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ASPECTS OF JUSTIFICATION

#145

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COMPEL THEM TO COME IN

C.H. Spurgeon

“And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.”—Luke 14:23

I feel in such a haste to go out and obey this commandment this morning, by compelling those to come in who are now tarrying in the highways and hedges, that I cannot wait for an introduction, but must at once set about my business.

Hear then, O ye that are strangers to the truth as it is in Jesus—hear then the message that I have to bring you. Ye have fallen, fallen in your father Adam; ye have fallen also in yourselves, by your daily sin and your constant iniquity; you have provoked the anger of the Most High; and as assuredly as you have sinned, so certainly must God punish you if you persevere in your iniquity, for the Lord is a God of justice, and will by no means spare the guilty. But have you not heard, hath it not long been spoken in your ears, that God, in his infinite mercy, has devised a way whereby, without any infringement upon his honour, he can have mercy upon you, the guilty and the undeserving?

To you I speak; and my voice is unto you, O sons of men; Jesus Christ, very God of very God, hath descended from heaven, and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. Begotten of the Holy Ghost, he was born of the Virgin Mary; he lived in this world a life of exemplary holiness, and of the deepest suffering, till at last he gave himself up to die for our sins, “the just for the unjust, to bring us to God.” And now the plan of salvation is simply declared unto you—“Whosoever believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved.” For you who have violated all the precepts of God, and have disdained his mercy and dared his vengeance, there is yet mercy proclaimed, for “whosoever calleth upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” “For this is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief;” “whosoever cometh unto him he will in no wise cast out, for he is able also to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us.”

Now all that God asks of you—and this he gives you—is that you will simply look at his bleeding dying son, and trust your souls in the hands of him whose name alone can save from death and hell. Is it not a marvelous thing, that the proclamation of this gospel does not receive the unanimous consent of men? One would think that as soon as ever this was preached, “That whosoever believeth shall have eternal life,” every one of you, “casting away every man his sins and his iniquities,” would lay hold on Jesus Christ, and look alone to his cross. But alas! such is the desperate evil of our nature, such the pernicious depravity of our character, that this message is despised, the invitation to the gospel feast is rejected, and there are many of you who are this day enemies of God by wicked works, enemies to the God who preaches Christ to you to-day, enemies to him who sent his Son to give his life a ransom for many. Strange I say it is that it should be so, yet nevertheless it is the fact, and hence the necessity for the command of the text,—“Compel them to come in.”

Children of God, ye who have believed, I shall have little or nothing to say to you this morning; I am going straight to my business—I am going after those that will not come—those that are in the byways and hedges, and God going with me, it is my duty now to fulfil this command, “Compel them to come in.”

First, I must, *find you out*; secondly, I will go to work to *compel you to come in*.

I. First, I must FIND YOU OUT.

If you read the verses that precede the text, you will find an amplification of this command: “Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind;” and then, afterwards, “Go out into the highways,” bring in the vagrants, the highwaymen, “and into the hedges,” bring in those that have no resting-place for their heads, and are lying under the hedges to rest, bring them in also, and “compel them to come in.” Yes, I see you this morning, you that are *poor*. I am to compel *you* to come in. You are poor in circumstances, but this is no barrier to the kingdom of heaven, for God hath not exempted from his grace the man that shivers in rags, and who is destitute of bread. In fact, if there be any distinction made, the distinction is on your side, and for your benefit—“Unto you is the word of salvation sent”; “For the poor have the gospel preached unto them.” But especially I must speak to you who are *poor, spiritually*. You have no faith, you have no virtue, you have no good work, you have no grace, and what is poverty worse still, you have no hope. Ah, my Master has sent *you* a gracious invitation. Come and welcome to the marriage feast of his love. “Whosoever will, let him come and take of the waters of life freely.” Come, I must lay hold upon you, though you be defiled with foulest filth, and though you have nought but rags upon your back, though your own righteousness has become as filthy clouds, yet must I lay hold upon you, and invite you first, and even compel you to come in.

And now I see you again. You are not only poor, but you are *maimed*. There was a time when you thought you could work out your own salvation without God’s help, when you could perform good works, attend to ceremonies, and get to heaven by yourselves; but now you are maimed, the sword of the law has cut off your hands, and now you can work no longer; you say, with bitter sorrow—

“The best performance of my hands, Dares not appear before thy throne.”

You have lost all power now to obey the law; you feel that when you would do good, evil is present with you. You are maimed; you have given up, as a forlorn hope, all attempt to save yourself, because you are maimed and your arms are gone. But you are worse off than that, for if you could not work your way to heaven, yet you could walk your way there along the road by faith; but you are maimed in the feet as well as in the hands; you feel that you cannot believe, that you cannot repent, that you cannot obey the stipulations of the gospel. You feel that you are utterly undone, powerless in every respect to do anything that can be pleasing to God. In fact, you are crying out—

“Oh, could I but believe, Then all would easy be,

I would, but cannot, Lord relieve, My help must come from thee.”

To you am I sent also. Before *you* am I to lift up the blood-stained banner of the cross, to you am I to preach this gospel, “Whoso calleth upon the name of the Lord shall be saved;” and unto you am I to cry, “Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely.”

There is yet another class. You are *halt*. You are halting between two opinions. You are sometimes seriously inclined, and at another time worldly gaiety calls you away. What little progress you do make in religion is but a limp. You have a little strength, but that is so little that you make but painful progress. Ah, limping brother, to you also is the word of this salvation sent. Though you halt between two opinions, the Master sends me to you with this message: “How long halt ye between two opinions? if God be God, serve him; if Baal be God, serve him.” Consider thy ways; set thine house in order,

for thou shalt die and not live. Because I will do this, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel! Halt no longer, but decide for God and his truth.

And yet I see another class,— *the blind*. Yes, you that cannot see yourselves, that think yourselves good when you are full of evil, that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, darkness for light and light for darkness; to you am I sent. You, blind souls that cannot see your lost estate, that do not believe that sin is so exceedingly sinful as it is, and who will not be persuaded to think that God is a just and righteous God, to you am I sent. To you too that cannot see the Saviour, that see no beauty in him that you should desire him; who see no excellence in virtue, no glories in religion, no happiness in serving God, no delight in being his children; to you, also, am I sent.

Ay, to whom am I not sent if I take my text? For it goes further than this—it not only gives a particular description, so that each individual case may be met, but afterwards it makes a general sweep, and says, “Go into the highways and hedges.” Here we bring in all ranks and conditions of men—my lord upon his horse in the highway, and the woman trudging about her business, the thief waylaying the traveller—all these are in the highway, and they are all to be compelled to come in, and there away in the hedges there lie some poor souls whose refuges of lies are swept away, and who are seeking not to find some little shelter for their weary heads, to you, also, are we sent this morning. This is the universal command—compel them to come in.

Now, I pause after having described the character, I pause to look at the herculean labour that lies before me. Well did Melanchthon say, “Old Adam was too strong for young Melanchthon.” As well might a little child seek to compel a Samson, as I seek to lead a sinner to the cross of Christ. And yet my Master sends me about the errand. Lo, I see the great mountain before me of human depravity and stolid indifference, but by faith I cry, “Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.” Does my Master say, compel them to come in? Then, though the sinner be like Samson and I a child, I shall lead him with a thread. If God saith *do* it, if I attempt it in faith *it shall be done*; and if with a groaning, struggling, and weeping heart, I so seek this day to compel sinners to come to Christ, the sweet compulsions of the Holy Spirit shall go with every word, and some indeed shall be compelled to come in.

II. And now to the work—directly to the work.

Unconverted, unreconciled, unregenerate men and women, I am to COMPEL YOU TO COME IN. Permit me first of all to accost you in the highways of sin and tell you over again my errand. The King of heaven this morning sends a gracious invitation to you. He says, “As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but had rather that he should turn unto me and live:” “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as wool; though they be red like crimson they shall be whiter than snow.” Dear brother, it makes my heart rejoice to think that I should have such good news to tell you, and yet I confess my soul is heavy because I see you do not think it good news, but turn away from it, and do not give it due regard.

