The Ladder to Heaven

Here is made a revelation of Jesus Christ as the only connecting link between God and sinful man, that the repenting sinner may find pardon. Christ spoke words to Nathanael which had reference to this mystic ladder: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (John 1:51).

Here Christ associates Himself, as the Son of man, with the mystic ladder. The angels of God are ascending and descending on the one even as they did on the other. By means of this ladder a constant communication is kept up between heaven and earth, and all the actions and affairs of this earth are known in heaven. The counsels of heaven are executed on earth, and the doings of men are judged in heaven.

Providence does its work gradually. The ladder that man must climb is made up of successive steps heavenward like the rounds of a ladder--step above step, upward to the wisdom of God, whose glory is at the upper end of the ladder. Angels rest not day nor night from active service in the positions assigned them. They ascend to bear their testimony of record of what they have done and of the state of individuals, and to receive further orders; and they descend to execute the orders they have received.

Christ is the Ladder; the foot on the earth in His human nature, the top in heaven in His divine nature. His human arm encircles the race while His divine arm lays hold upon the Infinite. All the intercourse between heaven and earth since the fall is by the Ladder.

GRACE AND PEACE BE MULTIPLIED

"Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:1-4).

"Like precious faith . . . through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." This is a genuine faith. It is not a fruitless faith. True saving faith is a precious treasure of inestimable value. It is not superficial. The just lives by faith a truly spiritual, Christlike life. It is through faith that the steps are taken one at a time up the ladder of progress. Faith must be cultivated. It unites the human with the divine nature.

The life of obedience to all of God's commandments is a life of progression, a life of constant advancement. As the elect, precious, have increased understanding of the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ, they see and grasp the rich promises that come through the righteousness of Christ. The more they receive of the divine grace the more they work on the plan of addition.

"Grace and peace" will be multiplied "through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord." Here is the Source of all spiritual power, and faith must be in constant exercise, for all spiritual life is from Christ. Knowledge of God inspires faith in Him as the only channel to convey Heaven's blessing to the soul, elevating, ennobling, refining the soul, as--through the knowledge of God--it is brought up to the high attainments of glory and virtue. "According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." Here the Christian is encouraged by an assurance of divine help, if he will comply with the conditions.

GIVE ALL DILIGENCE

"And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue." There is no promise given to the one who is retrograding. The apostle, in his testimony, is aiming to excite the believers to advancement in grace and holiness. They already profess to be living the truth, they have a knowledge of the precious faith, they have been made partakers of the divine nature. But if they stop here they will lose the grace they have received. They must go forward. The apostle prayed that grace and peace might be multiplied to them. They were to climb the ladder of progression.

Without giving "all diligence" to make step after step upward to God above the ladder, there is no gaining ground in peace and grace and the work of holiness. "Strive," said Jesus, "to enter in at the strait gate" (Luke 13:24). The way of the believer is marked out by God above the ladder. All his endeavors will be in vain if he has not virtue of character, a practical knowledge of Christ through obedience to all His requirements. Those who have faith must be careful to show their faith by their works.

It is common for men and women to speak of themselves as Christians whose whole claim lies in the assuming of the name. They do not reveal that they are partakers of the divine nature. They do not reveal love for Jesus or for religious things. As far as their words and their spirit and their character are concerned, no one would suspect they were Christians. Their assent to the truth has no virtue. This counts for nothing in the sight of God.

FAITH

True faith works by love and purifies the soul. Truth is an active, working principle, molding heart and life so that there is a constant upward movement, climbing the ladder Jacob saw, to the Lord above the ladder. In every step of climbing, the will is obtaining a new spring of action. The moral tone is becoming more like the mind and character of Christ. The progressive Christian has grace and love which passes knowledge, for divine insight into the character of Christ takes a deep hold upon his affections. The glory of God revealed above the ladder can only be appreciated by the progressive climber, who is ever attracted higher, to nobler aims which Christ reveals. All the faculties of mind and body must be enlisted.

KNOWLEDGE

"Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge"--knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, knowledge of the great plan of salvation. To be ignorant of God's commandments and laws will not excuse a soul. He will not dare to plead around the throne of God, "I did not know the truth. I was ignorant." The Lord has given His word to be our guide, our instructor, and with this heavenly enlightening there is no excuse for ignorance. Christ speaks of those who have eyes but see not, ears but they hear not. God has given them precious hours of probation. He has given them His truth. He has said plainly if they do His will they shall know of the doctrine. Therefore those that might be wise in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ but do not choose this wisdom will be banished from His presence when the judgment shall sit and the books be opened.

