinite love is seen flowing from the Lord of glory to the predestinated objects. Implicit in it is the church, created after the image of her Head, "where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all and in all." This, dear friends, is in brief "the form of sound words" to which I am to draw your attention; and of which the Apostle says, "The things that thou hast heard of me.....the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." Titus had the same charge, and it spreads over the whole church, it belongs to all who fear God. No penetrating human intellect, no mere human conception of words, could have created this beautiful "form of sound words." It is Divine. Jehovah only and alone could be the Author of the revelation of himself, his will, and his purposes. Herein the wisdom, love, and care of the Lord for his people shine, in giving the infallible Scriptures. He will have them know that when they read the Holy Scriptures, they read that on which they may depend. The Papist, for his additions and traditions, will suffer the just anger of God; the Modernist will suffer the awful resentment of Jehovah for his daring criticisms and taking from the infallible Word. Dear friends, hold fast the precious Word of God, though it may bring persecution, "the afflictions of the gospel," in some form. For preaching the gospel, the Apostles of Christ suffered persecution; and so have, and so will all the Lord's people who will live godly; they are set for signs and wonders in Israel with their blessed Head. Observe the context: "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner; but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel, according to the power of God." The afflictions of the gospel" are temptations, indwelling sin (Gal. 5:17), the bruising of Christ's heel (Gen. 3:15), and outward trials, persecutions.

First: The Fall of Adam very solemnly made way for the predestinated manifestation of sovereign wisdom, love, and power in the Lord Jesus. He was promised and typed out in the Mosaic, Levitical dispensation. The promises were not "received," fulfilled, "that they without us should not be made perfect" (Heb. 11:39,40). "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law" (Gal. 4:4). "And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory, the glory as of the only

begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Thus the eternal Son, the willing Servant of his Father, in whose bosom he had eternally been, possesses and reveals "the form of sound words." In the 17th chapter of John, Christ prays that his people "may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." Whatever God is, is in Christ: "For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). Believer, never look for any goodness, any manifestation of the glory of God in your soul, apart from Jesus Christ. Whatever communications of life, love, wisdom, grace, patience, faithfulness, and power God may make to you, he will make through him in whom all those things are in their perfection. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself," in his covenant of peace in Christ. The more the Spirit of Christ is in us, the more clearly and powerfully will he be taking us from time to time out of our wretched selves into the glorious Person of Jesus Christ. The more we see of him, the more we shall love him, and cleave to him as "the Prince of life, the God of all patience and goodness." Everything that is desirable and needed for salvation, God has put in his Son Jesus Christ. And this was necessary, as we shall see, if we consider the effect of the Fall. For we are "alienated from the life of God" through ignorance and wicked works; and if Jehovah is to be gracious to us, it must be in another, even the Lord Jesus. He reconciled us to himself, "in the body of his flesh through death," comforts us with love, and brings us again and again to receive every good thing from him. Thus Christ becomes the center, the circumference, the life, the light, the beauty, and the sweetness of all spiritual good. "Christ is all and in all."

Now this will meet a wonderful thing, namely, the increase in painful experience of our own wickedness, the deformity of our nature, the absolute absence of goodness, and the impossibility in us of doing anything pleasing to God in this nature. This perfection in Christ, I say, meets that. The lower you sink in self-estimation, the higher will Christ rise in your esteem as he is revealed by his Spirit. The weaker you feel, the more you will value, when it is made over to you, the strength of God, which is Christ. Let me just say this to you: Cleave to this truth, that all the holy properties, all the glorious perfections of Jehovah, all grace, and salvation, are in the Lord Jesus Christ. Turn, then, your eyes away from all imagined good in yourselves, yea, in God's wonderful works of creation, and look to him in whom "it pleased the Father" that all fullness should dwell.

Second: "The form of sound words," leads me to observe that the incarnation of the Son of God was necessary. If we are saved, there must be a "Mediator between God and us, the man Christ Jesus." O the sacred covering of that mediation, the blessedness of that mediation! All our deformity, wickedness, corruptions, derelictions of duty, everything that is evil in us, if we by the Holy Spirit ever approach God, will be covered by the Mediator of the new covenant. Faith says,

"Tis he instead of me is seen
When I approach to God."

That when known is one of the sweetest of all comforts. For it is to be accepted of God in the Mediator, protected in the Mediator from the blazing flame of Divine justice due to us; to have comfortable approaches to God in the Mediator, promises made over to us through him, the smile of God through him. In a word, all the gracious dealings of God with his people, his power in them to subdue their iniquities and bruise Satan under their feet, are by the most glorious Mediator. GREAT IS THE MEDIATOR.

Third: The incarnation of the Son of God was necessary also, (i) That He might be tempted of the devil. The temptation was not a probation. It were blasphemy to think thus of it. He stood not for himself. All his life, his obedience, and death, were vicarious. His victory in the wilderness of temptation secures his people when they come to be tempted. "There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it." (ii) It was necessary for his federal work. The doctrine of federation is a doctrine of the Scripture. It is based upon the new covenant, and is the foundation and cause of union. When the Lord of life came to redeem his people, he came not as a stranger to them, but as their Kinsman, their Head. Federation only can bear the weight, justice, and glory of substitution. The Lord did not suffer unjustly. It was not an act of injustice when his Father was pleased to bruise him and to put him to grief, to call on the sword of infinite and gracious relationship Christ received the imputation of sin. It pleased God to make him "to be sin for us," whence he became liable for the debt, punishment, shame, and death, due to his brethren. Hence, in dealing with the Surety and Substitute, infinite justice saw not the church, but claimed all at his hands; and he lovingly, willingly met the claim. This secret of the Lord was hidden in God before the foundation of the world, but is now made known to his saints. O the wonder and glory of the mystery of the counsel of Jehovah, "Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will!" Here is found the vicarious nature of the life, obedience, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest. Thus in him "mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other," on the cross. Therefore death had no more claim on him, he could not be righteously holden of death, and he raised himself from the dead. "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.....I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." His glorious resurrection was attested. On various occasions he manifested himself to his disciples, showed himself to above five hundred brethren at once. What a blessed congregation that was, five hundred saints at one meeting! Afterwards he led his disciples out as far as to Bethany, breathed on them, and was received up into heaven.

Now I apprehend this is the very soul and substance of "the form of sound words;" and I have brought it before you, that you may see, if the Spirit gives you light, that it does not simply mean so many detached doctrines, ordinarily known as the doctrines of grace. It embraces them, and the whole is in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, as I have endeavoured to set before you. If you by faith hold the Head, you hold all. If you reach by faith this blessed Person and his work, you reach the whole of "the form of sound words." Salvation is all in him, though you may not apprehend all the particulars of it. Everything in vital religion, in salvation, takes that form. Are you accepted of God? It is in the Beloved. Do you get any access to God? It is through Christ by the Spirit. Do you worship God? It is in his Son.