Permit me to tell you what the King has done for you. He knew your guilt, he foresaw that you would ruin yourself. He knew that his justice would demand your blood, and in order that this difficulty might be escaped, that his justice might have its full due, and that you might yet be saved, *Jesus Christ hath died*. Will you just for a moment glance at this picture. You see that man there on his knees in the garden of Gethsemane, sweating drops of blood. You see this next: you see that miserable sufferer tied to a pillar and lashed with terrible scourges, till the shoulder bones are seen like white islands in the midst of a sea of blood. Again you see this third picture; it is the same man hanging on the cross with hands extended, and with feet nailed fast, dying, groaning, bleeding; methought the picture spoke and said, “It is finished.” Now all this hath Jesus Christ of Nazareth done, in order that God might consistently with his justice pardon sin; and the message to you this morning is this—“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” That is trust him, renounce thy works, and thy ways, and set thine heart alone on this man, who gave himself for sinners.

Well brother, I have told you the message, what sayest thou unto it? Do you turn away? You tell me it is nothing to you; you cannot listen to it; that you will hear me by-and-by; but you will go your way this day and attend to your farm and merchandize. Stop brother, I was not told merely to tell you and then go about my business. No; I am told to compel you to come in; and permit me to observe to you before I further go, that there is one thing I can say—and to which God is my witness this morning, that I am in earnest with you in my desire that you should comply with this command of God. You may despise your own salvation, but I do not despise it; you may go away and forget what you shall hear, but you will please to remember that the things I now say cost me many a groan ere I came here to utter them. My inmost soul is speaking out to you, my poor brother, when I beseech you by him that liveth and was dead, and is alive for evermore, consider my master's message which he bids me now address to you.

But do you spurn it? Do you still refuse it? Then I must change my tone a minute. I will not merely tell you the message, and invite you as I do with all earnestness, and sincere affection—I will go further. Sinner, in God's name I *command* you to repent and believe. Do you ask me whence my authority? I am an ambassador of heaven. My credentials, some of them secret, and in my own heart; and others of them open before you this day in the seals of my ministry, sitting and standing in this hall, where God has given me many souls for my hire. As God the everlasting one hath given me a commission to preach his gospel, I command you to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; not on my own authority, but on the authority of him who said, “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature;” and then annexed this solemn sanction, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.” Reject my message, and remember “He that despised Moses's law, died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God.” An ambassador is not to stand below the man with whom he deals, for we stand higher. If the minister chooses to take his proper rank, girded with the omnipotence of God, and anointed with his holy unction, he is to command men, and speak with all authority compelling them to come in: “command, exhort, rebuke with all long-suffering.”

But do you turn away and say you will not be commanded? Then again will I change my note. If that avails not, all other means shall be tried. My brother, I come to you simple of speech, and I *exhort* you to flee to Christ. O my brother, dost thou know what a loving Christ he is? Let me tell thee from my own soul what I know of him. I, too, once despised him. He knocked at the door of my heart and I refused to open it. He came to me, times without number, morning by morning, and night by night; he checked me in my conscience and spoke to me by his Spirit, and when, at last, the thunders of the law prevailed in my conscience, I thought that Christ was cruel and unkind. O I can never forgive myself that I should have thought so ill of him. But what a loving reception did I have when I went to him. I thought he would smite me, but his hand was not clenched in anger but opened wide in mercy. I thought full sure that his eyes would dart lightning-flashes of wrath upon me; but, instead thereof, they were full of tears. He fell upon my neck and kissed me; he took off my rags and did clothe me with his righteousness, and caused my soul to sing aloud for joy; while in the house of my heart and in the house of his church there was music and dancing, because his son that he had lost was found, and he that was dead was made alive.

I exhort you, then, to look to Jesus Christ and to be lightened. Sinner, you will never regret,—I will be bondsman for my Master that you will never regret it,—you will have no sigh to go back to your state of condemnation; you shall go out of Egypt and shall go into the promised land and shall find it flowing with milk and honey. The trials of Christian life you shall find heavy, but you will find grace will make them light. And as for the joys and delights of being a child of God, if I lie this day you shall charge me with it in days to come. If you will taste and see that the Lord is good, I am not afraid but that you shall find that he is not only good, but better than human lips ever can describe.

I know not what arguments to use with you. I appeal to your own self-interests. Oh my poor friend, would it not be better for you to be reconciled to the God of heaven, than to be his enemy? What are you getting by opposing God? Are you the happier for being his enemy? Answer, pleasure-seeker; hast thou found delights in that cup? Answer me, self-righteous man: hast thou found rest for the sole of thy foot in all thy works? Oh thou that goest about to establish thine own righteousness, I charge thee let conscience speak. Hast thou found it to be a happy path? Ah, my friend, “Wherefore dost thou spend thy money for that which is not bread, and thy labour for that which satisfieth not; hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.” I exhort you by everything that is sacred and solemn, everything that is important and eternal, flee for your lives, look not behind you, stay not in all the plain, stay not until you have proved, and found an interest in the blood of Jesus Christ, that blood which cleanseth us from all sin.

Are you still cold and indifferent? Will not the blind man permit me to lead him to the feast? Will not my maimed brother put his hand upon my shoulder and permit me to assist him to the banquet? Will not the poor man allow me to walk side-by-side with him? Must I use some stronger words. Must I use some other compulsion to compel you to come in? Sinners, this one thing I am resolved upon this morning, if you be not saved ye shall be without excuse. Ye, from the grey-headed down to the tender age of childhood, if ye this day lay not hold on Christ, your blood shall be on your own head. If there be power in man to bring his fellow, (as there is when man is helped by the Holy Spirit) that power shall be exercised this morning, God helping me.

Come, I am not to be put off by your rebuffs; if my exhortation fails, I must come to something else. My brother, I *entreat* you, I entreat you stop and consider. Do you know what it is you are rejecting this morning? You are rejecting Christ, your only Saviour. “Other foundation can no man lay;” “there is none other name given among men whereby we must be saved.” My brother, I cannot bear that ye should do this, for I remember what you are forgetting: the day is coming when you will want a Saviour. It is not long ere weary months shall have ended, and your strength begin to decline; your pulse shall fail you, your strength shall depart, and you and the grim monster—death, must face each other.

What will you do in the swellings of Jordan without a Saviour? Death-beds are stony things without the Lord Jesus Christ. It is an awful thing to die anyhow; he that hath the best hope, and the most triumphant faith, finds that death is not a thing to laugh at. It is a terrible thing to pass from the seen to the unseen, from the mortal to the immortal, from time to eternity, and you will find it hard to go through the iron gates of death without the sweet wings of angels to conduct you to the portals of the skies.

It will be a hard thing to die without Christ. I cannot help thinking of you. I see you acting the suicide this morning, and I picture myself standing at your bedside and hearing your cries, and knowing that you are dying without hope. I cannot bear that. I think I am standing by your coffin now, and looking into your clay-cold face, and saying. "This man despised Christ and neglected the great salvation." I think what bitter tears I shall weep then, if I think that I have been unfaithful to you, and how those eyes fast closed in death, shall seem to chide me and say, "Minister, I attended the music hall, but you were not in earnest with me; you amused me, you preached to me, but you did not plead with me. You did not know what Paul meant when he said, 'As though God did beseech you by us we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.'"

I entreat you let this message enter your heart for another reason. I picture myself standing at the bar of God. As the Lord liveth, the day of judgment is coming. You believe that? You are not an infidel; your conscience would not permit you to doubt the Scripture. Perhaps you may have pretended to do so, but you cannot. You feel there must be a day when God shall judge the world in righteousness. I see you standing in the midst of that throng, and the eye of God is fixed on you. It seems to you that he is not looking anywhere else, but only upon you, and he summons you before him; and he reads your sins, and he cries, "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire in hell!"

