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FULLNESS OF THE GENTILES

A SERMON –Preached on Sunday Morning July 1st 1866, by

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AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET

"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in." (Romans 11:25)."

THIS is confessedly a very difficult verse to understand, and, indeed, so is the chapter altogether if we attempt to enter into its details; and perhaps it is one of those scriptures referred to by the apostle Peter when he saith of some of Paul's writings that "there are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned" (2 Peter 3:16)--that is, not taught of God--"wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." We have, therefore, to be thankful for the analogy of faith, and for a knowledge of the analogy of faith; for those that have a knowledge of the analogy of faith and the order of faith will never very seriously pervert the Holy Scriptures. You read in the twenty-first of Luke that "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, unto the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Now there is a subject quite different from this in our text. There the meaning is that literal Jerusalem should be trodden down until that treading down was completed; not one stone should be left upon another: and when the Gentiles finished their work, then the wars ceased, and Jerusalem settled down in a heathen state, in which it still remains. Then there is a similar expression in the eleventh of the Revelation, which has still another meaning: there, when John is commanded to take account of the temple, and the altar, and them that worship therein, by measuring it, he was to leave out the outer court; "for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city"--there the holy city means the true church--"shall they tread under foot forty and two months:" that is, unconverted Gentiles should persecute the church for a limited time. How long that forty-two months lasts the Lord alone knows; the measurement of that period is explained to none; it is a definite, as it were, for an indefinite course of time as far as creatures are concerned; but the Lord knows his own times, and he will bring about all that he has said shall be brought about within those times. Now there are several explanations that have been given of our text, and two I will mention before I enter upon the subject, with which I do not at all feel satisfied. One is this, that the Jews did not yet know

that the Gentiles were to be fellow-heirs with them, and not knowing this, they stood against Peter when he had gone in and preached the gospel unto the Gentiles: they considered that he had done wrong, and they called him, as you are aware, to account for so doing, and he expounded the matter unto them in order,--and then that partial blindness to which they were before subjected departed from them, their eyes were opened, and they then saw that unto the Gentiles also God had granted repentance unto life. Now this seems a very good explanation of our text as to the blindness in part happening unto Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. But then, unhappily for this interpretation, the circumstance of the blindness departing from Israel in respect of the ingathering of the Gentiles had happened many years before the apostle wrote this epistle. And the next interpretation given is that by-and-bye, when all the Gentiles whom the Lord hath in his deep counsels ordained to eternal life shall be called in, when that is done, when that is completed, then shall the blindness of the Jews under which they are, depart, and thus the Gentiles shall be blinded, and the Jews shall be enlightened and be brought in. This looks also rather feasible, but unhappily also for this view, while the Gentiles obtained mercy through the unbelief of the Jews, the Jews are not to obtain mercy through the unbelief of the Gentiles, but the Jews are to obtain mercy through the mercy of the Gentiles; so that while we obtain mercy by their fall, they are to obtain mercy by our standing fast. And for ought I know, there may in a strong, if not in a stronger sense than in the apostolic age, be one fold of Jews and Gentiles united, one fold and one Shepherd. So that they are to obtain mercy through our mercy.

What, then, is this blindness in part that has happened unto Israel, and what is the meaning of our text? I am not so sure as I could wish that I have the meaning of it; but nevertheless I will venture, the Lord enabling me, to say a few things that shall at least accord with the analogy of faith; and whether I am right, whether it be the mind of the Holy Spirit that I give in our text this morning, I must leave you to judge. I feel myself, before I enter upon the subject, somewhat satisfied with the view which appears to me to be the meaning of our text. I will therefore at once proceed to notice the contents in the text, which lie before us, as you see, in a threefold form. Here is first, then, the blindness of Israel, the partial blindness of unconverted Israel. Here is secondly, as it appears to me, the remedy for that blindness, when the fullness of the Gentiles shall come in. Here is, thirdly and lastly, the great importance of understanding this mystery, in order that we may be prevented from being wise in our own conceits. And that is a very poor place to be wise in. To be wise in Christ is a great thing; to be wise in the love of God is a great thing. So, then, let not the man that is wise in his own conceit glory, neither let the man that is rich after the flesh glory, neither let the man that is magisterially, or in any form mighty after the flesh, glory; "but" let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD." (Jer. 9:24)

