

A PURIFYING HOPE

A SERMON

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“And every man that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure.” 1
John 3:3

THE objects of this hope are very great. Some of them are mentioned in this same Epistle, such as a divine, and consequently an eternal life. Not a human life, but a divine life; the Lord Jesus Christ being the life of his people, it is not a human life, but a divine. Therefore, great is its dignity, infinitely surpassing human life; and this life being divine, is consequently eternal. This is one of the objects of this hope. Another is that purity of light, which God is to his people; for “he is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” This is another object of this hope: coming entirely out of darkness into the open light of his glory. And another is fellowship with God; that is, rejoicing in the same things that he rejoices in; dwelling in, being encircled by, and (in a word) being so one with Christ as to stand or fall with him. Another object of this hope is victory over the world, and all that is implied in that word: of course, sin, death, the wicked one, all these things are implied in it. These are some of the objects of this hope, and you see they are very great: great in their nature, great in their importance, great in their duration, in their depths, in their heights, in their lengths, and in their breadths. And therefore, infinite is the difference between the objects pursued by the men of this world, and the objects which God has revealed by his salvation, and which he brings his people to seek and after all, real greatness of mind consists in the longing after and realizing more or less the greatest of all objects, God Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. “And every man that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure.”

It is not, however, our intention this morning to dwell upon the objects of this hope, but simply to the nature of it, as stated in the language of our text, and likewise in some other scriptures we shall notice when we come to the conclusion. “Every man that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure.” Our hope, therefore, is a hope of sanctification; and we have to show how “every man that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure.”

But before I come to that, there is something to precede. Here is, as you will readily see, in this language, our coming into a likeness of Christ; but there is something which precedes that, and that is his coming into our likeness. For you must ever draw a line of distinction between Christ’s likeness to us and our likeness to him; one is essential to the other, but still, they are perfectly distinct. And we could never come into a likeness to him if he had not come into our likeness.

But what do I mean by this difference? Why, friends, we by nature are sinners, and the Lord Jesus Christ, in order for us to come into his likeness, must come into our likeness; therefore, it is said,

he came “in the likeness of sinful flesh.” But this, like other things in the word of God, requires understanding. Some people say, you are to take things just as they are; why, if the Lord did not give his people understanding, they might attribute sin to God, and corruption to Christ, and a thousand other things. And therefore, as it was of old, so it is now; the Lord being the teacher of his people, he “opens their understandings, that they may understand the Scriptures.” Therefore, we know what is meant, when it is said that he came “in the likeness of sinful flesh;” for we know that in him was no sin, that he was altogether free from sin. Then let me show you wherein his likeness to us lay.

And first, we are by creation under the law of God; and Jesus Christ was made, created. That is, his manhood was created, called “the new thing created in the earth;” he was “made of a woman,” “made under the law.” This is one likeness to us: we were under the law, and he came under the law to us. In this respect, as well as several more we have to mention, he came into our likeness; and then his coming under the law, and obeying the law for us, brings us out from under that law into that likeness, we shall have to notice presently. Then also we, as sinners, are under the curse of the law; and the Lord Jesus Christ came under this curse, where we are.

This is another likeness to us. He came under the weight of the curse, and the whole weight of the curse rested upon him, and he has destroyed the curse. Again: we were under sin (I know we are in sin but here, for the sake of being clear in the matter, I say we are under sin); and the Lord Jesus Christ also came, not into sin, but under sin, and sin was laid upon him, “The Lord laid upon him the iniquities of us all.” There is another feature of this likeness. The Lord Jesus Christ came also under the law of universal love, in the mere natural sense; which universal love, being in the mere natural sense confined entirely to temporal things, ended with his life, for it could reach no further than his natural life; but upon that I will not enlarge. And I must pass by many respects in which he was “found in fashion as a man;” as paying tribute to Caesar, travelling about among men, condescending to eat and to drink, and to be weary, and to sleep, and so on; I need not remind you of all these several respects, in which he was made like unto us. But there is another respect yet, another revelation of his likeness; and that is, that we are all under death, and the Lord Jesus Christ came under death. And all this is included in his taking upon him “the likeness of sinful flesh.” Coming into our position, he has magnified the law, and we are delivered; he has destroyed the curse and left nothing for us to suffer he has put away sin, and brought us salvation; he has abolished death, and brought in eternal life. Thus, he has come into our likeness. And when he died, his likeness to us there ended. He was no longer under the law, for he had gone to the end of that; he was no longer under the curse, for there was an end of that, bless the Lord for it; he was no longer under sin, there was an end of that; he was no longer under death, there was an end of that; he was no longer under circumstances of privation, there was an end of that. There was an entire end of all his sorrows. Here is an end to all the claims of justice; here center all the purposes of mercy; and here we realize all that we do realize of God in life and in death; and here it is that we shall stand at the last day and have “fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore.” “Every man that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure.”

