

***"I have stuck unto thy testimonies;  
O Lord, put me not to shame."***

Psalm 119:31

We have just seen the *choice* of the man of God, and the rule by which he acted upon it. Now we see his perseverance--*first choosing the way--then sticking to it*. While he complained of "*his soul cleaving to the dust*" (Verse 25), he would yet say--*I have stuck unto thy testimonies*. Thus did he illustrate the apostle's delineation of the Christian's two hearts (as a converted African expressed it), "I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."<sup>1</sup> In the midst, however, of the most painful conflicts, the child of God holds fast his confidence. He feels that he hates the sin that he commits, and loves the Saviour, whom, in spite of himself, he dishonours; so that, with all his sins and unworthiness, he fears not to put in his claim among the family of God.

But, reader, seriously ask yourself--How did you become a Christian? Was it by birth and education, or by choice? If indeed by grace you have been enabled to "*choose the way of truth*," then be sure you firmly *stick to it*; or better, far better, that you had not made choice of it at all. "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. If ye *continue* in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed. It had been better for you not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after you had known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto you." (Luke, ix. 62. John, viii. 31. 2 Pet. ii. 21.) Yet, praised be God for the security of perseverance! He that enabled you to "put your hand to the plough" will keep it there in the habit of faith, firm and steadfast. "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth you." (Ps. cxxxviii. 8.)

Yet this "cleaving to the Lord" (Acts, xi. 23), can only be maintained by unceasing conflict. The length and weariness of the way (Numb. xxi. 4), and the slowness of your progress, are sources of constant and harassing trial. Revert, then, to the ground of your original *choice*. Was it made under the Lord's light and direction? This reason may well bind you to "*stick to*" it. For are not the ways of God as pleasant--is not Christ as lovely--is not heaven as desirable--as at the beginning? Nay--have you not even more reason to adhere to your *choice*, than you had to make it? It was formed before at least you could fully know for yourself. Now "*you have tasted*" (1 Pet. ii. 3)--you have the seal of experience. Is not the crown more joyous in the nearer prospect?

Backslider! "has God been unto you a wilderness, and a land of darkness" (Jer. ii. 31), that

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<sup>1</sup> Rom. vii. 22, 23, 25. Thus does Augustine graphically describe this conflict in his own mind--"The new will which began to be in me, whereby I would love thee, O my God! the only certain sweetness, was not yet able to overcome my former will, confirmed by long continuance. So my two wills, the one old, the other new; the one carnal, the other spiritual, conflicted between themselves, and rent my soul by their disagreement. Then did I understand by my own experience what I had read, how the "flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit lusteth against the flesh." I was myself on both sides, but more in that which I approved, than in that which I condemned, in myself, because for the most part I suffered reluctantly what I did willingly."--*Confess.* Book viii. ch. 5. Comp. Rom. vii. 15-20.

you virtually give your testimony after trial,--'Satan is the better master, and I will return to him?' The world is the happiest path; and I will walk in it. This is, indeed, choosing a murderer in the stead of a Father--"forsaking the fountain" for the "broken cistern." (Jer. ii. 13.) Oh! must there not be repentance in this path? May that repentance come before it be too late! Ponder who it was, that befriended you in the moment of an awful extremity, and snatched you as "a brand from the burning." Ponder the endearing proofs of his love--condescending to become a man--"a man of sorrows" (Isa. liii. 3), and to die in the agony of the cross, bearing for you the eternal curse of God. (Gal. iii. 13.) And does not gratitude remind you, what returns of faithful service are due from a creature so infinitely indebted to him? Surely the steadfast perseverance with which his heart clave to his costly work (comp. Matt. xvi. 23; Luke, xii. 50; Heb. xii. 2, 3), may serve to put to shame your unsteadiness in "*sticking to his testimonies.*"

Believer! you are determined to abide by your choice--but not in your own strength. Remember him, who one hour declared, that he would sooner die with Christ than deny him; and the next hour denied him with oaths and curses. (Matt. xxvi. 35, 74.) Learn, then, to follow up your resolution with instant prayer--"*O Lord, put me not to shame.*" Leave me not to myself, lest I become a *shame* to myself, and an offence to thy Church. "I will keep thy statutes. O forsake me not utterly." (Verse 8.) Dependence upon the Lord, in a deep sense of our weakness, is the principle of perseverance. Never will he shut out the prayer of his faithful servant. He hath promised--"My people shall never be ashamed" (Joel, ii. 27); and therefore, taking firm hold of his promise, you may "go on your way rejoicing."