I notice, then, first, the blindness of Israel. And mind, I do this not merely to talk about the Jews, I do this in order that we may see how it applies unto us as well as unto them; that is if we ourselves are dead in trespasses and in sins. The partial blindness of Israel. They are spoken of as only partially blind for this reason, that they had the oracles of God, and that as rational men they knew from those oracles that there was a Supreme Being, and that worship was due to him, and to him alone. So that they were not blind as to that one and foundation truth of the Bible, that there is one God, Creator of the ends of the earth, and none but him. And have we not thousands upon thousands in our land that have the same kind of knowledge? They believe the Bible to be true, they believe in the one supreme God, and so far so good; we all are glad of this--we are glad of any amount of light the Lord is pleased to grant unto benighted man as to his condition. But now, notwithstanding they had this knowledge, by the oracles of God, of the supreme God, still at the same time they were ignorant of that which was essential to their salvation. That is the part in which they were blind, that is the part in which they were in darkness, that is the part wherein

their conduct was fatal to them, that is the part wherein the Saviour spake such solemn things concerning them. Now, then, what is the part in which they were ignorant? Circumstances will show clearly enough, but we will have not only circumstances, but the word of the Lord. Let us go back to the 10th chapter, for the Bible is indeed its own interpreter. The apostle Paul had a very great feeling towards those that had a partial knowledge of God; he had a very strong feeling towards them, the same as we have sometimes. There are many in our land very admirable characters, most amiable characters--benevolent, and devoted, and excellent,--and yet they do not seem savingly to know the truth; and when we put the question close home to our own consciences, Do we really believe such will be lost? do we really believe such will be damned to eternity, in common with profligates, wicked men, and ungodly people? Well, we can hardly believe it; and yet it must be so, if they live and die ignorant of what the Jew was ignorant. Let us therefore see what it was they were ignorant of. The apostle had a deep feeling for their souls, and a deep feeling upon this matter. He says, "I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." (Rom. 10:2) Now comes the part in which they were blind. "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness." (Rom. 10:3) There is the blindness. They had "a zeal for God," so that they were not altogether blind, "but not according to knowledge;" they were ignorant of Christ's righteousness, and therefore in their zeal for God they sought to establish their own righteousness. This, then, is one thing essential for us to know--the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. And if that were traced out you would find a vast amount of meaning in the words of the apostle when he saith, in order to give information to such, and if it be the Lord's will that such might be brought into the truth and be saved--"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness;" and then in order to cut off all creature work in this matter, he says, "To everyone that believeth." There does not appear anything very great in the truth that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to the man that does not know the law; but the man who knows the law,--he will see something great in Christ being the end of that law. I am not much of a hand at similes, but may I use one here for a moment?