"There he is love, and there alone."

Do you depend on God? It is in Christ. So, believing friends, take courage; in your desponding hours look to him; in your temptations look to him; in your weakness hang on him. "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness leaning on the arm of her beloved?" Do you feel dead? He is the resurrection and the life. Do you feel your weakness? He is the strength of God. Are you in darkness? He is the light of life. Are you ashamed of your rags? "This is the name wherewith he

shall be called, The Lord our righteousness." Do you feel your unholiness? He "of God is made unto us....sanctification." So you have all here.

And yet "the form of sound words," admits of other observations, as, "Who 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." Which means election: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." Think of it: "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand....it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger." We stand before a holy God. He owes us nothing but wrath and curse. O, if every one in this congregation were divinely taught to believe that, that God owes each individual here, and each man and woman in the whole world, nothing but curse, perdition; if the Lord brings us face to face with that terrible truth respecting our own particular selves, we shall be amazed and ashamed. If you turn away from it, if you are ready to curse it, you will only hurt yourselves, and dying so, be punished endlessly. I remember when I was ready to curse God, when the doctrine I am naming to you was first brought to my notice. It will come to this point, and I entreat you to listen to it. Answer the question in your own consciences now. What does God owe to you as you are fallen creatures? Have you done any good, that he should pay you a reward? Have you offered him anything that could please him? Have you brought a price to him that he will accept? A glimpse into, and some experience of, the fallen nature that you have, will evoke, make necessary, this answer, "Nothing; nothing but sin have we in our nature, nothing but sin have we done, for without faith we only sin: 'Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.'"

But see the love and glory of the doctrine. Chosen in Christ, loved in Christ, redeemed by Christ, regenerated by the Spirit of Christ, brought into the experimental knowledge of your need of Christ, blest with a sense of the love of Christ, the death of Christ, the glory of Christ, what a favour! Suppose your beginning was small, suppose you say, "When I look back I can hardly discern when I became acquainted with my sinfulness. Only I can and do now say, 'One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see.'" Suppose that be true of you, God may greatly increase your latter end. If you have early rain in its season, softening the ground which is ploughed and prepared and dressed, and the seed of truth sown in it, it will grow, even though you know not how; there is the blade, then the ear. And as it grows, the season comes when the latter rain falls; the harvest then is approaching. "This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise." that is, my glory. Grace here is glory in the bud; it must issue in the glory of God in you. "Called with an holy calling," quickened according to the good pleasure of his will. This gracious work is for the praise of the glory of his grace. O wonder, that a sinner should be for the glory of God in this world and the world to come!

But this sinner is brought into court by the law, and satisfaction is demanded, satisfaction which he cannot give. This process is in the conscience also, which speaks for God and against himself. His sad complaint is, "I am undone, lost, my rags condemn me, I am loathsome." But Christ comes into the court, he justifies the ungodly. Faith receives the sentence, and rejoices with joy unspeakable. The Saviour brings his righteousness, and its salvation is not far off.

Yet another point before I close, namely, sanctification. It is never far from justification. There is much talk about sanctification, the deepening of the spiritual life, dedication to God, and much

Arminian rubbish. Sanctification, according to Scripture, has two meanings. Christ is made sanctification to his people; as their holiness he is imputed to them (1 Cor. 1:30). But sin is in the justified person, his corruptions cost him many hours of his sleep; and the more grace he has, the more sorrow he feels, he sighs and groans. The blessed reason sin does not gain the victory, is that he is not under the law, but under grace, the sanctification of the Spirit. He purifies the heart by faith: "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil." "O how love I thy Law!" The sanctification of the Spirit follows imputed sanctification. Yet in the experience of many the Spirit's work is first by years. It is a mystery. For the more grace the heavier the conflict. The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." But much as the flesh lusts against the Spirit, he purifies the heart by faith. Much of his work lies in making the sinner acquainted with the prophet's complaint: "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." O the pain, the sorrow, the shame of it! But this is not all. The same Holy Spirit works in the mourner, "both to will and to do God's good pleasure," which is to believe on him whom he hath sent. This believing pleases God (Heb. 11:6). Notwithstanding, all the subjects of the Spirit's work know that it means conflict, as he is the Spirit of judgment and the Spirit of burning. Also the Holy Ghost is the "other Comforter" promised by the Lord Jesus. Herein is the Redeemer glorified. Very briefly this is the "sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the Truth." Amen

To omit from the form of sound words the Person and work of the Holy Ghost would be a grievous and sinful omission. He is God, a Person in the ever adorable Trinity, equal in essence, power and glory with the Father and the Son. The Scripture abundantly proves this. He is God. The Apostle Peter charged Ananias with lying unto God, and not unto men. The Spirit proceeds from the Father, and the Son sends him. He was an active Almighty Worker in creation: "Darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." When Jehovah would create man, he said, "Let Us make man in our image, after our likeness." As the Spirit of Christ he was in the Prophets, "when he testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow." When the fullness of the time came, he begat the sacred humanity the Son of God took into union with himself. The angel told Mary that the Holy Ghost should come upon her, and the power of the Highest should over-shadow her. It was the Holy Ghost who, by David, "spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus." He it was who filled the disciples on the day of Pentecost. He raised Christ from the dead, and dwells in the saints (John 14:17), and will quicken their mortal bodies at the resurrection (Romans 8:11). Surely these testimonies establish the Divine Personality and work of the Holy Ghost. I will therefore add only one or two further observations. The very remarkable and solemn teaching of Christ concerning his Spirit: "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men" (Matt. 12:31-32). God of his much mercy grant to us spiritual understanding in the "mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ," that we may be sincere, humble, worshipful Trinitarians. Surely the Unitarian's denial of the Triune Jehovah, and therefore of the Holy Ghost, is blasphemy. How ought all, to whom the Holy Ghost has been given, to honour him! He is the "other Comforter." He bears witness of Christ, takes of his perfecting death and the covenant, and shows them to us, (Heb. 10:14-18). Solemnly, tremblingly, we should hold the truth that the Holy Ghost is capable of being grieved. The Jewish church rebelled and vexed him, "therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them." Sword, famine, pestilence expressed his fighting. O for grace to keep us from grieving this most gracious Spirit,

whose grace has been so great to and in us. Well will it be if we duly consider his solemn work of fighting against those who provoke him. We are exhorted not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God. The sin of grieving him is very great when viewed in the light of his kindness to us, for he has sealed us unto the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30). His fighting against any of his people means spiritual famine, pestilence, and the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, in the conscience. The lack of the salt of the covenant is quickly followed by the outbreak of corruption. O, it is an evil thing and bitter to grieve the Holy Spirit.