My hearer, I cannot bear to think of you in that position; it seems as if every hair on my head must stand on end to think of any hearer of mine being damned. Will you picture yourselves in that position? The word has gone forth, "Depart, ye cursed." Do you see the pit as it opens to swallow you up? Do you listen to the shrieks and the yells of those who have preceded you to that eternal lake of torment? Instead of picturing the scene, I turn to you with the words of the inspired prophet, and I say, "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" Oh! my brother, I cannot let you put away religion thus; no, I think of what is to come after death. I should be destitute of all humanity if I should see a person about to poison himself, and did not dash away the cup; or if I saw another about to plunge from London Bridge, if I did not assist in preventing him from doing so; and I should be worse than a fiend if I did not now, with all love, and kindness, and earnestness, beseech you to "lay hold on eternal life," "to labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life."

Some hyper-calvinist would tell me I am wrong in so doing. I cannot help it. I must do it. As I must stand before my Judge at last, I feel that I shall not make full proof of my ministry unless I entreat with many tears that ye would be saved, that ye would look unto Jesus Christ and receive his glorious salvation. But does not this avail? are all our entreaties lost upon you; do you turn a deaf ear? Then again I change my note. Sinner, I have pleaded with you as a man pleadeth with his friend, and were it for my *own* life I could not speak more earnestly this morning than I do speak concerning *yours*. I did feel earnest about my own soul, but not a whit more than I do about the souls of my congregation this morning; and therefore, if ye put away these entreaties I have something else:—I must *threaten* you. You shall not always have such warnings as these. A day is coming, when hushed shall be the voice of every gospel minister, at least for you; for your ear shall be cold in death. It shall not be any more threatening; it shall be the fulfillment of the threatening. There shall be no promise, no proclamations of pardon and of mercy; no peace-speaking blood, but you shall be in the land where the Sabbath is all swallowed up in everlasting nights of misery, and where the preachings of the gospel are forbidden because they would be unavailing. I charge you then, listen to this voice that now addresses your conscience; for if not, God shall speak to you in his wrath, and say unto you in his hot displeasure, "I called and ye refused; I stretched out my hand and no man regarded; therefore will I mock at your calamity; I will laugh when your fear cometh."

Sinner, I threaten you again. Remember, it is but a short time you may have to hear these warnings. You imagine that your life will be long, but do you know how short it is? Have you ever tried to think how frail you are? Did you ever see a body when it has been cut in pieces by the anatomist? Did you ever see such a marvelous thing as the human frame?

"Strange, a harp of a thousand strings, Should keep in tune so long."

Let but one of those cords be twisted, let but a mouthful of food go in the wrong direction, and you may die. The slightest chance, as we have it, may send you swift to death, when God wills it. Strong men have been killed by the smallest and slightest accident, and so may you. In the chapel, in the house of God, men have dropped down dead. How often do we hear of men falling in our streets—rolling out of time into eternity, by some sudden stroke. And are you sure that heart of your's is quite sound? Is the blood circulating with all accuracy? Are you quite sure of that? And if it be so,

how long shall it be? O, perhaps there are some of you here that shall never see Christmas-day; it may be the mandate has gone forth already, "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live."

Out of this vast congregation, I might with accuracy tell how many will be dead in a year; but certain it is that the whole of us shall never meet together again in any one assembly. Some out of this vast crowd, perhaps some two or three, shall depart ere the new year shall be ushered in. I remind you, then, my brother, that either the gate of salvation may be shut, or else you may be out of the place where the gate of mercy stands.

Come, then, let the threatening have power with you. I do not threaten because I would alarm without cause, but in hopes that a brother's threatening may drive you to the place where God hath prepared the feast of the gospel. And now, *must I turn hopelessly away?* Have I exhausted all that I can say? No, I will come to you again. Tell me what it is, my brother, that keeps you from Christ. I hear one say, "Oh, sir, it is because I feel myself too guilty." That cannot be, my friend, that cannot be. "But, sir, I am the chief of sinners." Friend, you are not. The chief of sinners died and went to heaven many years ago; his name was Saul of Tarsus, afterwards called Paul the apostle. He was the chief of sinners, I know he spoke the truth. "No," but you say still, "I am too vile." You cannot be viler than the *chief* of sinners. You must, at least, be second worst. Even supposing you are the worst now alive, you are second worst, for he was chief. But suppose you are the worst, is not that the very reason why you should come to Christ. The worse a man is, the more reason he should go to the hospital or physician. The more poor you are, the more reason you should accept the charity of another. Now, Christ does not want any merits of your's. He gives freely. The worse you are, the more welcome you are. But let me ask you a question: Do you think you will ever get better by stopping away from Christ? If so, you know very little as yet of the way of salvation at all. No, sir, the longer you stay, the worse you will grow; your hope will grow weaker, your despair will become stronger; the nail with which Satan has fastened you down will be more firmly clenched, and you will be less hopeful than ever. Come, I beseech you, recollect there is nothing to be gained by delay, but by delay everything may be lost.

"But," cries another, "I feel I cannot believe." No, my friend, and you never will believe if you look first at your believing. Remember, I am not come to invite you to faith, but am come to invite you to Christ. But you say, "What is the difference?" Why, just this, if you first of all say, "I want to believe a thing," you never do it. But your first inquiry must be, "What is this thing that I am to believe?" Then will faith come as the consequence of that search. Our first business has not to do with faith, but with Christ.

Come, I beseech you, on Calvary's mount, and see the cross. Behold the Son of God, he who made the heavens and the earth, dying for your sins. Look to him, is there not power in him to save? Look at his face so full of pity. Is there not love in his heart to prove him *willing* to save? Sure sinner, the sight of Christ will help thee to believe. Do not believe first, and then go to Christ, or else thy faith will be a worthless thing; go to Christ without any faith, and cast thyself upon him, sink or swim.

But I hear another cry, "Oh sir, you do not know how often I have been invited, how long I have rejected the Lord." I do not know, and I do not want to know; all I know is that my Master has sent me, to compel you to come in; so come along with you now. You may have rejected a thousand invitations; don't make this the thousandth-and-one. You have been up to the house of God, and you have only been gospel hardened. But do I not see a tear in your eye; come, my brother, don't be hardened by this morning's sermon. O, Spirit of the living God, come and melt this heart for it has never been melted, and compel him to come in! I cannot let you go on such idle excuses as that; if you have lived so many years slighting Christ, there are so many reasons why now you should not slight him.

But did I hear you whisper that this was not a convenient time? Then what must I say to you? When will that convenient time come? Shall it come when you are in hell? Will that time be convenient? Shall it come when you are on your dying bed, and the death throttle is in your throat—shall it come then? Or when the burning sweat is scalding your brow; and then again, when the cold clammy sweat is there, shall those be convenient times? When pains are racking you, and you are on the borders of the tomb? No, sir, this morning is the convenient time. May God make it so.

Remember, I have no authority to ask you to come to Christ *to-morrow*. The Master has given you no invitation to come to him next Tuesday. The invitation is, "*To-day* if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts as in the provocation," for the Spirit saith "to-day." "Come *now* and let us reason together;" why should you put it off? It may be the last warning you shall ever have. Put it off, and you may never weep again in chapel. You may never have so earnest a discourse addressed to you. You may not be pleaded with as I would plead with you now. You may go away, and God may say, "He is given unto idols, let him alone." He shall throw the reins upon your neck; and then, mark—your course is sure, but it is sure damnation and swift destruction.

And now again, is it all in vain? Will you not now come to Christ? Then what more can I do? I have but one more resort, and that shall be tried. I can be permitted to weep for you; I can be allowed to pray for you. You shall scorn the address if you like; you shall laugh at the preacher; you shall call him fanatic if you will; he will not chide you, he will bring no accusation against you to the great Judge. Your offence, so far as he is concerned, is forgiven before it is committed; but you will remember that the message that you are rejecting this morning is a message from one who loves you, and it is given to you also by the lips of one who loves you. You will recollect that you may play your soul away with the devil, that you may listlessly think it a matter of no importance; but there lives at least one who is in earnest about your soul, and one who before he came here wrestled with his God for strength to preach to you, and who when he has gone from this place will not forget his hearers of this morning.