These few remarks we have made for the sake of clearing the way. For if the Lord Jesus Christ had not thus come in “the likeness of sinful flesh,” what was to be done? Here is the law; it cannot

be laid aside; it must be owned and honored. Here is the curse; here is sin; here is death; here is eternal perdition before us. The Lord Jesus Christ came and compassed the whole, accomplished the whole, and destroyed the whole.

Now then, what are we to understand by “purifying”? “Every man that has this hope in him purifies himself.” All men have shown, one way or another, that there is an indescribable dignity in holiness; and hence it is that all sects and parties in the world of a religious kind have pretended to holiness. Hence, in order to give as much weight and importance as possible to the Pope of Rome, he is called “His Holiness.” And although all this is hypocrisy deception and delusion, and the holiness amounts to just nothing at all in reality, yet it serves to show that if there were not such a dignity in holiness, men would not be so fond of pretending to it. But let us, the Lord leading us, not be deluded to suppose the language of our text means a mere creature, or fleshly or external holiness. “Every man that has this hope in vain purifies himself, even as he is pure.”

I. The first thing here implied is *incorruption*. In purity or in holiness there is incorruption, or incorruptibility. “Every man,” then, “that has this hope in him,” comes out of corruption into incorruptibility.

Now where shall we find incorruptibility? It is said of the Lord’s people that they are “born again of incorruptible seed, by the Word of God, which lives and abides forever.” God is said to be the “uncorruptible God.” It is said of Jesus Christ that he could “see no corruption “You will not leave my soul in hell, neither will you suffer your Holy One to see corruption.” Here, then, we have the uncorruptible God; here we have an uncorruptible Christ. Now we are brought to feel that we by nature are nothing but corruption, our souls corrupted, our bodies corrupted; that “we are altogether as an unclean thing;” and were it not for the coarseness of the phrase, I should say we might as well look to the devil himself for anything good, any real good in a spiritual sense, as to look to ourselves, or any creature under heaven, for anything that would contribute one iota towards that incorruptibility, essential to bring us into the presence, and to make us happy with the incorruptible God. And “every man that has this hope” has a knowledge of his entire corruption and depravity; and he consequently comes in his faith, in his desires, in his hope, out of this, and his hope centers in an incorruptible God. He has an incorruptible religion; God the Father appears in his incorruptibility in all the love of his heart, God the Son appears in his incorruptibility, God the Holy Ghost appears in his incorruptibility; and when corruption shall be no more, we shall have an incorruptible God and an incorruptible inheritance that fades not away, while we shall be invigorated to all eternity with all the freshness of incorruptibility. But “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither does corruption inherit incorruption we come therefore out of this into the incorruptibility of the living God. Yes, God comes in, in his sovereign choice of us: the Redeemer comes in, in his entire and eternal redemption of us; the Holy Ghost comes in, in his having eternally quickened our souls, “born again of incorruptible seed, by the Word of God, which lives and abides forever.” This is one feature of the perfection of that sanctification which the Lord’s people have. And Christ is our incorruptibility. Take Jesus Christ away and everything is corruption; let us have him, and corruption is over come, and we rejoice in the uncorruptible God.