TEMPERANCE

To knowledge must be added temperance. "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

They that run in a race to obtain a corruptible crown are careful in their diet. "Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things." The strict, severe habits of discipline are essential to give a full, healthful tone to all the nerves and muscles.

Athletes cheerfully comply with the conditions in order to be trained for the highest taxation of their physical strength. They do not indulge appetite, but put a constant restraint upon themselves, refraining from food which would weaken or lessen the full power of any of their organs. Yet they fight "as one that beateth the air," while Christians are in a real contest. Combatants in the games seek for mere perishable laurels. Christians have before them a glorious crown of immortality, incorruptible. And in this heavenly race there is plenty of room for all to obtain the prize. Not one will fail if he runs well, if he does according to the light which shines upon him, exercising his abilities which, to the best of his knowledge, he has kept in a healthful condition.

The combatants in the games used a spare, coarse diet, and denied themselves of luxuries in order to keep their muscles in a healthful condition. Should not Christians do as much? Paul says he was doing the same that he might win eternal life. The "body" which he kept "under" is the fleshly appetites and inclinations which need to be continually curbed. Any habit or practice which will weaken the nerve and brain power or the physical strength disqualifies for the exercise of the next grace which comes in after temperance--patience. Add "to temperance patience."

It was through intemperate appetite that Adam and Eve lost Eden, and it will be through habits of strict temperance and denial of hurtful indulgences that we shall have calm nerves and mental acuteness to discern good from evil. A man who is intemperate, who uses stimulating indulgences--beer, wine, strong drinks, tea and coffee, opium, tobacco, or any of these substances that are deleterious to health--cannot be a patient man. So temperance is a round of the ladder upon

which we must plant our feet before we can add the grace of patience. In food, in raiment, in work, in regular hours, in healthful exercise, we must be regulated by the knowledge which it is our duty to obtain, that we may through earnest endeavor place ourselves in right relation to life and health.

PATIENCE

The apostle says we succeed in the grace of temperance that we may add patience. Patience under trials will keep us from saying and doing those things which will injure our own souls and injure those with whom we associate. Let your trials be what they will, nothing can seriously injure you if you exercise patience, if you are calm and unexcited when in trying positions.

Solomon places the control of one's self above the exploits of the bravest and most successful heroes. There is a moral grandeur in being patient under trials and provocations. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city" (Prov. 16:32). It requires discipline and firmness of purpose not to give expression to passion but at all times to take care that no words shall escape the lips that will dishonor the Christian character. Self-control will be a valuable acquisition to the graces of the Spirit, and parents should teach their children, by precept and example, this precious lesson of patience and self-control.

Patience implies that we have difficulties to encounter, annoyances to meet. The Word of God says, "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (Prov. 15:1). "Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools" (Eccl. 7:9). The injunction of the inspired apostle is to "be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (James 1:9). Anger provokes anger.

TEMPERANCE HELPS PATIENCE

We can see the wisdom of Peter in placing temperance to be added to knowledge before patience. This is one strong reason for overcoming the appetite for all stimulants, for as the nerves become excited under the influence of these irritating substances, how many and grievous are the evils that are done! But the healthful use of the unstimulating articles of food will not excite the nerves by irritating the stomach and debilitating brain nerve power. There is necessity for the Christian adding patience to temperance. There will need to be a firm principle and fixedness of purpose not to offend in word or action our own conscience or the feelings of others. There must be a rising above the customs of the world in order to bear reproach, disappointment, losses, and crosses, without one murmur, but with uncomplaining dignity.

It is easier to act the part of a martyr than to be patient under provocation and to control a bad temper. Sound religious principles must be brought into the life to repress anger rather than inflame it by giving vent to it. We feel very angry, but if we control that anger and are not betrayed into expressions of hasty feeling, we will not lose the respect of our brethren or respect for ourselves. The Pattern, Christ Jesus, is our example. Patience is a heavenly attribute, and Christians must cultivate it.

We must not ever keep before us the feeling that we are slighted. The very fact that we suspect evil will go a long way toward creating that evil which we allowed ourselves to suspect. Our feelings will sometimes be deeply hurt, our temper sadly tried, but the sooner we shall forget the cause of this disturbance the better will it be for us and all connected with us.

A lying tongue will stir us to make some sharp thrusts, but it is only for a moment that lies will have force. If we treat these falsehoods as they deserve--with neglect--others will soon see there is no foundation for them. We are to leave our reputation with God. Slander may be lived down but can never be talked down.