I say again, when words fail us we can give tears—for words and tears are the arms with which gospel ministers compel men to come in. You do not know, and I suppose could not believe, how anxious a man whom God has called to the ministry feels about his congregation, and especially about some of them. I heard but the other day of a young man who attended here a long time, and his father's hope was that he would be brought to Christ. He became acquainted, however, with an infidel; and now he neglects his business, and lives in a daily course of sin. I saw his father's poor wan face; I did not ask him to tell me the story himself, for I felt it was raking up a trouble and opening a sore; I fear, sometimes, that good man's grey hairs may be brought with sorrow to the grave. Young men, you do not pray for yourselves, but your mothers wrestle for you. You will not think of your own souls, but your fathers anxiety is exercised for you. I have been at prayer meetings, when I have heard children of God pray there, and they could not have prayed with more earnestness and more intensity of anguish if they had been each of them seeking their own soul's salvation. And is it not strange that we should be ready to move heaven and earth for your salvation, and that still you should have no thought for *yourselves*, no regard to eternal things?

Now I turn for one moment to some here. There are some of you here members of Christian churches, who make a profession of religion, but unless I be mistaken in you—and I shall be happy if I am—your profession is a lie. You do not live up to it, you dishonour it; you can live in the perpetual practice of absenting yourselves from God's house, if not in sins worse than that. Now I ask such of you who do not adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour, do you imagine that you can call me your pastor, and yet that my soul cannot tremble over you and in secret weep for you? Again, I say it may be but little concern to you how you defile the garments of your Christianity, but it is a great concern to God's hidden ones, who sigh and cry, and groan for the iniquities of the professors of Zion.

Now does anything else remain to the minister besides weeping and prayer? Yes, there is one thing else. God has given to his servants not the power of regeneration, but he has given them something akin to it. It is impossible for any man to regenerate his neighbour; and yet how are men born to God? Does not the apostle say of such an one that he was begotten by him in his bonds. Now the minister has a power given him of God, to be considered both the father and the mother of those born to God, for the apostle said he travailed in birth for souls till Christ was formed in them. What can we do then? We can now appeal to the Spirit. I know I have preached the gospel, that I have preached it earnestly; I challenge my Master to honour his own promise. He has said it shall not return unto me void, and it shall not. It is in his hands, not mine. I cannot compel you, but thou O Spirit of God who hast the key of the heart, thou canst compel. Did you ever notice in that chapter of the Revelation, where it says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock," a few verses before, the same person is described, as he who hath the key of David. So that if knocking will not avail, he has the key and can and will come in. Now if the knocking of an earnest minister prevail not with you this morning, there remains still that secret opening of the heart by the Spirit, so that you shall be compelled.

I thought it my duty to labour with you as though *I* must do it; now I throw it into my Master's hands. It cannot be his will that we should travail in birth, and yet not bring forth spiritual children. It is with *him*; he is master of the heart, and the day shall declare it, that some of you constrained by sovereign grace have become the willing captives of the all-conquering Jesus, and have bowed your hearts to him through the sermon of this morning.

JUSTIFICATION

Martyn Lloyd-Jones

The next term for our consideration is “justified.” This, as we have seen, is always associated with belief and faith. The term has become familiar—“Justification by faith only.” That they are in a state of justification, or justified, is true of all who believe, who exercise faith. Christian people are often troubled and confused about “foreknowledge” and about the “calling,” but no Christian should ever be in trouble concerning “justification,” for it is the foundation of our whole position and standing with God. The first four chapters of this Epistle to the Romans are devoted to this subject of “justification by faith only.” The apostle introduced it in the 17th verse of the 1st chapter; but because of the failure of the Jews to see it, and a corresponding failure on the part of the Gentiles, he had to argue it out in detail and demonstrate it with a multiplicity of proofs in those four chapters.

Justification in its essence is a legal or forensic term, a term that belongs to the realm of the Law Court. It means “to declare just,” and “to declare righteous.” It is the opposite of condemnation. The Christian has moved from a state of “condemnation” to one of “justification.” For this reason the Apostle starts this 8th chapter by saying, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” He is taking up again the argument he had left off at the end of chapter 5, where he had been working out some of the consequences of justification. His constant emphasis concerning this is that it is something which is done by God, “Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified.” In other words we do not justify ourselves before God. God justifies us, and He does it—and this is the argument of the first four chapters—entirely apart from us and our works. It is not the result of any merit that is in us. One verse that states this clearly and beyond any doubt is the 5th verse in the 4th chapter: “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” God justifies the “ungodly”; not the “righteous,” but the “ungodly.”

He argues the same point in chapter 5, verses 6-8: “When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” It is the action of God, and exclusively the action of God. This is the central argument of this Epistle. It is the declaration made by God concerning those who believe in Christ. We are justified in Christ, but through faith and belief. The belief is the instrument.

Let us emphasize again certain other aspects of this doctrine. Justification does not merely mean forgiveness. It includes forgiveness, but it is much bigger than forgiveness. It means in addition that God declares us to be entirely guiltless; He regards us as if we had never sinned at all. He pronounces us to be just and to be righteous. In doing so He is answering any declaration that the Law may make with respect to us. It is the judge upon the bench not merely saying that the prisoner at the Bar is forgiven, but that he pronounces him to be a just and righteous person.

In justifying us God tells us that He has taken our sins and our guilt, and has “imputed” them to, “put them to the account of,” the Lord Jesus Christ and punished them in Him. He announces also that, having done that, He now puts to our account, or “imputes” to us, the perfect righteousness of His own dear Son. The Lord Jesus Christ obeyed the Law perfectly; He never broke it in any respect. He gave a full and a perfect satisfaction to all its demands. That full obedience constitutes His righteousness. What God does is to put to our account, to put upon us, the righteousness of Jesus Christ. In declaring us to be justified, God proclaims that He now looks on us, not as we are, but as clothed with the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. A hymn by the Moravian Count Zinzendorf, and translated by John Wesley, expresses it thus:

*Jesus, Thy robe of righteousness My beauty is, my glorious dress;
'Midst flaming worlds, in this arrayed, With joy shall I lift up my head.*

The Count proceeds in the hymn to defy anyone and anything to bring a charge against us, because we are clothed and robed with this “righteousness” of the Lord Jesus Christ. Such, then, is the meaning of justification, and it is entirely the action of God. It is, I repeat, the forensic, legal declaration of God that we are not only forgiven but guiltless, and that as we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ we shall continue in that condition. In other words, we are given a new standing and a new status in the presence of God.

ADOPTION

L.R. Shelton, Jr.

“Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will”— Ephesians 1:5

Not only has God the Father chosen us in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him (v4), but He has in love predestinated us unto the *adoption* of children by Jesus Christ to Himself.

This adoption is another blessing or privilege that God has given us in Christ Jesus which flows out of His saving work for us and our union with Him through grace by faith. This great blessing or privilege is according to the good pleasure of His will, and to the praise of the glory of His grace (v6).

SCRIPTURES PERTAINING TO THIS GREAT ACT:

Galatians 4:4-7: “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

Romans 8:14-17: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”

1 John 3:1-2: “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”

John 1:12-13: “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

The Scriptures teach that regeneration gives us the nature of children—His children (2 Peter 1:4); adoption gives us the rights of children, to call God our Father, “Abba, Father,” my Father. We then are partakers of both of these, for we are sons by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

When faith realizes the cleansing power of the blood of the Lord Jesus, and lays hold upon the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus, then the justified man becomes a son and a child. Justification and adoption always go together. “Whom he called, them he also justified,” and the calling is a call to the Father's house, and to a recognition of sonship. Believing brings forgiveness and justification through our Lord Jesus; it also brings adoption, for it is written, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” This is not a privilege granted to assurance or growth in grace: but is a blessing which belongs to him who has the smallest degree of faith: a blessing that belongs to every one of God's elect, whether they have just been born again, or have been in grace for years. “Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26).