His indwelling makes the saint his temple. "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" (1 Cor. 6:19). It is therefore unspeakably sinful to grieve him. The work of the Spirit is likened to a building: "Ye are God's building, builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." Further, it branches out into many particulars. For example, conviction of sin which is spiritual. There is a natural conviction, seen in many who are brought up under the truth. It may be so with some of you. May the Spirit of Christ grant that it may continue with you, though you have no grace, because by that you will be restrained from living in open sin; but may more than that come to you. Divine illumination in the heart and understanding is the manifestation of the being of God in his holy properties and infinite perfections; and the light of them shining into the heart of a sinner shows him his sins. That is very different from a natural idea of sin. The one, if it is powerful enough, will bring a great deal of remorse; the other will bring repentance, repentance not toward yourself, like Esau's, but "repentance toward God," which will give you to understand David's confession": "Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." O think of it! "done this evil in thy sight." "Not before man," you may say of your sins; "they are done in secret," yes, and God knows them.

The Spirit of God is promised by Jesus Christ as a Comforter. Christ was going to heaven, and he said to his mourning disciples, "If I go away, I will send you another Comforter. My Father will send him, and I will send him." The especial objects of that sending are to convince of sin, and then to take of Christ's things and show them to the soul. The sight of Christ that the Spirit gives, is that of his Person, his suffering and crucifixion, making "eternal redemption." "He shall take of mine," receive of mine in the covenant of grace. That is the Divine method: "He shall receive of mine as my Minister, as the other Comforter whom I will send; and he will bring my things to you." O the wonder that anyone should at any time receive this Divine Teacher and heavenly Comforter, bringing to him the things of Christ, revealing, "the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness!" That fountain in its efficacy applied, the sinner's sins are gone. He brings Christ's beauteous robe, Christ's gold, wonderful gold, tried gold, Christ's eye salve, Christ's riches. Thus he make's efficacious Christ's heavenly counsel: "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, and white raiment and eye salve." The Spirit's work is there. A most important work of the Spirit is in prayer. The eternally designed blessings he teaches the sinners to pray for. He "helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." "He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." Often not knowing what the will of the Lord is in regard to our condition, spiritual needs, or providential trials, how could we, unaided, know what to pray for? Through his merciful work as, "the Spirit of grace and of supplications," prayer is made, the mouth is opened wide, large petitions are presented for the blessings stored up in Christ, and ready to be bestowed.

Another work of the Spirit is to seal the soul, "unto the day of redemption." "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." This is carried to the whole church: "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed." That is the church of God. It may be years before the sealing comes to the individual; but when he is sealed, the experience is, "I am by beloved's, and my beloved is mine."

Again. He is given as, "the earnest of the inheritance." The Lord does not give a piece of the world to a child of his, and say, "This is your portion." No; he brings a piece of heaven, and gives it to him, saying, "This is a part of your inheritance, which is undefiled and fadeth not away; it comes from it, belongs to it. You are going to heaven, and this is a piece of heaven. God has loved you, and this is his love." That brings the love of God, the grace of Christ, the communion of the Holy Ghost. These mercies are thus spoken of by Paul: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?"

The work of the Spirit, then, is the work of grace. From the new birth to the entrance into heaven, all is the work of the Holy Ghost, Christ's minister, for the purpose of uniting experimentally the church to Christ and the Father: "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfect in one," (John 17:23). Thus we are saved from the world, and received by the Father, who says, I "will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters: saith the Lord Almighty," (2 Cor. 6:18). Thus the Eternal Three are made known in the church, whereby she is separated unto God. She is consecrated unto God. The word, "consecrate", is much abused today. Men talk of consecrating themselves to God, deepening the spiritual life, and all that kind of Arminianism. Real consecration is, according to the word used in Holy Scripture, "filling the hands." The hands of the high priest, when he was consecrated to his office, and then ministered, were filled with sacrifices. When the Holy Ghost brings a sinner to that point, mourning his sins, his hands of faith and love are filled with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Then he is acceptable, he is accepted. Thus the Person of the Holy Ghost and his work form a large and important part of, "the form of sound words." Never, O church of God here, think for a moment of omitting the Holy Ghost in any way from, "the form of sound words." It is a sin to omit him, or to think lightly, slightly of him.

There are other things that might be said of the Person and work of the Holy Spirit which I cannot enter into now, but several may be mentioned. The Holy Spirit is, "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," whereby all who walk after the Spirit are without condemnation. He is the Spirit of wisdom, whereby men are made, "wise unto salvation." He is the Spirit of revelation, revealing the Lord Jesus. He is the Spirit of prayer and of supplication. Men pray well when they pray by the Holy Ghost. Others may chatter with many words without a breath of prayer; and some pray, and utter not a word; they sigh and groan: "We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened." Also Romans 8:26. But I must leave these points for the present. I have brought before you, my beloved friends, this fundamental of our faith, this blessed part of, "the form of sound words." Not so many doctrines which you can reel off without gracious experience, but a solemn manifestation of the purpose, will, love, grace, and power of God revealed in Holy Scripture, and in some measure in the saints of the Most High God. You may have a great deal of religion without this wonderful form in your souls; but if it be in your souls, hold it fast. May the

Lord command his blessing to rest upon us as a little body of people, that we may "hold fast" what is revealed in the Scripture and in us. Amen

I proceed. The Apostle Paul tells us that God would save us, "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 is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." This appearing of Emmanuel was first at his miraculous birth. But few men honoured him. His Father commanded the heavenly host to celebrate so glorious an event, saying: "When he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." But the serpent was in Herod, whom he moved to attempt his destruction. But the Saviour was born a King, to receive a kingdom; no Satanic measures could compass his destruction. he came to destroy the works of the devil, and he could not fail to finish the work he was sent to do. Further, the holy, just and good God could not deal immediately with sinful men, so he sent his only begotten Son to bear testimony of his gracious purpose, and declare his pleasure to the church, (Psalm 40:7-10). He who is the brightness of his Father's glory and the express image of his Person, made himself of no reputation, took on him the form of a servant, that grace and truth might come by him to lost men. And the gracious words he was sent and taught to speak, (John 8:28), he gave to his disciples: "I have given them the words which thou gavest me." When the famishing people cried to Pharaoh for bread, he said to them, "Go unto Joseph." When broken sinners are led to seek God for the forgiveness of their sins, the Spirit of God in them leads them to Christ for all that God will give them, even salvation. That most blessed One has all they need. Never therefore, dear friends, expect to see God, or receive blessings from him except through his only begotten Son. Would you be beholding the glory of the Lord and enquiring in his temple? Christ is the Minister of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man, in which he dwells with men and wipes away all tears from their eyes. May the Holy Ghost take of those things, yea, all the things of the Lord Christ, and reveal them to us.