We will take, for instance, the criminal, the murderer; he is under sentence of death. Well, he knows the power of the law, in taking him into custody, in judging him, in condemning him, and there he is helplessly and hopelessly condemned. That man knows the law. And now if a friend could step in and release him entirely from his position, and make a new man of him, and put him into a position where there would be no danger or any disposition on his part to do the like again, but put him into a new position altogether, would he not look upon that circumstance as a great circumstance? You see it would do four things for him. It would deliver him from bondage; it would change his disposition, supposing such a thing could be done; put him into a new position; and at the same time secure him there. And this is just what faith in Christ as the end of the law does. It exempts us from so great a death, and it convinceth us of our state, and we know something of the power of the law to hold us fast, to execute its sentence, and to condemn. If we know something of this, and see the awfulness of falling into the hands of a sin-avenging God, then we shall see the blessedness of that scripture, that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth." We come out from condemnation by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Then it gives a new disposition. Some of you can say so. You may have doubts and fears as to your interest in it; but look at this one thing--change of disposition. There was a time when you were disposed to hate the truth, now you can love it. There was a time when your disposition led you to say concerning Christ and his salvation and his mercy. "Depart from me, I desire not the knowledge of thy ways." Whereas now you go to the house of God upon the Lord's day, and upon a week night when you can, when your avocations are such as to enable you to get away therefrom, and to seek the Lord, and to read the Bible, and pray, and join in his praise. What a change of disposition is here! a new state; you are brought into the new covenant, brought into new prospects, into new scenes altogether, and are secure therein; having on your side Christ's everlasting righteousness; for that righteousness is always the same with God, and God is always the same with that, Christ's righteousness is everlasting. You may tear the planets from their orbits,

and extinguish every star in the sky, if such a thing could be done; but his righteousness shall not be abolished.

Now, then, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness." They were blind to this, ignorant; this blindness in part happened unto them, and a terrible happening it was. Take, then, that fourfold view, and then go on and see how it cuts off all works in this matter, that he is the end of the law to everyone that believeth. Then the apostle brings in what the law is. But the word of faith speaketh on this wise, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus"--the anointed Saviour, the Saviour set forth throughout the Old Testament,--"and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Here, then, was their ignorance, and here is the ignorance now. I do believe we live in a day when many of the great doctrines of the gospel are preached from different pulpits, and are held by different professors, and that they know not the real meaning of any of the doctrines they hold. Suppose they were put to the test. What is meant by the end of the law? Why, they would hardly know. Indeed, many that I have conversed with in my time, of the stamp of which I now speak, I have questioned them, they do not know what it means; and the gospel appears to them to be something like the spirit of what they call Antinomianism; for they must have the law. A vast amount of talk about the moral law. Hence a few months ago the tremendous alarm in the camp of the Ishmaelites and in the borders of the Israelites about the moral law, that somebody had been suspending the moral law; terrible concern about the moral law. Why, if one word is said about the moral law, there is a terrible noise; but you may preach mixed-up Arminianism, duty-faith, and other doctrines, the inventions of men, and so pervert the gospel, and they take but little notice of it; just showing where men are, that the majority of them are in their firstborn state--at least, if not so, in partial ignorance. But the man who is brought to the end of the law finds in the gospel everything he needs. He does not need anything wherewith to come to God that he does not find in the gospel; he does not find one word he needs, nor anything he needs, which he does not find in the gospel. I never find the apostle Paul so awfully alarmed about the law; he knew that fiery law will take care of itself. But when we come to the gospel, knowing that that was the only remedy for man, he was alarmed in a moment, when he saw any of the royal family disposed to go away ignorantly into slavery, desiring to be in bondage again; and he saith that even an angel from heaven should be anathematized if he were to preach another gospel. Here, then, is the ignorance of the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we see this in the multitude all through the Old Testament. See in Jeremiah's day how few there were that received him and understood him. Why was it? Because they were ignorant of Christ's righteousness. Had they but known Christ's righteousness when Jeremiah was sent with the ponderous, and overwhelming, and divine, and glorious testimony, "This is his name whereby he shall be called, Jehovah our righteousness," (Jer. 23:6) why, every man taught of God would say, What an infinite fool must I have been to attempt to put my puny, poor, moth, worm-like doings into the place of Jehovah my righteousness! "This is his name whereby he shall be called, Jehovah our righteousness."