WHAT IS ADOPTION?

It is taking a stranger into the relationship of a son and heir; as Moses was the adopted son of King Pharaoh's daughter, so we who were strangers and aliens (Eph 2:12) has God taken and made sons and heirs with Christ Jesus. In adoption God does three things:

(1) He gives us His name. He who is adopted bears the name of Him who adopts Him—“I will write upon him the name of my God” (Rev 3:12).

(2) He sanctifies us by His Spirit. When He adopts, He anoints; when He makes sons, He makes saints. When a man adopts another for his son and heir, he may put his name upon him, but he cannot put his disposition into him; if he be of a sullen, gloomy, sulky nature, he cannot alter it; but whom God adopts He sanctifies. He not only gives a new name, but a

new nature. “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 1:4). He infuses into us His Spirit of holiness. He turns the wolf into a lamb; He makes the heart humble and gracious; He works such a change as if another soul dwelt in the same body (2 Cor 5:17).

(3) Where the Holy Spirit enters, there is a cry: “God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6). It is the Spirit of God that cries. Romans 8:15 tells us that it is our cry, but a cry prompted and inspired by the Holy Spirit because He is the Spirit of adoption.

He anoints us in some manner so that we are able to pray aright. He puts His divine energy into us so that we cry, Abba, Father, in an acceptable manner. There are times when we cannot cry at all, and then He cries in us. There are seasons when doubts and fears abound, and so suffocate us with their fumes that we cannot even raise a cry, and then the indwelling Spirit represents us, crying in our name, and making intercession for us according to the will of God (Rom 8:26,27). Thus does the cry, “Abba, Father,” rise up in our hearts even when we feel as if we could not pray, and dare not think ourselves children. Then we may each say: “I live, yet not I, but the Spirit of Christ that dwelleth in me.” On the other hand, at times our soul gives such a sweet assent to the Spirit's cry that it becomes ours also, but then we more than ever own the work of the Spirit, and still ascribe to Him the blessed cry, “Abba, Father.”

It is literally the cry of the Son. God hath sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, and that Spirit cries in us exactly according to the cry of the Son. In Mark 14:36 we see in our Lord's agony He cried in His native tongue, Hebrew, “Abba, Father.” Is not this a lesson for us?

Adoption comes to us by redemption: We should prize redemption, because it was by the precious blood of Christ that we were redeemed from the curse of the law. “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal 4:4,5).

By adoption we are *no more like to bondservants*: “Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father” (Gal 4:1-2).

By adoption *we are heirs*: “Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (Gal 4:7). No man living has ever realized to the full what this means. Believers are at this moment heirs, but what is the estate? It is God Himself! We are heirs of God (Rom 8:17)! Not only of the promises, of the covenant engagements, and of all the blessings which belong to the chosen seed, but heirs of God Himself? The Lord is my portion, saith my soul. This God is my God for ever and ever. Surely “the lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage” (Psa 16:6).

LET'S LOOK AT THE WONDER OF GOD'S LOVE IN ADOPTING US INTO HIS FAMILY:

Meditate upon this truth: that God should adopt us when He had a Son of His own. Men adopt because they want children, and desire to have some one to bear their name; but that God should adopt us when He had a Son of His own, the Lord Jesus, is a wonder of love. Now since God had a Son of His own, and such a Son, how wonderful God's love in adopting us. We needed a Father, but He did not need sons.

Contemplate what we were before God adopted us. We were very deformed, in a state of sin and misery, very unlovely, and surely a man will not adopt one for his heir that is crooked and ill-favored, but rather he that has some beauty. But when we were yet in our blood, God adopted us. “When I saw thee polluted in thy blood, it was the time of love” (Eze 16:6). God did not adopt us when we were adorned with holiness and had the angels' glory upon us; but when we were as filthy as hell itself, diseased as lepers; that was the time of His love. Praise the Lord!

Ponder with love and admiration that God should go to such great expense in adopting us. When men adopt, they have only some papers to sign, and the thing is effected; but when God planned to adopt, it cost Him a far greater expense. It was no easy thing to make heirs of wrath, heirs of the promise. There was nothing simple and easy about God devising the adoption of fallen man. Our adoption was purchased at the price of the blood of His own Son. Here is the wonder of God's love in adopting us, that He should go to such expense to accomplish it.

Think upon this precious truth that God should adopt *His enemies*. If a man adopts another for his heir, he will not adopt his enemy; but that God should adopt us when we were not only strangers, but enemies, is the wonder of His love. For

God to have pardoned His enemies was a great act of love; but to adopt them for His heirs sets the angels in Heaven to wondering, and also this poor soul of mine.

Again consider that God should take great numbers out of the devil's family and adopt them into the family of Heaven. Men adopt usually but one heir, but God is resolved to increase His family. He brings many sons to glory. God's adopting millions is the wonder of love. Had but one been adopted, all of us might have despaired, but He brings many sons to glory, which opens a door of hope to us.

Once more meditate upon this truth that God should confer so great honor upon us in adopting us when we should be cast out of His presence in hell forever! "For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God" (Rom 8:19).

Let me sum it up: *Adoption* is that act of God whereby I, who was by nature a child of wrath even as others, am, entirely of the pure grace of God, translated out of the evil family of Satan, and brought actually and virtually into the family of God, so that I take His name, share the privileges of sons, and am to all intents and purposes the actual offspring and child of God.

I close by saying I am utterly amazed at the great love and grace of my heavenly Father to adopt me into His family as a child, when I deserve nothing but His wrath. I can only praise Him and give Him glory for it is all of grace. What a blessing; what a privilege to be a child of the heavenly Father and an heir of God Himself and a joint heir with Christ, all because of my blessed Lord's redemptive work for me.

Did you ever think what a high honor it is to be called a son of God? Do we who profess to be children of God walk worthy of this great privilege?

JESUS ONLY

Horatius Bonar

"To him that worketh not, but believeth."—Romans 4:5

There seem to be many, in our day, who are seeking God. Yet they appear to be but "feeling after Him, in order to find Him," as if He were either a distant or an "unknown" God. They forget that he is "*not far* from every one of us" (Acts 17:27); for "in him we live, and move, and have our being."

That He is not far; that He has come down; that He has come near: this is the "beginning of the gospel." It sets aside the vain thoughts of those who think that they must bring Him near by their prayers and devout performances. He has shewn Himself to us, that we may know Him, and, in knowing Him, find the life of our souls.

Some have tried to give directions to sinners "how to get converted," multiplying words without wisdom, leading the sinner away from the cross by setting him upon *doing*, not upon *believing*. Our business is not to give any such directions, but, as the apostles did, to preach Christ crucified, a present Saviour, and a present salvation. Then it is that sinners are converted, as the Lord Himself said, "I, if I be lifted up...will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32).

You say, "I am not satisfied with the motives that have led me to seek Christ; they are selfish." That is very likely. The feelings of a newly awakened sinner are not disinterested, neither can they be so.

You have gone in quest of salvation from a sense of danger, or fear of the wrath to come, or a desire to obtain the inheritance of glory. These are some of the motives by which you are actuated. How could it be otherwise? God made you with these fears and hopes; and He appeals to them in His Word. When He says, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" He is appealing to your fears. When He sets eternal life before you, and the joys of an endless kingdom, He is appealing to your hopes. And when He presents these motives, He expects you to be moved by them. To act upon such motives, then, cannot be wrong. Indeed, not to act upon them would be to harden yourself against God's most solemn appeals. "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor 5:11), says Paul. It cannot be wrong to be influenced by this terror. "The remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven" (Rev 11:13). This surely was not wrong. The whole Bible is full of such motives, addressed to our hopes and fears.

