

The SPURGEON ANTHOLOGY

by Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

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THE SCRIPTURE

THE BIBLE

"I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing."

—Hosea 8:12

THIS is God's complaint against Ephraim. It is no mean proof of His goodness that He stoops to rebuke His erring creatures; it is a great argument of His gracious disposition that He bows His head to notice terrestrial affairs. He might, if He pleased, wrap Himself with night as with a garment; He might put the stars around His wrist for bracelets, and bind the suns around His brow for a coronet. He might dwell alone, far, far above this world, up in the seventh heaven, and look down with calm and silent indifference upon all the doings of His creatures. He might do as the heathens supposed their Jove did: sit in perpetual silence, sometimes nodding his awful head to make the Fates move as he pleased, but never taking thought of the little things of earth, disposing of them as beneath his notice, engrossed within his own being, swallowed up within himself, living alone and retired. And I, as one of His creatures might stand by night upon a mountain-top, and look upon the silent stars and say, "Ye are the eyes of God, but ye look not down on me; your light is the gift of His omnipotence, but your rays are not smiles of love to me. God, the mighty Creator, has forgotten me, I am a despicable drop in the ocean of creation, a sear leaf in the forest of beings, an atom in the mountain of existence. He knows me not; I am alone, alone, alone."

But it is not so, beloved. Our God is of another order. He notices every one of us. There is not a sparrow or a worm, but is found in His decrees. There is not a person upon whom His eye is not fixed. Our most secret acts are known to Him. Whatsoever we do, or bear, or suffer, the eye of God still rests upon us—and we are beneath His smile, for we are His people; or beneath His frown, for we have erred from Him.

Oh! how ten-thousand-fold merciful is God, that, looking down upon the race of man, He does not smile it out of existence. We see from our text that God looks upon man, for He says of Ephraim, "I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing." But see how when He observes the sin of man He does not dash him away and spurn him with His foot; He does not shake him by the neck over the gulf of hell, until his brain doth reel, and then drop him for ever; but rather, He comes down from heaven to plead with His creatures; He argues with them; He puts Himself, as it were, upon a level with the sinner, states His grievances, and pleads His claim. "O Ephraim, I have written unto thee the great things of my law, but they have been unto thee as a strange thing!"

I come here to night in God's stead, my friends, to plead with you as God's ambassador, to charge many of you with a sin; to lay it to your hearts by the power of the Spirit, so that you may be convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of a judgment to come (Joh 16:8). The crime I charge you with is the sin of the text. God has written to you the great things of His Law, but they have been unto you as a strange thing. It is concerning this blessed book, the Bi-

ble, that I mean to speak tonight. Here lies my text—this Word of God. Here is the theme of my discourse, a theme which demands more eloquence than I possess; a subject upon which a thousand orators might speak at once; a mighty, vast, incomprehensive theme, which might engross all eloquence throughout eternity, and still it would remain unexhausted.

Concerning the Bible, I have three things to say tonight and they are all in my text. First, its author, “I have written”; secondly, its subjects, the great things of God’s Law; and thirdly, its common treatment, it has been accounted by most men a strange thing.

1. Who Is the Author?

First, then, concerning this book, Who is the author? The text says that it is God. “I have written to him the great things of my law.” Here lies my Bible—who wrote it? I open it, and I find it consists of a series of tracts. The first five tracts were written by a man called Moses. I turn on and I find other. Sometimes I see David is the penman, at other times, Solomon. Here I read Micah, then Amos, then Hosea. As I turn further on, to the more luminous pages of the New Testament, I see Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; Paul, Peter, James and others. But when I shut up the book, I ask myself who is the author of it? Do these men jointly claim the authorship? Are they the compositors of this massive volume? Do they between themselves divide the honor? Our holy religion answers, No!

This volume is the writing of the living God: each letter was penned with an Almighty finger; each word in it dropped from the everlasting lips; each sentence was dictated by the Holy Spirit. Albeit that Moses was employed to write his histories with his fiery pen, God guided that pen. It may be that David touched his harp and let sweet psalms of melody drop from his fingers, but God moved his hands over the living strings of his golden harp. It may be that Solomon sang canticles of love, or gave forth words of consummate wisdom, but God directed his lips and made the preacher eloquent. If I follow the thundering Nahum when his horses plough the waters, or Habbakuk when he sees the tents of Cushan in affliction; if I read Malachi, when the earth is burning like an oven; if I turn to the smooth page of John, who tells of love, or the rugged, fiery chapters of Peter, who speaks of the fire devouring God’s enemies; if I turn to Jude, who launches forth anathemas upon the foes of God—everywhere I find God speaking. It is God’s voice, not man’s; the words are God’s words, the words of the Eternal, the Invisible, the Almighty, the Jehovah of this earth. This Bible is God’s Bible; and when I see it, I seem to hear a voice springing up from it, saying, “I am the book of God; man, read me. I am God’s writing; open my leaf, for I was penned by God; read it, for He is my author, and you will see Him visible and manifest everywhere.” *“I have written to him the great things of my law.”*