Why, then, if it is an everlasting righteousness it carries out everlasting love, everlasting mercy, carries out the everlasting covenant, carries out everlasting life, carries out everlasting peace, carries out everlasting conquest, and will throw open to us an eternity of bliss. But they were ignorant of it, and so poor Jeremiah was put first in the stocks, but that could not put his testimony into the stocks; and they put him into the dungeon, but that could not put God's word into the dungeon. You may bind your ministers, but you cannot bind their testimonies. The word of God is not bound, it will have its way through everything, beat down everything that stands in its way, level every mountain, raise every valley, straighten every crook, smooth every rough place, and will go majestically on; the great God saying, "It shall not return unto me void, but shall accomplish that which I please." (Isa. 55:11) Just so with Ezekiel; how few there were to receive him! and just so the Saviour, how few there were to receive him! See the

rabble, see the multitude at large. Here they were ignorant in part. They all believed in God. Hence they said to the man whose eyes the Saviour opened, "Give God the glory, this man is a sinner." We know God ought to have the glory. Now that is right, you see; they were right in the object, but wrong in the way to that object. So it is now. And if I personify the gospel, why, the pure gospel they would call it a sinner. The gospel is a sinner, it is a very dangerous gospel, and any man must run the risk of being hated and despised if he mean to be savingly useful to the souls of men, for the light is that that the natural man does not like.

Here, then, is the ignorance. How is it with us? Have we been made acquainted with law? The apostle saith, in the 7th chapter of this epistle, "I speak to them that know the law." What is the knowledge that most professors have of the law? Well, sir, the ten commandments; we ought to keep them. Very good; nothing against that. But do you know that there is a sense or a respect in which no man ever did or ever can keep them since the fall, except the man Christ Jesus? and that is the commandment comes home to the heart. The Lord looketh on the heart, and if you have had only one evil thought in your lifetime, then that one evil thought, tied around your neck, only that one, would be a millstone that would sink you into eternal damnation. The whole human race became sinful by one act, and you would be damned by only one evil thought. And what is the testimony of the great God himself with reference to this subject? "The imaginations of the heart of man are evil, and only evil, and that continually." (Gen. 6:5) "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." (Jer. 17:9) And yet that heart comes forward and boasts of being holy, just, and good. Only look at it. The law is holy, just, and good, and that heart--for so it was with Saul of Tarsus; he of course boasted of being holy, just, and good. But when this law took hold of him, and opened up thus what he was internally, then he came to a right conclusion,--"The law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin." (Rom. 7:14) Where is the surety, where is the righteousness, where is the ransom, where is the mercy, where is the love, where is the goodness, where is the power, that can deliver me from the body of this death? "Thanks be to God, that giveth us the victory by our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 15:57) Here, then, is the ignorance that happened unto Israel; and it is an ignorance that has happened to our British Israel. As a minister some time ago said to me, "You preach those doctrines too much. Now I give the people"--somewhere about a little back parlor full I think he has to speak to--"a good deal of practical instruction." "Well, what do they do?" "Well, I can't say much of their doings." "Nor you can't say much of your own either. I have never heard of your doings." And I said, "Do you know the reason you do not preach these doctrines more?" He said, "I don't think they are exactly profitable." I said, "You don't know them. You think you do; you have got them in theory, but you do not know them. If you had realized their infinite value and infinite worth, you would be more of the spirit of the apostle." What was his determination? What was his definition of his future work? It was this,--"Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." (Acts 20:24) Ah, those that do know the truth savingly, and know that these testimonies are more precious than thousands of gold and silver, sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb, if they should hold their peace the very stones would cry out; their very souls cry, "Hosanna to the Son of David;" their very souls praise him that cometh in the name of the Lord, just, and having salvation; the just God; just, and yet the Justifier of the ungodly. True knowledge will endear the truth beyond expression, beyond description. All sorts of similes are used in the word of God to set forth the endearment of God's truth to those that know it; but all the similes come short. What are gold and silver to it? What is the sweetness of honey to it? What is honor to it? What is anything you can name in comparison to the glorious gospel of the blessed God?