When was it otherwise? Among the millions who have found life in Christ, who began in any other way, or started with a purely disinterested motive? Was it not thus that the jailor at Philippi began when the earthquake shook his soul and called up before his conscience the everlasting woe? Was it not a sense of danger and a dread of wrath that made him ask, "What shall I do to be saved?" And did the apostle rebuke him for this? Did he refuse to answer his anxious question because his motive was so selfish? No. He answered at once, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

There is nothing wrong in these motives. When my body is pained, it is not wrong to wish for relief. When overtaken by sickness, it is not wrong to send for a physician. You may call this selfishness, but it is a right and lawful selfishness, which He who made us what we are, and who gave us our instincts, expects us to act upon; and in acting on which, we may count upon His blessing, not His rebuke. It is not wrong to dread hell, to desire heaven, to flee from torments, to long for blessedness, to shun condemnation, and to desire pardon.^[1] Let not Satan then ensnare you with such foolish thoughts, the tendency of which is to quench every serious desire, under the pretext of its not being disinterested and perfect.

You think that, were you seeking salvation from a regard to the glory of God, you would be satisfied. But what does that mean, but that, at the very first, even before you have come to Christ, you are to be actuated by the highest of all motives? He who has learned to seek God's glory is one who has already come to Christ; and he who has learned to do this entirely, is no sinner at all; and, therefore, does not need Christ. To seek God's glory is a high attainment of faith; yet you want to be conscious of possessing it before you have got faith; nay, in order to your getting it! Is it possible that you can be deluding yourself with the idea that if you could only secure this qualification, you might confidently expect God to give you faith? This would be substituting your own zeal for His glory, in the room of the cross of Christ.

Do not keep back from Christ under the idea that you must come to Him in a disinterested frame, and from an unselfish motive. If you were right in this thing, who could be saved? You are to come as you are, with all your bad motives, whatever these may be. Take all your bad motives, add them to the number of your sins, and bring them to the altar where the great sacrifice is lying. Go to the mercy-seat. Tell the High Priest there, not what you desire to be, not what you ought to be, but what you are. Tell Him the honest truth as to your condition at this moment. Confess the impurity of your motives, all the evil that you feel or that you don't feel, your hard-heartedness, your blindness, your unteachableness. Confess everything without reserve. He wants you to come to Him exactly as you are, and not to cherish the vain thought that, by a little waiting, or working, or praying, you can make yourself fit, or persuade Him to make you fit.

"But I am not satisfied with my faith," you say. No, truly. Nor are you ever likely to be so. At least I should hope not. If you wait for this before you have peace, you will wait till life is done. It would appear that you want to believe in your own faith in order to obtain rest to your soul. The Bible does not say, "Being satisfied about our faith, we have peace with God," but "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God"; and between these two things there is a great difference.

Satisfaction with Jesus and His work, not satisfaction with your own faith, is what God expects of you. "I am satisfied with Christ," you say. Are you? Then you are a believing man; and what more do you wish? Is not satisfaction with Christ enough for you or for any sinner? And is not this the truest kind of faith? To be satisfied with Christ is faith in Christ. To be satisfied with His blood is faith in His blood. Do not bewilder yourself, nor allow others to bewilder you. Be assured that the very essence of faith is being satisfied with Christ and His sin-bearing work; ask no more questions about faith, but go on your way rejoicing, as one to whom Christ is all.

Remember the Baptist's words, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). Self, in every form, must decrease, and Christ must increase. To become satisfied with your faith would look as if you were dissatisfied with Christ. The beginning, the middle, and end of your course must be dissatisfaction with self and satisfaction with Christ. Be content to be satisfied with faith's glorious object, and let faith itself be forgotten. Faith, however perfect, has nothing to give you. It points you to Jesus. It bids you look away from itself to Him. It says, "Christ is all." It bids you look to Him who says, "Look unto me"; who says, "Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore" (Rev 1:17,18).

If you were required to believe in your own faith, to ascertain its quality, and to know that you are born again, before you were warranted to trust in Jesus, or to have peace, you would certainly need to be satisfied with your own faith. But you are not required to make good any personal claim, save that you are a sinner; not that you feel yourself to be one (that would open up an endless metaphysical inquiry into your own feelings); but simply that you are one. This you know upon God's authority, and learn from His Word; and on this you act, whether you feel your sinfulness or not. The gospel needs no ascertaining of anything about ourselves, save what is written in the Bible, and what is common to all Adam's children—that we need a Saviour. It is upon this need that faith acts; it is this need that faith presents at the throne of grace. The question, then, is not: Am I satisfied with my faith? but: Am I a needy sinner, and am I satisfied that in Christ there is all I need?

You say, "I am not satisfied with my love." What! Did you expect to be so? Is it your love to Christ, or His love to you, that is to bring you peace? God's free-love to sinners, as such, is our resting-place. There are two kinds of love in God—His love of compassion to the unbelieving sinner, and His love of delight and complacency to His believing children. A father's love to a prodigal child is quite as sincere as his love to his obedient, loving child at home, though it be of a different kind. God cannot love you *as a believer* till you are such. But He loves you as a poor sinner. And it is this love of His to the unloving and unlovable that affords the sinner his first resting-place. This free love of God attracts and satisfies him. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us" (1 John 4:10). "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16). "I am not satisfied with my repentance," you say. It is well. What would you have thought of yourself had you been so? What pride and self-righteousness would it indicate were you saying, "I am satisfied with my repentance; it is of the proper quality and amount?" If satisfied with it, what would you do with it? Would you ground your peace upon it? Would you pacify your conscience with it? Would you go with it, instead of the blood, to a holy God? If not, what do you mean by the desire to be satisfied with repentance before having peace with God?

In short, you are not satisfied with any of your religious feelings, and it is well that you are not so; for, if you were, you must have a very high idea of yourself, and a very low idea of what both law and gospel expect of you. You are, no doubt, right in not being satisfied with the state of your feelings, but what has this to do with the great duty of immediately believing on the Son of God? If the gospel is nothing to you till you have got your feelings all set right, it is no gospel for the sinner at all. But this is its special fitness and glory, that it takes you up at the very point where you are at this moment, and brings you glad tidings in spite of your feelings being altogether wrong.

All these difficulties of yours have their root in the self-esteem of our natures, which makes us refuse to be counted altogether sinners, and which shrinks from going to God, save with some personal recommendation to make acceptance likely. Utter want of goodness is what we are slow to acknowledge. Give up these attempts to be satisfied with yourself in anything, great or small, faith, feeling, or action. The Holy Spirit's work in convincing you of sin is to make you dissatisfied with yourself, and will you pursue a course which can only grieve Him away? God can never be satisfied with you on account of any goodness about you; and why should you attempt to be satisfied with anything which will not satisfy Him?

There is but one thing with which He is entirely satisfied—the person and work of His only-begotten Son. It is with Him that He wants you to be satisfied, not with yourself. How much better would it be to take God's way at once, and be satisfied with Christ? Then would pardon and peace be given without delay. Then would the favour of God rest upon you. For God has declared that whoever is satisfied with Christ shall find favour with Him. His desire is that you should come to be at one with Him in this great thing. He asks nothing of you, save this. But with nothing else than this will He be content, nor will He receive you on any other footing, save that of one who has come to be satisfied with Christ, and with what Christ has done.

Surely all this is simple enough. Does it not exactly meet your case? Satisfaction with yourself, even could you get it, would do nothing for you. Satisfaction with Christ would do everything; for Christ is all. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Be pleased with Him in whom the Father is pleased, and all is well.