I am now to bring before you another very important part of, "the form of sound words." Let me first of all remind you of the truth that, "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine," (2 Tim. 3:16). If we neglect any part of the inspired Word, it is our sin and loss. The doctrine I am now to bring before you is, "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." She has existed from eternity in the council of peace and purpose of God, and is for his glory. It behoves us therefore to reverently look into that which he has made for his glory, his house, habitation and rest, which he has desired, and where he will dwell for ever, (Psalm 132, Eph. 3:21). Directing Timothy in regard of officers and the ruling of the church of God, the Apostle, in the event of his inability to see him shortly, writes: "If I tarry long, follow my guidance, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." It is in this church that the glory of God by Jesus Christ is to shine throughout all ages, world without end. It would seem therefore very difficult to overstate the importance of the subject I am now to bring before you: The Church of God.

[i] She is invisible. She is the body, the bride of Christ, chosen in him before the foundation of the world, and made, "the fullness of him that filleth all in all." She is many members, but one in Christ, (Romans 12:5). "My dove, my undefiled is but one," ever only one; "that they all may be

one." Christ's kingdom is not of this world, but a spiritual body, mystical, always the same living perfect church, without increase or decrease, (Psalm 45:13). The Prophet Ezekiel and the Apostle John each received a vision of the church in her perfection, "that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God." This glorious city is, "for an habitation of God through the Spirit." As, "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for the that love him," so the church is unknown in the world in her spiritual being. Some of you may now be turning into yourselves, and seeing and feeling your sins, corruptions and changes, be ready to conclude that your spot is not the spot of God's people, and therefore you cannot belong to the blessed church of God. Of this painful experience I shall, as enabled, speak later. Meanwhile labour to enter into Christ, in whom the church is, and is untouched by the ebb and flow of circumstances, varying experiences, and the sovereign planting and judicial plucking up of visible churches. The immutable state of the invisible church of God is full of comfort to faith. "Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure; yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end. The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee, (Psalm 102:25-28).

[ii] I am now to speak of the visible church or churches. They have existed and been known since Adam and Eve. Abel, Enoch, Noah, and the elders who obtained a good report, they were visible believers; the world knew them. Providence created them and set them for signs and wonders: "Ye are my witnesses." Many and very different have been the phases of visible churches in the world. They have been a battlefield. Of their own selves evil men have arisen, grievous wolves have entered the folds, not sparing the flocks. Errors, errorists, false prophets, have turned many away to another gospel which is not another. These things have needed the three-score valiant men about Solomon's bed with their swords, being expert in war; or to change the figure, when the horns of an enemy have scattered the saints, God has sent carpenters to fray them, (Zech. 1:18-21). Thus she has been, "terrible as an army with banners." Anon, the visible church has been fair as the moon, clear as the sun, prosperous and full of peace. Always since her apostasy the great whore of Rome has employed her ecclesiastical and political power, her golden cup, to exterminate the church of God, but has not succeeded, and will not. What we may more fear today is Modernism; it is rife, and threatens to flood and drown all faith in God. But ultimate destruction awaits the destroyer.

The first New Testament gospel church met in an upper room on the eve of the day of Pentecost, when that mighty effusion of the Spirit, spoken of by Joel and all the Prophets with more or less distinctness, came, and there were added that day about three thousand additions to the one hundred and twenty. Listen to their conviction of sin by the Holy Ghost: "Men and brethren, what shall we do? We are sinners, we are lost, what shall we do?" "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," was the inspired answer. The jailor, "What shall I do to be saved?" Lydia, with her heart, "opened, that she attended unto the things spoken by Paul." The grandmother and mother of Timothy, then Timothy himself, called by grace. The gospel was taken to Antioch, and there was founded a church; and the churches in Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia, were visible churches raised by the grace and power of God. But the devil was alive, and in that new church of three thousand members, Ananias and Sapphira were found. Evil has always crept in where

grace has been. That solemn word in Genesis: "The seed of the woman shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel," has always been in the fulfilling. Dust has ever since that day been the meat of the serpent; and Christ and the serpent have always been in conflict, and will be to the end of the world. There is no gracious person in the world, and therefore not one in this chapel, who in some form, at some time more or less, has not found the serpent's subtlety, the power of the god of this world; that he has to fight, "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." These things are not in the profane world, but in the visible church of God. The world that lieth in wickedness is led by the god of this world, and gives him no trouble; it is led captive by him at his will. In the first little church, composed of Adam, Eve, and Abel, the serpent was busy in Cain. Mysteriously the enemy was permitted to mingle with the sons of God in Job's day, in Zechariah's day. He is here now. As permitted he will plague you thus: "You have neglected some natural duty," or he may inject terrible thoughts and distract you from the service.

Members of churches owe mutual duties. "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another." The Apostles needed it, for by occasions they had indignation one against another, arising out of the proud question, who should be the greatest in the Redeemer's kingdom. An obligation is laid on the church to pray always, "with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit," for all saints. By love and prayer we are to, "serve one another." In the church there is the, "labour of love," and there is the, "patience of hope," and God is not unmindful to forget it. As it continues in us, we shall be spiritually healthy; on the contrary, if we bite and devour one another, we may be consumed one of another. I need not say to you that we are in perilous times, the foundations of the earth are out of course, and what shall the righteous do? The perishing fashions of the world have invaded the churches. Women professing godliness cut off their hair which is given them for their glory, (1 Cor. 11), and by some among us it is allowed; and the Lord's table is desecrated by woman who have thus sinned. Repentance and reformation for this and other sins among us, are needed. If we as a body were more spiritual, we doubtless should in some form suffer tribulation according to Scripture: "In the world ye shall have tribulation." We must distinguish between the trouble to which man is born and the tribulation foretold by our Lord. For tribulation there is a provided place and a purpose. It is implied in the important question: "What is the chaff to the wheat?" Hence separation. The saints at Rome gloried in tribulation, (Romans 5:3). O the honour of having the separating flail used on us!

If you walk after the flesh, and the Lord loves you, he separates you from that. It may be he sees you setting your affections on something here below, and himself is forgotten. Forgetting God leads to endless sins. Worldliness preveils, covetousness makes one an idolater. Hardness of heart through the deceitfulness of sin works grievous damage. Wandering of mind in prayer invades others; inattention to the Word of God leads to careless reading of it. These all come when you forget God. Not only does the Word of God inform us of this, but as each one, blest with the teaching of the Spirit, is dealt with, his conscience is spoken to, and he finds he, "is carnal, sold under sin." The church in the Song of Solomon had a Divine Husband. He came one night and knocked at the door, saying, "Open to me, my sister, my spouse, for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." And she in her laziness and carnality, woe unto us who have done the same, said: "I have put off my coat; I have washed my feet, I am comfortable in my bed, I cannot rise." O the unkindness of some of us to Christ! How it has wounded me when I have seen my unkindness to him! Do you follow me? Does conscience say

in any of you, "Guilty?" Does the slighted, injured Husband forsake his church? No, she is his bride; yet he resents her baseness. He puts in his hand by the hole of the door, leaves myrrh on the handle; her affections are touched, and she rises and opens to him. Then she learns his resentment and rues her sin. Thus basely do all who walk carnally. He is jealous, and will have no other gods in his house; "Whose house are we if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end."