Now, having got at the ignorance, let us come to the remedy. Now this ignorance is to remain until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. What is the fullness of the Gentiles? Jesus Christ. He is their fullness. Now if I can bring no scripture to give some proof of this, I shall fail to convince you perhaps that this is

what I believe to be the meaning. But you see how beautifully it suits. When this which is now the fullness of the Gentiles comes to the Jews, it will convert them too; but until that same fullness which hath converted us come to them, they will remain in darkness. Until this same fullness come unto you that know not God, you will remain in darkness. This fullness, therefore, is the remedy. "The law of the Lord is perfect;" (Ps. 19:7) that is, the law of faith. It brings in a mediatorial and eternal perfection, consequently converts the soul. But let us have a scripture or two. 60th of Isaiah; you read there of the abundance of the sea being converted unto the Lord, and that the wealth of the Gentiles shall be brought into the city of the Lord; that they shall bring silver, and gold, and incense, and shall show forth the praises of the Lord; and again, "The kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it." Well, as far as the ministration of temporal things is concerned, building places of worship, and helping the poor, and all that, of course that is sure to be done where the truth is savingly known, but then there is a much higher sense than that in which silver and gold are to be brought in, and wealth is to be brought in. You know that scripture, some of you, that I quoted on Friday night; let me begin, to help myself, with that scripture: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors," (Ps. 24:7,9) that I may come in? No, no; I want to get in, and I want these gates of truth and everlasting doors to let me go in. You want to get in, do you? Yes, there is something inside I want. Who are you? "The King of glory shall come in." Oh yes, he shall come in immediately. "Then they that were ready went in with him," and without him they could not get in. You cannot get into heaven without Christ. Therefore the silver and the gold that you are to bring if you wish to join the church--why, the church would not have you unless you brought some silver and gold with you--you must bring a golden faith with you, and a silver sanctification with you; you must bring that testimony that shall show to us, or to that church, that you have received Christ Jesus the Lord. He is the wealth we are to bring into the church; the fragrance of his name is the incense. This is the glory of the kings of the earth; the kings of the earth, or the kings of the land, bring their glory; and the apostle said, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Gal. 6:14) Every Christian is a king, and when he enters the city he brings Christ with him, he brings the cross of Christ with him, and thus brings his wealth, his glory, his fullness with him. Hence when we meet with a person of no experience we instantly say, There is nothing in him; cannot see anything in him; cannot recognize anything in him; and it is of no use to receive empty things, and yet we must too. How do you make that out? say you. I am sure we want those that are emptied of self and filled with Christ; filled with the knowledge, and spirit, and gospel of Christ; those that know something of the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. If you look, then, at that 60th of Isaiah, you will see the gospel brought this wealth to the Gentiles, and then the Gentiles by that spiritual wealth came into the city; and they are the kings that bring their glory and their wealth into the city of God--the fullness of the Gentiles. Now this fullness can alone take the blindness away.

You find a similar scripture to the 60th of Isaiah in the 21st of Revelation. Let us now enter, hastily it must be, into detail. What are the things that make up this fullness? I shall take this chapter as my guide chiefly. Eternal election is one essential to this fullness. "Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel," against those to whom blindness had happened, saying, as it is in the Old Testament--for the apostle does not quote all the words, but evidently means to refer us to the scripture,--"They have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." They were priding themselves that they had got rid of them all. Now what saith the answer of God? "I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal;" fifty in that desert, a couple of hundred men in that wood, some here and some and some there--I have reserved to myself seven thousand; no thanks to them that they are reserved; no, I have reserved them. And I know how many they are, and I know where they are, and I know whose they are. "Even so at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace

is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace; otherwise work is no more work." (Rom. 11:2-6) That is, it cannot be conditional and unconditional at the same time; it must be either the one or the other. The apostle there avers by the unerring Spirit of the blessed God that if it be unconditional it cannot be conditional; otherwise unconditionality is no more unconditionality; and that if it be conditional it cannot be unconditional; otherwise conditionality is no more conditionality. So then "the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded." (Rom. 11:7) He that takes away the doctrine of election takes away at least one of the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