HAPPINESS COMES FROM SELF-CONTROL

A petulant, ill-natured man or woman really knows not what it is to be happy. Every cup which he puts to his lips seems to be bitter as wormwood, and his path seems strewn with rough stones, with briars and thorns; but he must add to temperance patience and he will not see or feel slights. Alexander and Caesar found it easier to subdue a world than to subdue themselves. After conquering nation after nation, they fell--one of them the victim to beastly intemperance, the other to mad ambition.

Patience must have its perfect work or we cannot be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. Troubles and afflictions are appointed unto us, and shall we bear them all patiently or shall we make everything bitter by our complaining? The gold is put into the furnace that the dross may be removed. Shall we, then, not be patient under the eye of the Refiner? We must refuse to sink into a sad and disconsolate state of mind, but show calm trust in God, counting it all joy when we are permitted to endure trials for Christ's sake.

GODLINESS

Having added patience to temperance, we are then to ascend the ladder of progress and add to patience godliness. This is the very outgrowth of patience. Said the apostle Paul, "We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience, experience, and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:3-5).

Here, then, is an advance grace, godliness, which is to have the spirit and the likeness of the character of Jesus Christ. To raise us to His divine ideal is the one end of all the dealings of God with us, and of the whole plan of salvation. For this His Spirit strives with us to exalt us to this great purpose. The corruption of the world is seeking to steal our senses; all the unholy influences on every side are working to hold us to a low, earthly level--blinding our sensibilities, degrading our desires, enfeebling our conscience, and crippling our religious faculties by urging us to give sway to the lower nature. Corruptions around us find corruptions within. Each works upon the other.

THE INVITATION--COME UP HIGHER!

To draw us away from all this is the precious ladder. The eye is attracted to God above the ladder. The invitation comes from the glory above it, Come up higher. The heart is attracted. Steps are taken in advance, one after another. Higher and still higher we ascend. At every step the attraction becomes greater. Higher, holier ambitions take possession of the soul. The guilt of the past life is left behind. We dare not look down the ladder at those things which long poisoned the springs of true happiness and kindled remorse, weakened and depraved the will,

and repressed every better impulse. The eye is steadfastly fixed, with grateful, trembling emotion, upon God above the ladder. Christ is the ladder. We lay hold on Christ, climbing up by Christ, resolving to return, broken, contrite, subdued, to the Father above the ladder. The offers of God's mercy, of living connection with God, of grace multiplied as we advance step by step, make the distance from earth more apparent.

The aim of God's Word is to inspire hope, to lead us to fasten our hands to this Ladder and climb step by step heavenward, with ever-increasing vigor. It is the key to the sense in which we partake of the nature of God. We attain a likeness of character to God by the imparting of His own grace. In the measure of our limited powers we can be holy as He is holy and can reproduce the truth and love which exist in Him who is at the top of the ladder. As wax takes the counterpart of the seal, so the soul receives and retains the moral image of God. We become filled and transfigured by His brightness, as the cloud--dark in itself--when filled with the light is turned to stainless whiteness.

BROTHERLY KINDNESS

There are still additional steps to take. Add "to godliness brotherly kindness." Thus there will not be merely a profession of Bible religion, but a sincere, earnest practice of godliness. We must be partakers of the divine nature before we can represent the Christlike character and practice the works of Christ. The climbing Christian will not sit passively, claiming the promises, enjoying the grace given him of God, but will work from principle. He is a worker together with God. The grace given him of God teaches him how to be kind and tender and helpful to his brethren. There is no waiting for an overpowering, magical change to be wrought into the conversion of others without any action of our own. Life becomes a humble but earnest working out of salvation with fear and with trembling, knowing that God worketh in us both to will and to do of His own good pleasure. The very exercise of brotherly kindness assimilates the soul to Christ and brings him into sympathy with Christ.

Growing in grace is an earnest working out of what God works in. It is an earnest of future glory, the working out here upon the earth of the spirit that is cherished in heaven.

The Word of God enjoins upon every one of His children: "Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous" (1 Peter 3:8). Now, unless godliness was added to patience, man would not show that brotherly kindness. Christ has shown man in His mission to our world the graces of the Spirit of God which, when accepted, fashion and mold the entire man, externally as well as internally, by abasing his pride and leading him not to esteem himself highly but to esteem his brother as precious in the sight of God because Christ paid an infinite price for his soul. When man is valued as God's property, then we will be kind, amiable, and condescending toward him.