Again, a visible church may tolerate his enemies, false teachers; but that sin brings a very solemn rebuke and threat. Great is his love and goodness in acknowledging the graces he finds in a church, wonderful the eyes which are as a flame to discover evil people therein. How do we stand as a church? Defects are in the most gracious people, and we should be jealous of our own hearts, and take heed lest there should be in any of us, "an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God." For an ungracious walk, holding false doctrine, disregarding the precepts of the Word of God, will bring a grievous loss of good. "Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not." Therefore the Lord has taken away your meat and drink, and has brought the reproach of famine upon you; and your mournful confession will be, "My leanness is my own begetting, my darkness I have procured to myself, the absence of God I have brought by my waywardness and wickedness." Amen

We find another very important thing in the visible church, namely, the gracious word of the Lord Jesus, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the spirit saith unto the churches." To a sinning church one solemn word is: "Repent, or else I will come and remove thy candlestick." Has this church ever been afraid of that word? Are any of you concerned about it? We are here, we meet as of custom, we meet as of desire. Some of us meet hungry and thirsty for God. But are there things which you neglect to notice in yourselves? Are there matters in your hearts which keep you from the Lord and harden your hearts? which make you dull of hearing what the Spirit saith unto the churches, and cause you to walk contrary to the word, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches?"

Let us notice yet another very important point: the power of discipline. Men call it, "the power of the keys." We have an example and commandment of discipline set before us in Matthew: "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone." That is, do not repeat it to other people, but go to your brother in obedience to the Divine direction, in a gracious spirit and prayerfully. If he receives you and acknowledges his offence, you win him, and according to the Apostle James, you "hide a multitude of sins," and the matter is ended, and should never go further. But if he will not hear you alone, take with you one or two brethren; but if he is stubborn and resists you all, then tell it to the church. Let a church meeting be called, and the case be simply, tenderly stated. If the offender relents by grace, forgiveness is expressed, the case is ended, God is glorified, but if he be obstinate, and will not hear the church, he must be withdrawn from as a disorderly person. And so awful and solemn is the power Christ has given to the church, that the person thus dealt with is henceforth to be to it, "as an heathen man and a publican," and the act of the church is ratified in heaven, (Matt. 18:17-18). The solemn act of excommunication can never be rescinded but by repentance, (1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 7:8). Time cannot obliterate sin. It is a grievous sin among us that Holy Scripture in respect of discipline is either entirely forgotten or wilfully ignored. But the Divine Author of it will not abrogate it, nor

pass unheeded such glaring disobedience. Orderly walking is enjoined in the church of God. We should consider the binding in heaven of the Scriptural excommunication by a church.

In merciful instruction the Lord speaks of the meeting of two or three in his name, and promises his presence. Oh the wonder, solemnity, beauty and glory of such meetings in that name which is above every name, to confess sin, seek his strength and his face evermore! Once when Christ was teaching the people, we read that, "the power of the Lord was present to heal them." Have you ever found that? Do you come weak and sickly and diseased, saying, "There is no soundness in my flesh, my heart aches, my soul is troubled, Lord, have mercy?" and does Jesus Christ receive you, and comfort you with his love? Does the ministry find you out? Does it tell you of some fault, so that perhaps you have said mentally, "Has friend so-and-so told the minister?" Or, does it bring good news from a far country to your heart? With the Lord Jesus in the midst, you have him in the arms of your faith, and there stands on your side for your everlasting good, that gracious word, "There am I in the midst of you." "I do not realize it," says one. But the promise is there; and if you from time to time miss the realization of it, may grace come to you and lead you to say, "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord." God has a certain method in his dealings with his people. He loves them without end, but he chides them, reproves them. Never, I hope, shall I forget two words that God has made powerful to my soul. The first is, "All manner of sin and blasphemy against the Son of Man," against Jesus Christ, "shall be forgiven." The other is, "I will not make a full end of thee, but I will correct thee in measure." There is no measure in hell, but endless punishment.

Now, my brethren, as your old pastor, I bring these things before you. Regard them, because they are part of, "the form of sound words." Let me remind you that the whole of the Word of God is inspired, and therefore the whole of it applies and is infallible. "Hold fast the form of sound words." This is an inspired commandment. You are not to be loose in your profession or tolerate error. Do not say, "O well, in these days we cannot be expected to be as particular as our fathers and leaders were." Why not? Does time make a commandment less divine, less important, less imperative? No; hold it fast. The Lord has given to his churches two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper; also the sacred institution of the ministry. These should ever be observed, should be very carefully and prayerfully observed by you of Galeed. Oh, let them not slip! The jealous love of Christ shows itself in either withdrawing his Spirit, and more or less gradually removing the candlestick; or in speaking powerful reproofs, giving repentance for the discovered sins, and restoring the joy of his salvation. Membership of a visible church is a solemn privilege, and carries a weighty obligation. Do we as a church believe and realize our position? I know we have "the form of sound words," and are walking in the ordinances of the Lord. Notwithstanding, I would press the question on your attention: Do we realize our position, our obligation according to Holy Scripture? Are we esteeming each other better than ourselves, looking not every man on his own things, but every one also on the things of others? Put these questions to yourselves, and let conscience answer. If indeed we are right, we are on the side of Christ, and he will be taking pleasure in us, for "the Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him."

"The form of sound words," is given in a few words in one place. I draw your attention to it. It is in John: "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." That is the true substance of, "the form of sound words." A very solemn Scripture, and he who receives it by the gracious power of the Holy Ghost is in a blessed state, yet he trembles before

the eternal majesty of God: "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones," (Isa. 57:15). Here is Jehovah revealed in awful majesty and infinite condescension. All who thus know him possess, "the form of sound words," in principle and power, and feel the authority of it. It captivates, binds, humbles, melts, teaches, and guides them. Beautiful form! nothing hard, harsh, or legal, for the sweet freedom of the gospel is in it, admiration of Christ, and sitting down under his shadow with great delight, finding his fruit sweet to your taste. You thus delight yourself in him, commit yourself and all that concerns you to his keeping. How good it is to be thus won and married to Christ! to find the truth of the remarkable war-like word of the Apostle Paul: "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringeth into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ," (2 Cor. 10:4)! Not a thought left that naturally we should have of desire to help, or oppose, or add to the Lord's work. Thus then do we know the "form of sound words." The kingdom of God is within us, given, wrought, written, so as to make us the epistles of Christ. Happy people thus saved by the Lord!

Two other parts of, "the form of sound words," I will now bring before you. (a) the promises, (b) the precepts. These have been likened to two hedges. The path of life is narrow, and on either side are dangerous pitfalls.