What are the truths of the gospel but the keys of the kingdom of heaven, that unlock to us the mysteries of God's pure and eternal mind? It is a remarkable thing that those men that claim to have the keys are the very men that have them not. Has the Pope of Rome the keys? Dr. Pusey tells us he has the keys. They are just the men that have them not. Every Christian knows that the truths of the gospel are the keys of the kingdom; and to give Peter the keys was to give unto him the truths of the gospel. What does the apostle say? "We were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel." Now substitute the word keys for the word gospel;--"We were allowed to be put in trust with the keys." Would not trust everybody with the keys. The apostle Paul reckoned it a distinguished honor to be allowed to be put in trust with the keys; allowed to be put in trust with the gospel; and with those glorious truths they unlocked mystery after mystery. So then eternal election is one essential to this fullness of the Gentiles. We are saved by grace. If you take election away, you must fill it up with something else, and then you substitute human invention for the truth of God. The Saviour says, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." (John 15:16) Second, here is a twofold representation of the mediation of Christ; that is another part of the fullness, that converts the sinner, and turns him into a saint. "If the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root be holy, so are the branches." (Rom. 11:16) Go to Leviticus; you will find the firstfruits were to be green ears of corn, to represent Christ in his freshness, youth, and purity; they were to be full, to represent in his fullness; dried by the fire, to represent Christ in his sufferings. These were to be presented, and the whole harvest consecrated by the firstfruits. So, if Jesus Christ be our firstfruit, if by him I am looking for acceptance with God, if by him I am seeking to gain access to God, then there is a fullness of access, there is a fullness of welcome; every impediment is removed out of the way. "Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." (1 Cor. 15:23) That is another part of the fullness of the Gentiles. If you could entertain any doubt in your mind as to Christ's acceptance, what a cloud would come over everything! But, bless the Lord, there is no cloud there; all is clear there. Then, "if the root be holy, so are the branches." If Christ be your root, from whence you derive your life and nourishment--I lay considerable stress upon the word nourishment here, because the root is to convey nourishment to all the branches of the tree,--and if Jesus Christ be that that nourishes your faith, and your love, and your zeal, and prayer, and everything that is spiritual, and strengthens you to serve God, and you can truly say that he is refreshing, that he is strengthening, that he is encouraging, then he is your root, and you by faith are holy. And you will never be broken off except for one fault, and that fault you cannot commit if you are a real child of God. The Jews were broken off because of unbelief; that is, they professed to be people of God, but at the same time disbelieved in the Christ of God, disbelieved in the righteousness and truth of God, and therefore they were broken off; because, while they professed the name of God, and said that God was their Father, they at the same time disbelieved his truth. Because of unbelief they were broken off.

The real Christian stands by faith, and by faith you have a fullness of acceptance. And do you not also see in the root the way in which that scripture is fulfilled, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be?" "Fear not," is his language, "I will nourish you;" and so the Lord does feed, nourish, support, and supply us, and keep us, shall I say, from dying. Now I have one more thing to name that makes up the fullness of the Gentiles, and that you will find in the 26th and 27th verses:--"And so"--by this fullness coming in, by election coming in, mediation coming in, the Spirit of God thus coming in,--"and so all Israel shall be saved. For this is my

covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins." "This is my covenant." Never can hear too much said of God's everlasting covenant. You know when a creature makes a will, however many thousands of pounds are contained in that will for the legatees, and however extensive the inheritance, it does not take you very long to read through the whole, and to be acquainted with the whole. But it is not so with the heirs of glory. Their Father's will hath willed them unsearchable riches; their Father's will hath willed them incalculable glory; an inheritance immeasurable, and it extends to infinity, stretches on to eternity; that we shall be to all eternity reading the wonders of our heavenly Father's covenant will, never get to the end thereof.