Now it may seem a little digressive, but I have a word or two more to say upon this subject. The truth of God is said to be by men corrupted; the name of God is said to be by men corrupted; the

church of God is said also to be corrupted or defiled. Let us look at this. In what sense is the truth of God corrupted? In what sense is the name of God polluted? For the Lord says that his holy name is polluted. And in what sense is the church of God polluted? We will tell you: it is expressive merely of the conduct of men, of what they would make the truth of the Lord, of what they would make the name of the Lord, of what they would make the church of the Lord. For instance, when Jesus Christ was in this world, I suppose you will admit (and are brought somewhat to feel the blessedness of it) he was the Holy One of God; the devils themselves confessed it, and the disciples well knew it; and yet men called him all the awful names they could think of, devil, wine-bibber, gluttonous man, and so on. This is what they would have made him out to be; but instead of being what they would have made him out to be, he turned out to be what God said he was, the Holy One of Israel. He turned out to be possessed of all that purity and perfection that defied all earth and defied all hell, stood the scrutinizing eye of heaven, and gloried in being the hope of the millions who were gone home to glory before him, and looked forward to him as possessing that incorruptibility which should destroy their corruption. And therefore, men are said to pollute his holy name, not because they can do it really, but because they would give it an evil sound in the ears of men. Again, the apostle says, "We are not as many which corrupt the Word of God;" not that the Word of God can really be corrupted. "Ah, that election," say some; "it is a dangerous doctrine;" bless you, you may call it an evil thing, but it will turn out to be a good thing at last. "Ah, that particular redemption; it is a dangerous doctrine;" it will turn out to be a good thing at last. "Ah, that doctrine of divine invincibility, in bringing the sinner out of a state of nature, whether the man will come or not; it is a dangerous doctrine;" bless your heart, it will turn out to be a good doctrine at last, for all the Lord's people will acknowledge that they were "dead in trespasses and sins," and that for the great love wherewith he loved them" he quickened them together with Christ, and that the whole work was his own from first to last. "Ah, that doctrine of the everlasting covenant" at which a hoary-headed man jumped up and ran out of the chapel last Thursday at Redcross Street, because I drew the line of distinction between the old and the new covenant; "it is a dangerous thing;" bless your heart it is a good thing, for the Lord in this covenant says he will blot out our transgressions and will not remember our sins, he will put his laws in our minds and write them in our hearts, and that we shall "sit under our vine and under our fig tree, and none shall make us afraid." So that that name which men tried to corrupt turned out at last to be a glorious name, Immanuel, God with us:

"The noblest balm of all my wounds.
The cordial of my cares;"

and that word which men exclaimed against, saying, "You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine," why, it shall turn out to be the golden cord by which Jehovah and his people are eternally united. Ay, and so with the church too. They try to corrupt the church; "Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion." Give her an ugly name; in order to give ourselves a good name. "Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion." But "they know not the thoughts of the Lord." They may give Zion a bad character; God has given her a good character, and she shall turn out to be as fair as God says, "You are all fair, my love, there is no spot in you;" and by the grace of the Lord she shall appear at last as a bride adorned for her husband, in the presence of Infinite Purity, without fault or spot or any such thing. "Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion;" "but they

know not the thoughts of the Lord, neither understand they his counsel, for he shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor." He will take care of them. "Every man," therefore, "that has this hope, purifies himself" from enmity against the Savior's name, from enmity against the truth, and from enmity against the people of God; he comes out from all these corrupt systems into the incorruptibility of the living God. Now are you bad enough to need this purifying? All purifying, short of this, is nothing; every man that has this hope purifies himself," to know the difference between corruptible man and the uncorruptible God.

II. Now we will take another view of it; in the next place, he "that has this hope purifies himself" not only in this, that he comes out of corruption into the incorruptibility of God, but the purity signifies also *qualification*.

If the Lord Jesus Christ had had one sin, I will go farther and say, if he had had one personal infirmity, it would have disqualified him for his great work. Under the law, the priest, as it regards the fair proportions of his body, was to be perfect; any deformity would disqualify him. I know that was figurative; but it is the typical meaning that I have in view. "But" say you, "the visage of the Lord Jesus Christ was 'marred more than any man's'; that expresses no deformity, but only his grief, for he was 'a man of sorrows.'" Now the Savior, being entirely free from sin, was perfectly qualified to meet all the demands of law; perfectly qualified, being God and man in one person, to obey for us; qualified to be an offering for us; qualified to come before God for us, at liberty to come and plead for us because he had no sin of his own. So then, "every man that has this hope purifies himself" from disqualification. A man by nature is not fit for heaven, because he is unholy; but we have this hope in our God, and by this hope we come out of disqualification, and become qualified for everlasting glory.