TRUE COURTESY

The religion of Jesus Christ is a system of the true heavenly politeness, and leads to a practical exhibition of habitual tenderness of feeling, kindness of deportment. He who possesses godliness will also add this grace, taking a step higher on the ladder. The higher he mounts the ladder, the more of the grace of

God is revealed in his life, his sentiments, his principles. He is learning, ever learning, the terms of his acceptance with God, and the only way to obtain an inheritance in the heavens is to become like Christ in character.

The whole scheme of mercy is to soften down what is harsh in temper, and refine whatever is rugged in the deportment. The internal change reveals itself in the external actions. The graces of the Spirit of God work with hidden power in the transformation of character. The religion of Christ never will reveal a sour, coarse, and uncourteous action. Courtesy is a Bible virtue. The virtue of this grace of brotherly kindness characterized the life of Christ. Never was such courtesy exhibited upon the earth as Christ revealed, and we cannot overestimate its value.

CHARITY IS LOVE

The next step in the ladder is charity. Add "to brotherly kindness charity," which is love. Love to God and love to our neighbor constitute the whole duty of man. Without brotherly kindness we cannot exhibit the grace of love to God or to our fellow men.

This last step in the ladder gives to the will a new spring of action. Christ offers a love that passeth knowledge. This love is not something kept apart from our life, but it takes hold of the entire being. The heaven to which the Christian is climbing will be attained only by those who have this crowning grace. This is the new affection which pervades the soul. The old is left behind. Love is the great controlling power. When love leads, all the faculties of mind and spirit are enlisted. Love to God and love to man will give the clear title to heaven.

LOVE KEEPS THE COMMANDMENTS

No one can love God supremely and transgress one of His commandments. The heart softened and subdued with the beauty of Christ's character and bridled by the pure and lofty rules which He has given us will put into practice what it has learned of love, and will follow Jesus forthwith in humble obedience. The living power of faith will reveal itself in loving acts.

What evidence have we that we have the pure love, without alloy? God has erected a standard--His commandments. "He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me" (John 14:21). The words of God must have an abiding place in our hearts.

We are to love our brethren as Christ has loved us. We are to be patient and kind, and yet there is something lacking--we must love. Christ tells us that we must forgive the erring even seventy times seven, and how infinitely greater is the love of God than is our love. It is not the greatness of our sin but the depth of our repentance that brings the pardoning love of God to our hearts. When there is much forgiven, the heart loves much. Love is a tender plant. It needs to be constantly cultured or it will wither and die.

All these graces we must have. We must climb the whole length of the ladder. "If these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to

make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall" (2 Peter 1:8-10).

ADDITION & MULTIPLICATION

The only safety for the Christian is to be unwearied in his efforts to live on the plan of addition. The apostle shows the advantages to be gained in thus doing. For those who add grace to grace, God will work on the plan of multiplication, so that the graces will be in and abound in the religious life, and he will not "be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Those abounding in the Christian graces will be zealous, lively, vigorous in all practical Christianity, and will practice righteousness--just as the branch abiding in the vine will produce the same fruit that the vine bears and will bring forth much fruit.

He who does not climb the ladder of progress and add grace to grace "is blind, and cannot see afar off," He fails to discern that without taking these successive steps in ascending the ladder round after round, in growing in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, he is not placing himself in a position where the light of God above the ladder is reflected upon him. As he does not add grace to grace, he has forgotten the claims of God upon him, and that he was to receive the forgiveness of sins through obedience to the requirements of God. He is in the position of a sinner before God. If he has the graces of Christ he will exercise and increase them, but if he does not bear fruit in good works to the glory of God he remains in a state of blindness and ignorance, self-indulgence, and sin. He "cannot see afar off." His eyes are fastened upon the earth, not on God above the ladder.

This class may have earthly advantages but have no discernment of the privilege and blessings of living in the light which shines from God above the ladder. They know not the things that make for their peace. They cannot look backward with clear spiritual sight, as they do not view things in the light of heaven. They once enjoyed the love of God; they repented of their sins and enlisted to become servants of Jesus Christ, but they forgot all the vows made to God at baptism--all the solemn obligations taken upon themselves to seek for glory, honor, and immortality.

SET AFFECTIONS ABOVE

Says the apostle, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are (through the baptismal vows) dead (to the world, dead to its customs, its ambition, its pride, its pursuits), and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory: (Col. 3:1-4).