(a) The promise, which, "in God are yea and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us," are to keep us from dismay and despair when we are tempted, when iniquities, prevail against us, and afflictions abound. May they say to us, "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee," (Isa. 43:1-3). Thus by the promise the feet of the saints, which are often ready to slip, are kept; the mire and despair which they see and fear, they do not fall into. Notwithstanding, promises often bring very great trials, though they are precious. The fathers to whom the promises were given, received them not in their fulfilment: Joseph's promise, "the word of the Lord," tried him, until the time of fulfilment came. But they are all precious and great, and the faithfulness of God is pledged in them. You to whom God has given promises are rich, you know not how rich. Wait for their ripeness, cleave to them, put the Divine Promiser in mind of them. They are given for your safety and comfort.

(b) The precepts of the Scripture. They are a Divine hedge, to warn us against and preserve us from presuming. If we break through this hedge, a serpent will bite us. A very gracious precept is: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God," (Heb. 3:12). From persistent worldliness, seeking great things for ourselves, backsliding, rebellion against untoward providences, the holy commandments of the Apostles warn and exhort us. I am fully aware that heady, hard, high-minded professors regard the enforcement of the words spoken by the Holy Prophets, and of the commandments of the Apostles of the Lord and Saviour, as legal. Let us, however, be not moved by such a charge. A

presumptuous confidence, the love of some sin, an unbroken spirit, a despising of a contrite spirit, mark the loose professor. If you meet him, he may trouble you, and all he meets who desire to walk unto all pleasing in the clean, tender fear of God. But keep in the narrow path of life, losing all, that you may be found in Christ; and endeavour to keep your eye on the perceptive part of the, "form of sound words." Even when you walk in darkness and have no light, seek grace to obey the voice of God's servant, to trust in the Name of the Lord, and stay upon your God, (Isa. 50:10).

Consider the points I have brought before you in regard of the church of the living God; they are part of the, "form of sound words," and a solemn and weighty obligation is laid upon us to hold it fast. Hold it fast against Anglo-Catholicism, Modernism, the abounding profanity; the spirit of the world and its friendship, which is the enmity of God; the "spirit of error," which may hide itself under a more or less correct walk, through men of our, "own selves speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them;" and in the face of all the evils our fallen nature may seek to introduce, argue and urge against the precious Word of God. For the contest and conflict in cleaving to Christ and what the Spirit saith unto the churches, we need the power of the Holy Ghost and his demonstration of the truth in our hearts and understandings. Thus, and thus only, can we spiritually take the precious Word of God to ourselves as a heritage for ever. O church of the living God, "hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." Amen

Having spoken to you inadequately of, "the form of sound words," as it relates to the church of God, I now come to the exhortation: "Hold fast the, "form of sound words," which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." Obviously it will occur to you that you cannot hold fast, or hold at all this Divine form unless you first possess it; you cannot hold what you do not possess. It is therefore of the utmost importance that we examine ourselves with regard to so vital a matter. To begin, this glorious form is in the whole of the inspired Word of God. It is the self-revelation Jehovah has made to men. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." This holy Book is common possession, and is to be known, circulated, and, "preached to every creature," for the ingathering of the "other sheep" which the Lord has, that ultimately there may be one fold and one Shepherd. But more than a general knowledge of the Word of God is required by our text. A personal knowledge of the Word, as taught to Timothy by the Apostle Paul, is necessary. And this is obtained, not by education, but by the Holy Ghost. This way of receiving the truth may be illustrated by the church at Thessalonica: "Yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.....And ye became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost." It affected their consciences, laid hold of their affections, and gave Christ a throne in their hearts. Thus the words given to Christ to speak, come to all his disciples in different measures. Each one in his own manner can use as his own the sweet words of the Prophet Jeremiah: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart." If you have intelligence and diligence enough to carefully read the Word of God, you may obtain a fair knowledge of the sacred revelation, but this is short of the saving knowledge of my text. I appeal

to you, do you possess, "the form of sound words," so as to submit to its authority, love its doctrines, embrace them, and find them so precious as to hide them in your hearts, that you may not sin against its Divine Author?

I come now to the holding fast of this Divine form. There are three ways of keeping and holding fast what we have received, "unless we have believed in vain."

First. By faith. This prominent grace is a Divine creation in the soul. "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." There surely can be no controversy about the meaning here; distinctly we are taught that faith lays hold of grace, that it is the Divine method of bringing a soul into an experimental knowledge of grace. This faith holds Christ, a grain of faith receiving him will hold him. But there is an enemy near, even Ishmael watching the rejoicing and mocking. How I have wished Ishmael had really died when he gave up the ghost. But faith, "lives and labours under load, though damped it never dies." O, but the enemies of faith are many and strong. It needs fresh supplies of life, light, and testimonies, good news from a far country: "Be not ashamed," of the crucified man, of whom the world, watching the glorious Redeemer, mockingly said, "He saved others, himself he cannot save."

But if you have faith, you have to face much. "In the world ye shall have tribulation." Tribulation is a very particular thing, it is not common trouble. "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble" (Job 14:1). Tribulation is not beating the air. Tribulation is a threshing, a heavy business, which you are acquainted with. In Paul's day there was the flail, the cart-wheel. Tribulation means trouble, but it also means mercy. God takes no trouble with the world, he lets the world alone until the day of judgment. The world's conscience is hardened against God, its mind is blinded. The world rebels and curses God when there is trouble: "They shall pass through it, hardly bestead and hungry: and it shall come to pass, that when they shall be hungry, they shall fret themselves, and curse their king and their God, and look upward." Tribulation is something different; there is a threshing floor, a particular place. There is an intention in tribulation; the wheat must be garnered, the chaff be driven away. So this means great affliction, in which you are to hold fast. It means also this, that you have some particular test put to you. Will you hold Christ in the face of this? Can you believe his love in the face of a natural impossibility? Can you love him when he seems to fight against you? It only seems so. Rutherford speaks like this: "It is not the Rock that is moved, it is our sea that is moving." There is no alteration in Christ, but there is a great deal of moving in those who are on him, and about him.