Then what is our qualification for everlasting glory? for "every man that has this hope in him" comes out of disqualification into qualification. Qualification for heaven consists in this one thing, and I simplify it in this way, in order that if it be the Lord's will, you may remember it the better; it consists in being perfectly one in our minds with the mind of God. For if you differ from him, you are not fit to live with him; certainly not, for "can two walk together except they be agreed?" Now by nature we certainly do very widely differ from him; truly, truly, "his thoughts are not our thoughts, nor his ways our ways." But "every man that has this hope," comes out of his own thoughts into God's thoughts, comes out of his own sentiments into God's sentiments, comes out of his own ways into God's ways; and therefore, we read of a man's "ceasing from his own wisdom," and so on. We are to become completely one in our minds with God; and therefore, Paul says, "We have the mind of Christ; and in another place, "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." What is the whole object of the gospel towards us? Why, to make known the mind of the Lord concerning us; and if I know the mind of God concerning me, that what he has done is for me, that his Holy Spirit is for me, that his testimony in the Holy Scripture is for me, why, being of one mind with him, I am fit to live with God. There is no collision; there is perfect harmony. This is the one thing that constitutes preparation for heaven. "Every man that has this hope purifies himself" from antipathy to the mind of God in the one business of salvation, and he comes out of this into the mind of God.

I should be very sorry to make use of an unbecoming expression, or to say anything now that I should be sorry to say in a dying hour; but I believe a child of God cannot die in Arianism, or Sabellianism, or any base system, because they are systems of enmity against God. And I would just as soon believe that the devil is in heaven, as that John Wesley is there by his religion. Mind, by his religion: I do not say that John Wesley is not there, but if he is it is not by that religion he preached. If he is there, he is there by that grace against which he fought; and as Toplady once said to him, "If ever you get to heaven, I think after the many lies you have told, you will be a pretty good proof that salvation is of grace." Get to heaven! yes, that God's people shall, not by their own way; they shall get to heaven by the Lord's way. Heaven is a harmonious place. There the mind of God without reserve is revealed, understood without confusion, received without hesitation, echoed without a jarring note throughout all the boundless plains of an eternal world.

And yet some poor creatures think they are fit for heaven because they have run through a round of prayers got out of their Prayer-books for a few years. Why, it has no more to do with it than Aesop's fables. Aesop's fables would bring you to heaven just as soon as a round of miserable duties. It is the soul that must be won to God. Why, what would men do with their *duties*? If they could bring them to heaven, they would shut Jesus Christ out; and our King could not look upon their doings with much favor, for they would dethrone him if they could. It would be, "Down with free grace! up with free will!" So that profanity and profession join to cast the great Redeemer down from his excellency. But his people "have not so learned Christ." May the Lord take these things and make them sink down deep into your hearts! "Every man that has this hope" comes out of antipathy into a sameness of mind with God; and there is no getting to heaven without. When the Lord Jesus Christ was in this world, his disciples differed from him very much, as we all do till we know better; but whenever he communicated, whether a kind explanation or a cutting reproof, it always put them to silence. "Get you behind me, Satan;" we do not find Peter entered into any controversy; he felt he was wrong, and he trembled before God. Or let him give any explanation, it always puts them to rights. And so, it is now. You may get into a dispute with a fellowman, but when the Lord speaks, it always settles the matter.

So then, not to enlarge here, "every man that has this hope;" comes out of corruption into incorruption, and out of disqualification into qualification or oneness of mind with God.