I suspect that some of those difficulties of yours arise from the secret idea that the gospel is just a sort of *modified law*, by keeping which you are to be saved. You know that the old law is far above your reach, and that it condemns, but cannot save you. But you think, perhaps, that Christ came to make the law easier, to lower its demands, to make it (as some say) an evangelical law, with milder terms, suited to the sinner's weakness. That this is blasphemy a moment's thought will shew you. For it means that the former law was too strict; that is, it was not "holy, and just, and good." It denies also Christ's words, that He "came not to destroy but to fulfil the law." God has but one law, and it is perfect; its substance is love to God and man. A milder law must mean an imperfect one, a law that makes God's one law unnecessary, a law that gives countenance to sin. Will obedience to an imperfect law save a breaker of the perfect law? But faith does not make void the law; it establishes it (Rom 3:31).

It is by a perfect law that we are saved; else it would be an unholy salvation. It is by a perfect law, fulfilled in every "jot and tittle," that we are saved; else it would be an unrighteous salvation. The Son of God has kept the law for us; He has magnified it and made it honourable; and thus we have a holy and righteous salvation. Though above law in Himself, He was made "under the law" (Gal 4:4) for us; and by the vicarious law-keeping of His spotless life, as well as by endurance unto death of that law's awful penalties, we are redeemed from the curse of the law.

"Christ is the end [the fulfilling and exhausting] of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Rom 10:4). For Christ is not a helper, but a Saviour. He has not come to enable us to save ourselves by keeping a mitigated law, but to

keep the unmitigated law in our room, that the law might have no claim for penalty upon any sinner who will only consent to be indebted to the law-keeping and law-magnifying life and death of the divine Surety.

Other difficulties spring from confounding the work of the Spirit *in us* with that of Christ *for us*. These must be kept distinct; for the intermingling of them subverts both. Beware of overlooking either; or keeping them at a distance from each other. Though distinct, they go hand in hand, inseparably linked together; yet each having its own place and office. Your medicine and your physician are not the same, yet they go together. Christ is our medicine, the Spirit is your physician. Do not take the two works as if they were one compound work; nor build your peace upon some mystic gospel made up of a mixture of the two. Realize both, the outward and the inward, the objective and the subjective; Christ for us, the Holy Spirit in us.

As at the first, so to the last, must this distinctiveness be observed, lest, having found peace in believing, you lose it by not holding the beginning of your confidence steadfast to the end. "When I begin to doubt," writes one, "I quiet my doubts by going back to the place where I got them first quieted; I go and get peace again where I got it at the beginning; I do not sit down gloomily to muse over my own faith or unbelief, but over the finished work of Immanuel; I don't try to reckon up my experiences, to prove that I once was a believer, but I believe again as I did before; I don't examine the evidence of the Spirit's work in me, but I think of the sure evidences which I have of Christ's work for me in His death, and burial, and resurrection. This is the restoration of my peace. I had begun to look at other objects; I am now recalled from my wanderings to look at Jesus only."^[2]

Some of your difficulties seem to arise from mixing up the natural and supernatural. Now the marvellous thing in conversion is that while all is supernatural (being the work of the Holy Ghost), all is also natural. You are, perhaps, expecting some miraculous descent of heavenly power and brightness into your soul; something apart from divine truth, and from the working of man's powers of mind. You have been expecting faith to descend, like an angel from heaven into your soul, and hope to be lighted up, like a new star in your firmament. It is not so.

The Spirit's work is beyond nature, but it is not against nature. He displaces no faculty; He disturbs no mental process; He does violence to no part of our moral framework; He creates no new organ of thought or feeling. His office is to "set all to rights" within you; so that you never feel so calm, so true, so real, so perfectly natural, so much yourself—as when He has taken possession of you in every part, and filled your whole man with His heavenly joy. Never do you feel so perfectly free—less constrained and less mechanical—in all your faculties, as when He has "brought into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." The heavenly life imparted is liberty, and peace; it is the removal of bondage, and darkness, and pain. So far from being a mechanical constraint, it is the removal of the iron chain with which guilt had bound us. It acts like an army of liberation to a downtrodden country; like the warm breath of spring to the frost-fettered tree. For the entrance of true life, or living truth, into man's soul must be liberty, not bondage. "The truth shall make you free."

Other difficulties arise out of confused ideas as to the proper *order* of truth. Misplaced truth is sometimes more injurious than actual error. In our statements of doctrine, we are to have regard to God's order of things, as well as to the things themselves. If you would solve the simplest question in arithmetic, the figures must not only be the proper ones, but they must be placed in proper order. So it is with the doctrines of the Word of God. Some seem to fling them about in ill-assorted couples, or confused bundles, as if it mattered little to the hearer or reader what order was preserved, provided only certain truths were distinctly announced. Much trouble to the anxious person has arisen from this reckless confusion.

A gospel in which election is placed first is not the gospel of the apostles; though certainly a gospel in which election is denied is still less the apostolic gospel. The true gospel is neither that Christ died for the elect, nor that He died for the whole world; for the excellency of the gospel does not lie in its announcement of the numbers to be saved, but in its proclamation of the great propitiation itself.

Some who are supposed to be holding fast "the form of sound words" present us with a mere dislocation of the gospel; the different truths being so jumbled, that while they may be all there, they produce no result. They so neutralize each other as to prevent the sinner extracting from them the good news which, when rightly put together, they most assuredly contain. If the verses of the Epistle to the Romans were transposed or jumbled together, would it be the Epistle to the Romans, though every word were there? So if, in teaching the gospel, we do not begin at the beginning—if, for instance, we tell the sinner what he has to do, before we tell him what God has done; if we tell him to examine his own heart before we tell him to study the cross of Christ—we take out the whole gladness from the glad tidings, and preach "another gospel."

Do we not often, too, study the Bible as if it were a book of law, and not the revelation of grace? We draw a cloud over it, and read it as a volume written by a hard master. A harsh tone is thus imparted to its words, and the *legal* element obscures the *evangelical*. We are slow to read it as a revelation of the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; as the book of grace, specially written for us by the Spirit of grace. The law no doubt is in it, yet the Bible is not law, but gospel. As Mount Sinai rears its head, an isolated mass of hard, red granite, amid a thousand desert mountains of softer and less stern material, so does the law stand in the Bible—a necessary part of it—but not the characteristic of it; “added because of transgressions, till the seed should come” (Gal 3:19). Yet have not our suspicious hearts darkened this Book of light? Do we not often read it as the proclamation of a command *to do*, instead of a declaration of what the love of God has done?

In going to God at first, are you to take for granted His willingness or His unwillingness to bless? Most seem to do the latter. They even defend themselves by saying that if they knew they were converted, they would take His willingness for granted, but not being sure of this they dare not do so! As if the gospel were not the revelation of His willingness to receive sinners as such!

How strange! We believe in Satan's willingness to tempt and to injure; but not in God's willingness to deliver and to save! We yield to our great enemy when he seduces into sin, and leads away from Christ and heaven; but we will not yield to our truest Friend when He draws us with the bands of love! We will not give God credit for speaking truly when He speaks in tender mercy, and utters over the sinner the yearnings of His unfathomable pity. We listen as if His words were hollow; as if He did not mean what He says; as if His messages of grace, instead of being the most thoroughly sincere that ever fell on human ears, were mere words spoken as a matter of course.

There is nothing in the whole Bible to repel the sinner, and yet the sinner will not come! There is everything to draw and to win; yet the sinner stands aloof! Christ receives sinners; yet the sinner turns away! He yearns over them, weeps over them, as over Jerusalem; yet the sinner is unmoved! The heavenly compassion is unavailing; the infinite long-suffering does not touch the stony heart, and the divine tears are thrown away. The Son of God stretches out His hands all the day long, but the outstretched hands are disregarded. All, all seems in vain to arrest the heedless, and to win back the wanderer.