"Hold fast." Temptation comes. "Let him go, or let him make speed, let him hasten his work. Hath God said?" There is subtlety, sometimes violence. There are two words in one of the Psalms that I have often prayed: "Save me from deceit and violence." The devil will practice both of them. He would "seduce, if possible, even the elect." So Jesus Christ said. Ministers may be angels of darkness just covered with a white robe, transformed into angels of light, to deceive the elect, if it were possible. And all these things you have to meet, deal with, contend with, be afflicted by, if you, "hold fast the form of sound words." It is uphill work to get to heaven. Some of you older members will recollect good old Mr. Evans; he was somewhat over 80 years old, and lived in Buckingham Road. I would walk up the hill with him sometimes after a service, and

he would stand about the middle of the hill and say, "This hill I do covet to ascend, its difficulties do not me offend." "Why?" he would ask. "My home is at the top," was his answer. You may sometimes say, "I covet to get through. I would climb up to the house that is built on the top of the mountains and hills, and reach the house of God." Difficulties? You must have them, heaven you shall also have. So the Scriptures teach with regard to the Lord's people. Faith can overcome the world only as it stands in the power of God. May the Lord help us, we greatly need him. He alone knows fully our degenerate condition, but also he does know who are the "few names" in Sardis. Did you ever covet to be among them? How often I have prayed to be among them! and also for years I have said in my heart to the Lord in secret as well as in public prayer for you, "Put this people among the 'few names even in Sardis.' Put them among those few names who with undefiled garments walk with thee, and are esteemed to be worthy." Unworthy in their own esteem, but worthy in his esteem. Brethren, look at this inspired Word, consider it, consider your own position. If you have a treasure in Christ, your affections are there. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Amen

I am, if the Lord will help me, to speak to you still further about holding fast, "the form of sound words." If we look at the difficulties which must attend this great business, we may well faint. But if we are led to look at the end, at the possession of the inheritance laid up for us, and at the Captain of our salvation, we may understand a little of Rutherford's strong word, "Though seven deaths, and ten hells were in the way, we would struggle on." O the end! I have got that in view, and I would bring it before you, my believing friends. Look further then. I have spoken of some of the difficulties there are in this great matter of holding fast. Christ must suffer in every saint something like what he suffered when he was here below, except the curse of the law. He was mocked, despised, crucified. There is a mocking Ishmael, shameful in fallen nature; there is a devil, the serpent, who bruises the heel of Christ in every saint. A kind of death comes. Christ said, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." "If any man serve me, let him follow me." How did Paul follow Christ? "I am crucified with Christ." You must die with him, else you will never bear fruit in him, never glorify God. "It is a faithful saying, For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him," (Rom. 6:8); if we suffer, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us," (2 Tim. 2:11,12). It is this that makes the trouble. There are outward things always, but it is this inward trial that makes the greatest difficulty, the pain, of holding fast. For he is the sum and substance of the "form of sound words." All is in him, all grace, all mercy, all love, all wisdom, all power, all glory. So that when one holds fast, "the form of sound words," really, he is held fast. You must see him to believe all this. Vital experience is not all darkness, confusion, wickedness, doubt and fear. True experience much consists in knowing Christ, proving Christ, so that you can say, "I have proved him, I know him, he has spoken to me in the night, he has tried me. He has put me into the furnace, and I was purified; but when I saw the scum rising, I could hardly believe there was a grain of gold in the fining pot." And, my brethren, if it is easy to you to hold on, the fear is that you have nothing to hold on to. This easy day is terribly dangerous, this easy religion is very seductive. "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him." God's religion is a very solemn and suffering matter. The end is beautiful and glorious; but the way, that is the difficulty. I have seen him by faith, and I know the difficulty of following him. I have seen his beauty, and I know what it is to be attracted by that beauty. I want his gold and his white raiment and his eye salve; and that not once or twice, but over and over. To hold on when he is absent from you, to follow him when, though he has been life in you, he is as it were dead in you; to

feel with the disciples when he was buried, that your hope is all but perished from the Lord. Well, when disciples are in that case, it is good to follow those distressed disciples, and hold your sad communications; for you do not know how soon he will join you, walk with you, and make your hearts burn within you.

How do you hold to Christ, "the form of sound words?" By faith, that blessed grace,

"That lives and labours under load,
Though damp't it never dies;"

that faith that credits contradictions, that believes impossibilities shall be removed, that believes death is nothing to God, the living God, that weakness is nothing to him who is the strength of God; that darkness and ignorance are nothing to him who is light and wisdom; and that the serpent now bruising him in you shall one day be under your feet. This faith, I say, gives him credit for being what he declares himself to be: "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25). Yea, from time to time, even while you are in the struggle, the devil may be put under your feet. When Christ says, "Arise and come with me, let us lodge in the villages, let us go into the fields, let us see if the vine flourishes," at such times Satan is bruised under your feet for a season. Now when faith hears the voice of Christ, "I am the resurrection and the life," and brings in something of the efficacy of that resurrection, then there is an uprising and a holding. To the Ephesians the Apostle Paul said that the "mighty power" of God was exerted in Christ, "when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion" (Eph. 1:19-21). And you understand that word then, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places," and so on" (Eph. 6:12). Faith holds here. It holds, first of all, to his Person. There is none like him; I know him, and I know there is none like him. When he comes forth from, "the ivory palaces," in which there are refuges for sinners, then the savour of his Person and his Name and his greatness and his glory, does refresh the soul. Cleave, brethren, to his Person. You may have a great deal to lose. Young Christians particularly have a great deal to lose, a great deal of religion to lose; their wisdom they have to lose, and their strength. They will have to find that to be true that Hart speaks:

"Prayer's a weapon for the feeble,
Weakest souls can wield it best."

Hold to his Person. You may say you feel dead and dark and ignorant and foolish, and particularly vile. That painful experience will fit you to value his Person. Hold to that. O, but it is difficult, especially when he hides himself, when he is silent to you, when your prayers seem to have no answer at all, not ever regarded; when you are ready to say, "Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer." Pray, pray, pray. When you have no prayer, ask him to hear your voice in your prayer, not to shut out your prayer.

"Pray, if thou canst or canst not speak."

This is how faith will keep you holding on to his Person. Hold on as fast as you can to his death. That will be your life if you are going to heaven, that will be the purity of your conscience, will bring answers into your souls, will be your plea, your ground, your purity.

"The blood of Christ, a precious blood,
Cleanses from all sin, doubt it not,
And reconciles the soul to God
From every folly, every fault."

"How shall I believe it?" By precious faith. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;.....that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you" (1 John 1;1,2). "We have not followed cunningly devised fables." Ministers should say that. I can say it, as far as I know. I have not followed a cunningly devised fable, and I have not preached one to you; and I will not, God forbid it. There is a reality in the blood of Christ, an efficacy in the blood of Christ, a prevailing plea for the vilest sinner out of hell, in the blood of Christ. Rest on nothing short of this for your salvation. Build on nothing short of this for your conscience. Nothing can properly, truly pacify a wounded, guilty conscience, but the blood of Christ. I have known a burdened conscience, I have known a pure conscience, an conscience without sin; and Christ's blood wrought this that experience. You must know it if you are going to heaven. The forgiveness of sins is a principle in the gospel, the scarlet thread that runs through every inch of the rope and cord of the gospel. The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin. If you get encouragement, thank God for it; if you get an uplifting sometimes, be grateful for it. But until your consciences are really purged by the blood of Christ, may you never rest. It is not safe to rest apart from that. If you rest on some good experience, you may displease God by that, and he will take the experience from you. He will not deny that you have had it, but he will not let you build on it. Here some of us erred when we were young. I did. You are not to rest on anything for your cleansing and your salvation, but the precious blood of Christ. Hold this fast.