III. Again: purity not only supposes incorruptibility and oneness of mind with God, but it also supposes *right*. If a man is holy and has no sin, he has a right to something. Had Adam and Eve remained holy, they, according to the dispensation under which they were, would have had a right to Paradise, and to all included in the full-meaning word; but when, the fall took place, they lost that right, and they had nothing else. And therefore, we cannot have any right to salvation; for if Adam had stood till this day, he could not have raised himself in the scale of being, he had a right to stand only where he was. A man may by industry and frugality break out from the common blundering way of others, and signalize himself, and raise himself in the scale of society; but when we come to eternal things, to raise himself in the scale of dignity is impossible. Adam could never have attained anything more than his unfallen state. It would have been sin to attempt it. "Why," say you, "our divine tells us that if Adam had not sinned, he might have got to heaven." I repeat,

it would have been sin to attempt it; by that very act he fell; it would have been an act of disobedience to attempt to get any more than he had there.

But now “every man that has this hope” comes out of his state of having no right to anything, into a right and title to the things of eternity. And what is our right to eternal glory? Why, that question may be answered several ways, but for the sake of conciseness I answer it in these few words: our right to eternal glory is the authority of God. The Savior explains it and sets it before us beautifully; and if we have this hope, we come into that right. “In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.” If it be asked of me, what right have I to this everlasting purity? God my Father, of his good pleasure, gave it to me. That is my right; invalidate it if you can. What right have I to this salvation? the dear Redeemer wrought it out for me. That is my right; invalidate it if you can. What right have I to this knowledge of God, this love to God, this decision for God? the Holy Ghost has brought me into this knowledge, this love, this decision. Invalidate his authority if you can. And therefore “every man that has this hope in him” comes out of human authority: good-bye, Mr. Pope; good-bye, Mr. Bishop; farewell to human authorities, calling no man on earth either father, or master, or teacher, in these things. Our authority for possessing them is the authority of God himself; invalidate that authority if you can.

“Everyman that has this hope in him purifies himself” from human authorities and comes into the authority of God. I know some of you do not half like my cutting at these public men so much as I do but I always shall, and so will every other man that is like his Master, the Scribes and Pharisees with their long faces and long phylacteries, and long prayers and miserable looks So then “every man that has this hope in him purifies himself from all human usurpation; and if it cost him his life in doing it, he cares not, for if he “lose his life he shall keep it unto eternal life.” “Every man that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure.” Christ is incorruptible; Christ was perfectly of one mind with the Father, he is qualified; Christ acted entirely by divine authority. We thus come into likeness with Christ; we “purify ourselves even as he is pure.” Was he incorruptible? So are we, by him. Was he qualified for his great work and high destiny? So are we by him. And had he a right to do what he did and what he said, and to all the glory which he has? and was divine authority that right? did he declare that he came not in his own name, but in his Father’s name, ever contending that his authority was his right to act as he did? So, it is ours too. It is a good hope, and a daring hope; it will look everything in the face.

IV. Again, purity supposes, not only incorruptibility, qualification, and right to everlasting glory, but also *liberty*. And this is the last thing I will mention at present.

Where is our bondage? In sin. Sin is our bondage. The flesh, the law, the world, these things are our bondage. But holiness, purity, is our liberty. Now the Lord Jesus Christ took our captivity upon him; he led captivity captive; he spoiled principalities and powers; he is shut up no more, he is straitened no more, he dies no more, sin has no more dominion over him. If that be true, free-will must be an egregious liar; sin has no more dominion over him. ‘Oh! yes,’ says the free-willier; ‘Jesus Christ comes to take possession of that man, and sin will not let him the Savior and sin meet, and sin proves itself stronger than the Savior; he conquered sin for the sinner, but he cannot

conquer sin in the sinner. Aye, but the truth of God will shine forth in its glory, when the lies of men shall fall back upon their own heads.

Then “every man that has this hope” comes into liberty. Christ having led captivity captive, has for himself and for us perfect liberty. What is to hold him? the law is established, the covenant confirmed, the promises Yea and Amen. He has dominion over all worlds. He goes forthwith, “Loose him, and let him go.” The Savior says to everyone, “Loose him, and let him go.” After the snare has held us as long as he pleases, he says, “Loose him, and let him go;” and we receive strength. The snare is broken, and we escape. “If it had not been the Lord that was on our side”, ah! But it *was* the Lord that was on our side, and *it is* the Lord on our side, and *it will be* the Lord on our side.