Oh! the amount of divine love that has been expended upon this sad world; that has been brought to bear upon the needy sons of men! We sometimes almost doubt whether it be true or possible that God should lavish such love on such a world. But the cross is the precious memorial of the love, and that saying stands unchangeable: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.” Sometimes, too, we say, What is the use of throwing away such love? Is not the earnestness of God disproportioned to the littleness of its object—man? It would be so were this life all; were there no eternity, no heaven, no hell, no endless gladness, and no everlasting woe. But with such a destiny as man's: with an eternity like that which is in store for him, can any amount of earnestness be too great? Can love or pity exceed their bounds? Can the joy or grief over a sinner saved or lost be exaggerated?

He whose infinite mind knows what heaven is, knows what its loss must be to an immortal being. Can He be too much in earnest about its gain? He whose all-reaching foresight knows what hell is, in all its never-ending anguish, sees far off and fathoms the horrors of the lost soul, its weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth for ever and for ever; its horrible sense of condemnation and unmitigated woe; its cutting remorse, its too-late repentance, its hopeless sighs, its bitter memories of earth's sunny hours; with all the thousand sadnesses that go to make up the sum total of a lost eternity! Can He then pity too much? Can He yearn too tenderly over souls that are madly bent on flinging themselves into a doom like this? Can He use words too strong or too affectionate, in warning them against such a darkness and such a devil, and such a hell; in beseeching them to make sure of such a heaven as His?

In the minds of some, the idea prevails that sin quenches pity for the sinner in the heart of God. It is not so. That it shall do so hereafter, and that God will cease to pity the lost, is an awful truth. The lost soul's eternity will be an unpitied eternity of woe. But, meanwhile, God's hatred of the sin is not hatred of the sinner. Nay, the greatness of his sin seems rather to deepen than to lessen the divine compassion. At least we may say that the increasing misery which increasing sin entails calls into new intensity the paternal pity of “the God of the spirits of all flesh.” It grieves Him at His heart (Gen 6:6). The further the prodigal goes into the far country, the more do the yearnings of the father's heart go out after him, in unfeigned compassion for the wretched wanderer, in his famine, and nakedness, and degradation, and hopeless grief.

No, sin does not quench the pitying love of God. The kindest words ever spoken to Israel were in the very height of their apostasy. The most gracious invitation ever uttered by the Lord was to Capernaum, and Bethsaida, and Chorazin, “Come unto me.” The most loving message ever sent to a church was that to Laodicea, the worst of all the seven, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock.” It was Jerusalem, in her extremity of guilt and unbelief, that drew forth the tears

of the Son of God. No, sin does not extinguish the love of God to the sinner. Many waters cannot quench it, nor can the floods drown it. From first to last, God pursues the sinner as he flies from Him; pursues him not in hatred but in love; pursues him not to destroy, but to save.

God is not a man that He should lie. He means what He says when He speaks in pity, as truly as when He speaks in wrath. His words are not, like man's, random expressions or utterances of vague sentiment or highly wrought representations of feelings. His words are all true and real. You cannot exaggerate the genuine feeling which they contain; and to understand them as figures is not only to convert them into unrealities, but to treat them as falsehoods. Let sinners take God's words *as they are*; the genuine expressions of the mind of that infinitely truthful Being, who uses nothing but the words of "truth and soberness."

He is sovereign; but that sovereignty is not at war with grace; nor does it lead to insincerity of speech, as some seem to think. Whether we can reconcile the sovereignty with the pity, it does not matter. Let us believe them both, because both are revealed. Nor let us resort to an explanation of the words of pity which would imply that they were not sincerely spoken, and that if a sinner took them too literally and too simply, he would be sorely disappointed; finding them at last delusive exaggerations, if not empty air.

When Christ was on earth, He received and blessed and healed every one who came to Him. Divine sovereignty did not hamper divine love; nor did love interfere with sovereignty. Each had its own place. There was no conflict between them. Christ spoke truly when He said, "No man can come unto me except the Father draw him"; and He spoke as truly when He said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

Let us learn to treat God as not merely the holiest, but the most truthful of all beings. Let the heedless sinner hear His truthful warnings, and tremble; for they shall all be fulfilled. Let the anxious sinner listen to His truthful words of grace, and be at peace. We need to be told this. For there is in the minds of many a feeling of sad suspicion as to the sincerity of the divine utterances, and a tendency to evade their honest meaning; and this even among those who do not seem at all aware of such distrust. Let us do justice to the truthfulness of God.

God is love. Yes, *God is love*. Can such a God be suspected of insincerity in the declarations of His long-suffering, in His words of yearning compassion toward the most rebellious and impenitent of men? That there is such a thing as righteousness; that there is such a place as hell; that there are such beings as lost angels and lost men, we know to be awful certainties. But however terrible, and however true, these things may be, they cannot cast the slightest doubt upon the sincerity of the great oath which God has sworn before heaven and earth, that He has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked"; nor in the least blunt the solemn edge of His gracious entreaty, "*Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?*"

Footnotes:

^[1] It is not wrong to love God for what He has done for us. Not to do so would be the very baseness of ingratitude. To love God purely for what He is, is by some spoken of as that highest kind of love, into which enters no element of self. It is not so. For in that case, you are actuated by the pleasure of loving; and this pleasure of loving an infinitely lovable and glorious Being of necessity introduces self. Besides, to say that we are to love God solely for what He is, and not for what He has done, is to make ingratitude an essential element of pure love. David's love shewed itself in not forgetting God's benefits (Psa 103:2). But this so-called "pure love" soars beyond David's, and finds it a duty to be unthankful, lest perchance some selfish element mingles itself with its superhuman, superangelic purity.

^[2] True faith is what may be called colourless, like air or water; it is but the medium through which the soul sees Christ, and the soul as little rests on it and contemplates it as the eye can see the air. When men, then, are bent on holding it, as it were, in their hands, curiously inspecting, analyzing, and so aiming at it, they are obliged to colour and thicken it, that it may be seen and touched. That is, they substitute for it something or other, a feeling, notion, sentiment, conviction, an act of reason, which they may hang over and dote upon. They rather aim at experiences within them, than at Him who is without them. Now, men who are acted on by news, good and bad, or sights beautiful or fearful, admire, rejoice, weep, or are pained, but are moved spontaneously, not with a direct consciousness of their emotion. So is it with faith and other Christian graces. Bystanders see our minds, but our minds, if healthy; see but the objects which possess them.

Meditating on the Goodness and Love of God – Henry Scougal

Nothing is more powerful to engage our affection than to find that we are beloved. Expressions of kindness are always pleasing and acceptable unto us, though the person should be otherwise mean and contemptible: but, to have the love of One who is altogether lovely, to know that the glorious Majesty of heaven hath any regard unto us, how must this astonish and delight us, how must it overcome our spirits and melt our hearts, and put our whole soul into a flame!

Now, as the Word of God is full of the expressions of his love toward man, so all his works do loudly proclaim it: he gave us our being, and, by preserving us in it, doth renew the donation every moment. But, lest we should think these testimonies of his kindness less considerable, because they are the easy issues of his omnipotent power, and do not put him to any trouble or pain, he hath taken a more wonderful method to endear himself to us; he hath testified his affection to us by suffering as well as by doing; and because he would not suffer in his own nature, *he assumed* ours. The eternal Son of God did clothe himself with the infirmities of our flesh, and left the company of those innocent and blessed spirits, who knew well how to love and adore him, that he might dwell among men, and wrestle with the obstinacy of that rebellious race to reduce them to their allegiance and felicity, and then to offer himself up as a sacrifice and propitiation for them.

The account which we have of our Saviour's life in the gospel, doth all along present us with the story of his love; all the pains that he took, and troubles that he endured, were wonderful effects, and uncontrollable evidences of it. But oh! that last, that dismal scene is it possible to remember it and question his kindness, or deny him ours? Here, here it is, my dear friend, that we should fix our most serious and solemn thoughts, "That Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith, that we being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height: and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph 3:17-19).

I remember one of the poets hath an ingenious fancy to express the passion wherewith he found himself overcome after long resistance; that the God of love had shot all his golden arrows at him, but could not pierce his heart, till at length he put himself into the bow, and darted himself straight into his breast!