Hold fast to justification. He is "the Lord our righteousness." Now faith is given to lay hold of this. Christ, we are told, was "delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). Therefore says Paul to the Romans, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Rom. 5:1). "I am wrong," says one, "I am in court, I am condemned; two things condemn me, the law and my conscience." Listen to them: the law will never lie, and conscience will not lie here. And if you are condemned by these two things, go with your guilt to the throne of grace. If you are condemned by a discovery of your vileness, remember if you can, plead if you can, what the Apostle Paul teaches in the Hebrews: "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace" (Heb. 4:16). "Hold fast the form of sound words." What a rule is Christ to walk by! What a rule is his blood to walk by! What a rule is his righteousness!

Second. How shall we hold fast? By prayer and supplication: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit (Eph. 6:18)." "In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:6). The man who has enough faith to go to God, to the throne of his heavenly grace, and make full, honest confession of his

sins, and justify God in the severest sentence of the law against him, and yet also has the power to plead the blood of Christ, shall one day say, "Now know I that the Lord saveth his anointed."

"Pray, if thou canst or canst not speak."

Do not be too solicitous about words in prayer. Probably the people of God pray more without words than with words; and at the best, words are but a kind of dress. The living child of prayer in the soul breathes without words. "O, but I am too weak to pray." The weaker you are, the better you will pray. You need to have the sinew in your thigh touched by the Man who will wrestle with you. Think of Jacob wrestling when he was a limping cripple. How could he wrestle when the Lord had crippled him? That was the way he was enabled to say, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Crippled Jacob got the blessing. A weak soul gets the best blessing, it is God's way. Hold by this. You will hold it sometimes when your memory rises in prayer. And Christ enjoins this: "Remember how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast." Think of that gracious word spoken to the church in Sardis. Remember what God did for you, what he said to you, and hold it fast. Jacob was enabled to do this: "Thou didst say, Return to thy country, and I will be with thee." When you can take something like that to God, it is a great thing: "Thou didst say, Walk in this path of difficulty." "Thou didst say, Depend on me, thou canst not fail so depending." Brethren you are dependent. Every child of God knows that; but is one thing to know you are dependent, it is another thing to be enabled to depend. And this will be one way of holding fast. Think of that beautiful summary of the gospel which the Apostle Paul gave to the Corinthians: "I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." "By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you," (1 Cor. 15:2,3). God makes a great use of memory in his people, and he is offended and pained when we forget him, as often, alas! we do. Remember thy fall from thy first love.

Third. Hold fast, next, "in love." One may say, "I like the doctrines of grace." You may do that, and die without them. Yes, you may be pleased with your knowledge of the doctrines of grace. They are beautiful doctrines, they are Divine doctrines, they are invaluable doctrines; you can never know too much of them, but mind this, when you are boasting of your knowledge of them, see if you have in your heart the grace of them. See if there is any efficacy arising from your knowledge of them, if they sanctify you, if they humble you, if they say, "Boast not." If you know them, you know them only by Divine teaching. Says Paul, "But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee" (Rom. 11:18).

"Hold fast" to the Holy Scripture. John Newton must have felt it when he wrote that hymn,

"Precious Bible! what a treasure!"

Sometimes a chapter, a Psalm, a verse, will hold your heart, hold your eyes; sometimes you may be able to say, "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee." "Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart." You see more than you can see, you see mysteries and do not understand them. Then you may say, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." And you may be sorry that you have neglected the Bible so much. But again and again, though difficulties are before you,

there is a movement of the Spirit in your heart, dark like the dark waters of creation, and light comes, and life and help and goodness. Perhaps you remember when he brought you into his banqueting house, when his banner over you was love, when his left hand sustained you; that is to say, when his power held you up in trouble, kept you from fainting, kept you from being too much discouraged, kept you with your eyes waking, looking for him; kept you with your soul alive with desire, "O let me see thee, let me come to thee, let me embrace thee, let me be sure I am thine, that thou art more." You will love him. In his ointments what a savour there is! what a healing virtue they have! His banqueting house, how beautiful it is! how reviving, how refreshing his wine is! Hold fast to him in love. Not the least way of holding fast, "the form of sound words," is love. Great is the emphasis the Holy Ghost lays on love, (1 Cor. 13). Peace is pronounced on all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. To hold the truth in righteousness is a mark of the child of God; to hold it as some do in unrighteousness brings a curse: "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha," (1 Cor. 16:22). Love is a free, sweet grace, born of the manifestation in the soul of the truth, "as in Jesus." It is a warm grace, runs to its Divine object. When he is absent, when sloth has procured that absence, the soul has no rest till he finds the Lord. Thus may we hold fast that which we received by the Spirit of truth and love. This will enable us to walk humbly with and before our God.

When you know Christ, you know the substance of, "the form of sound words." And Christ says to one of the churches in Asia, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." How often have I put that up as a prayer: "Give me power to keep, 'the word of thy patience.'" The word of tribulation, the word of conflict, the word that promises tribulation in the world: "In the world ye shall have tribulation;" the word that tries you, "Until the time that his word came, the word of the Lord tried," Joseph. Until the time of fulfilling a promise, the promise tries you, prison tries you, doubts try you, fears try you, and you may say, "This word is my trouble." I have found this, that the clearest promise of God becomes a very bitter trouble; sweet in the mouth, but O the difficulties, the seeming impossibilities of the fulfilment of that promise, these will make up a bitterness to you. Yet, "if we believeth not, he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself." O embrace the dear Saviour, you believing people. Go to him with your wants and your fears and your weaknesses, go to him with all the troubles you have, and the bruising of the Saviour in your souls; for surely he is bruised in you from time to time by the serpent. And the day shall come when you will find that in all these things you were holding fast, could not, would not let him go, could not give him up. It is a solemn prayer, "Lead us not into temptation." Jesus was, "led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." You may be led into temptation by the Lord. He may see it good for you to be in a tempted condition of mind, of soul, of providence. The Lord teach those of us who fear him to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." But if we are led into it, may we be kept from denying him. If we go into the world, we go where temptation may come; but that is not being, "led up of the Spirit," to be tempted. Observe the difference.

"The things that thou hast heard of me," this "form of sound words." An inspired Apostle gave this, "form of sound words," and he charges Timothy to keep it. As he was a minister, he was to take great care of it. He left him in Ephesus to appoint ministers, faithful men, who should be

able to teach others. Titus had the same charge, and it spreads over the whole church, it belongs to all who fear God.

One word in conclusion. Let us look for a moment at the end. "If we suffer," with him, "we shall also reign with him." If we are crucified with him, "we shall also live with him." "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). But what of the end? I have seen just a little of this. I have been near, as I have felt, very near to heaven. I have thought the grave would be the softest bed I ever could lie on. O what a gain it will be, to gain endless purity, endless happiness, endless glory, to be with the Lord for ever!

I conclude my inadequate treatment of so important a subject, desiring the sweet mercy of the Lord may fill us with, "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." Amen