So then, “he that has this hope” comes out of bondage into liberty. The Lord Jesus Christ has entire dominion over all worlds and therefore our liberty is the liberty of God. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty, and the Spirit of God is in Christ and therefore our liberty is in Christ. In Christ we have dominion over all adverse powers. And this is real sanctification, that takes a man out of corruptibility into incorruptibility, out of disqualification, into qualification, out of bondage into glorious, final, and eternal liberty. But I must not enlarge.

Now by way of conclusion, I must just give you a fourfold view of this hope. Four things are said of it.

One is, that sometimes we cannot see it; we seem to be without it. Not that we are ever without hope really; but said the church in one place, “We see not our signs and Jeremiah said, “My hope and my strength is perished from the Lord.” I have said that a most numberless times; I have been brought into such a state as to feel I had no right to hope, no right to expect mercy, and seeing no sign of it, backward nor forward, one way nor the other. And yet we have this hope, and it still remains. It is “incorruptible, undefiled, and fades not away.” Another thing said of this hope is, that it “enters into that within the veil.” The apostle means the veil that separated the holy from the most holy place; and as the Lord’s glory used to be revealed in the holy of holies in a way it was not outside, so this refers to the revelation of the secrets of eternity; and our hope “entering into that within the veil” means, that those who have this hope are made acquainted with those purposes, plans, and provisions, which the Lord our God has for us.

Then again, it is said that our hope is “sure and steadfast.” And see how true this is. It is incorruptible; it will never give way. It has qualification, oneness of mind with God; it will never give way. It has right, by the authority of God; it will never give way. It has liberty, already obtained; it will never give way. And therefore, although we sometimes see not this hope, yet it enters into the holy of holies, and is sure and steadfast.

And lastly, it makes a man very bold. “Hope makes not ashamed.” The Lord’s people are a bold people. You know as well as I do, when we enjoy a little of the presence of the Lord, we can face anything. Why, look at good old Elijah. Here are four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal: ‘I do not care if there are four hundred and fifty thousand; bring them all forth, and prepare sacrifice, and let them try to make their god act if they can.’ He was so daring, that he ridiculed their free-will god: “Cry aloud: he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleeps

and must be awaked.” And so, they did, and tormented themselves too; but their god did not come and could not come. ‘Now,’ said he, bold as a lion, ‘just to show we are honest, fill the trench, with water’ and then Elijah’s God appears, and water and wood and stones all share the same fate, and are all consumed together. But as soon as this was over, and the Lord began to hide his face, and Elijah could not now see his hope so clearly as he had done, he began to fear; and when Jezebel sent out her royal edict, poor Elijah went off into the wilderness, and said, “O Lord, I am not better than my fathers.” Why, if he could continue acting so heroically, he would have thought himself better than all the rest of the prophets; but now he finds out he is no better than they. But he lies down, and the Lord takes care of him, and brings him food in the desert. So, he ate, and he “went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights”, where? to Jezebel, to beg her pardon? No, he was still to God-ward, his hope was still in God; he went “unto Horeb, the mount of God,” and there the Lord appeared to him. Yes, this hope is “sure and steadfast,” and “the righteous is bold as a lion.” May the Lord bring us more and more into the great objects of this hope!

The following lines were composed on meditating upon the great Mediator from a sense of my need. The dear Redeemer, shining forth in the fulness, freeness, and riches of his grace, engages the thoughts and wins the affections of his dear people, and renders himself precious to their souls. Oh for more of these blessed way-marks, for they are tokens of my eternal election:

The beauties of Jesus my soul would adore,
The God-man Mediator that’s blessed evermore;
I would cleave to his mercy, his grace, and his blood,
And sing of my safety, for Jesus is God.

But oh, when my Jesus, and often he does,
Quite hide from my heart the sweet beams of his love,
'Tis then I’m in trouble for want of his blood,
Yet here is my comfort, for Jesus is God.

The same in his love, in his thoughts, and decrees,
And when I can see him and rest on his knees;
Here, then, is a Savior that’s always the same,
God-man is his nature, Jehovah his name. James Wells