These things are to be often in mind. Meditate upon them. Think of your serious obligations you have entered into, and do not defraud God by violating any one of your solemn promises.

"Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10). We need not have a supposed hope, but an assurance. To make our calling and election sure is to follow the Bible plan to closely examine ourselves, to make strict inquiry whether we are indeed converted, whether our minds are drawn out after God and heavenly things, our wills

renewed, our whole souls changed. To make our calling and election sure requires far greater diligence than many are giving to this important matter. "For if ye do these things"--live on the plan of addition, growing in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ--ye shall mount up, step by step, the ladder Jacob saw, and "ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

CHRIST IS THE LADDER

Let us consider this ladder which was presented to Jacob. The human race was cut off from intercourse with God. They might look at a paradise lost but could see no means of entering it and holding communion with heaven. The sin of Adam cut off all intercourse between heaven and earth. Up to the moment of man's transgression of God's law there had been free communion between earth and heaven. They were connected by a path which Deity could traverse. But the transgression of God's law broke up this path and man was separated from God.

As soon as Satan seduced man to disobedience of God's holy law, every link which bound earth to heaven and man to the infinite God seemed broken. Man might look to heaven, but how could he attain it? But joy to the world! The Son of God, the sinless One, the One perfect in obedience, becomes the channel through which the lost communion may be renewed, the way through which the lost paradise may be regained. Through Christ, man's substitute and surety, man may keep the commandments of God. He may return to his allegiance, and God will accept him.

Christ is the ladder. "By Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (John 10:9).

This is the ladder, the base of it resting upon the earth, the top reaching to the highest heavens. The broken links have been repaired. A highway has been thrown up along which the weary and heavy laden may pass. They may enter heaven and find rest.

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN GOD & MAN

The ladder is the medium of communication between God and man. Through the mystic ladder the gospel was preached to Jacob. As the ladder stretched from earth, reaching to the highest heavens, and the glory of God was seen above the ladder, so Christ in His divine nature reached immensity and was one with the Father. As the ladder, though its top penetrated into heaven, had its base upon the earth, so Christ, though God, clothed His divinity with humanity and was in the world "found in fashion as a man." The ladder would be useless if it rested not on the earth or if it reached not to the heavens.

God appeared in glory above the ladder, looking down with compassion on erring, sinful Jacob, addressing to him words of encouragement. It is through Christ that the Father beholds sinful man. The ministering angels were communicating to the inhabitants of the earth through the medium of the ladder. The only way that man can be saved is by clinging to Christ.

We ascend to heaven by climbing the ladder--the whole height of Christ's work--step by step. There must be a holding fast to Christ, a climbing up by the merits of Christ. To let go is to cease to climb, is to fall, to perish. We are to mount

by the Mediator, and all the while to keep hold on the Mediator, ascending by successive steps, round above round, stretching the hand from one round to the next above. In the work of redemption we may have a knowledge of Jesus Christ by planting the feet on one round after another in perfect obedience to all the commandments of God. This is a necessity for each individual--striving and making progress at every step. It is simply impossible to enter heaven without constant striving. There is fearful peril in relaxing our efforts in spiritual diligence for a moment, for we are hanging, as it were, between heaven and earth.

We must keep the eye directed upward to God above the ladder. The question with men and women gazing heavenward is, How can I obtain the mansions for the blessed? It is by being a partaker of the divine nature. It is by escaping the "corruption that is in the world through lust." It is by entering into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, laying hold of the hope set before you in the gospel. It is by fastening yourself to Christ and straining every nerve to leave the world behind, laboring to diminish by successive steps your distance from God, who is at the top of the ladder. It is by being in Christ and yet led by Christ; by believing and working--trusting in Jesus, yet working upon the plan of addition, holding onto Christ and constantly mounting upward toward God.

When the successive steps have all been mounted, when the graces have been added one after another, the crowning grace is the perfect love of Godsupreme love to God and love to our fellow men. And then the abundant entrance into the kingdom of God.

We point you to the mansions Christ is preparing for all those who love Him. We point you to that city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. We show you its massive walls, with the twelve foundations, and tell you that these walls must be scaled. You look discouraged at the magnitude of the work before you. We point you to the ladder set up on earth, reaching to the city of God. Plant your feet on the ladder. Forsake your sins. Climb step by step and you will reach God above the ladder, and the Holy City of God. None who will resolutely mount up on the ladder will fail of everlasting life. "For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Ms 13, 1884.