How do you know that God wrote the book? That is just what I shall not try to prove to you. I could, if I pleased to a demonstration, for there are arguments enough, there are reasons enough, did I care to occupy your time tonight in bringing them before you. But I shall do no such thing. I might tell you, if I pleased, that the grandeur of the style is above that of any mortal writing; and that all the poets who have ever existed could not, with all their works united, give us such sublime poetry and such mighty language as is to be found in the Scriptures. I might insist upon it that the subjects of which it treats are beyond the human intellect, that man could never have invented the grand doctrines of a Trinity in the Godhead, man could not have told us anything of the creation of the universe, he could never have been the author of the majestic idea of Providence; that all things are ordered according to the will of one great Supreme Being and work together for good. I might enlarge upon its honesty, since it tells the faults of its writers; its unity, since it never belies itself; its master simplicity, that he who runs may read it; and I might mention a hundred more things, which would all prove to a demonstration that the book is of God.

But I come not here to prove it. I am a Christian minister, and you are Christians, or profess to be so, and there is never any necessity for Christian ministers to make a point of bringing forth infidel arguments in order to answer them—it is the greatest folly in the world. Infidels, poor creatures, do not know their own arguments till we tell them, and then they glean their blunted shafts to shoot them at the shield of truth again. It is folly to bring forward these firebrands of hell, even if we are well prepared to quench them. Let men of the world learn error of themselves; do not let us be propagators of their falsehoods. True, there are some preachers who are short of stock, and want them to fill up! But God’s own chosen men need not do that; they are taught of God, and God supplies them with matter, with language, and with power.

There may be some one here tonight who has come without faith, a man of reason, a free-thinker. With him I have no argument at all. I profess not to stand here as a controversialist, but as a preacher of things that I know and feel. But I too have been like him. There was an evil hour when once I slipped the anchor of my faith; I cut the cable of my belief; I no longer moored myself hard by the coasts of revelation; I allowed my vessel to drift before the

wind. I said to reason, “Be thou my captain”; I said to my own brain, “Be thou my rudder”; and I started on my mad voyage. Thank God it is all over now; but I will tell you its brief history. It was one hurried sailing over the tempestuous ocean of free thought. I went on, and as I went the skies began to darken; but to make up for that deficiency, the waters were brilliant with coruscations of brilliancy. I saw sparks flying upwards that pleased me, and I thought, ‘If this be free thought, it is a happy thing.’ My thoughts seemed gems, and I scattered stars with both my hands; but anon, instead of these coruscations of glory, I saw grim fiends, fierce and horrible, start up from the waters, and as I dashed on they gnashed their teeth and grinned upon me. They seized the prow of my ship and dragged me on, while I, in part, gloried at the rapidity of my motion, but yet shuddered at the terrific rate with which I passed the old land marks of my faith.

As I hurried forward with an awful speed, I began to doubt my very existence. I doubted if there were a world; I doubted if there were such a thing as myself. I went to the very verge of the dreary realms of unbelief. I went to the very bottom of the sea of infidelity. I doubted everything. But here the devil foiled himself, for the very extravagance of the doubt proved its absurdity. Just when I saw the bottom of that sea, there came a voice which said, “And can this doubt be true?” At this very thought I awoke. I started from that death-dream, which, God knows, might have damned my soul and ruined this my body if I had not awoke. When I arose faith took the helm; from that moment I doubted not. Faith steered me back; faith cried, “Away, away!” I cast my anchor on Calvary; I lifted my eye to God; and here I am alive and out of hell.

Therefore, I speak what I do know. I have sailed that perilous voyage; I have come safe to land. Ask me again to be an infidel! No, I have tried it; it was sweet at first, but bitter afterwards. Now, lashed to God’s Gospel more firmly than ever, standing as on a rock of adamant, I defy the arguments of hell to move me, for “I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him” (2Ti 1:12). But I shall neither plead nor argue this night. You profess to be Christian men or else you would not be here. Your profession may be lies; what you say you are may be the very contrary to what you really are—but still I suppose you all admit that this is the Word of God. A thought or two then upon it.

“I have written to him the great things of my law.”

Its Authority

First, my friends, stand over this volume, and admire its *authority*. This is no common book. It is not the sayings of the sages of Greece; here are not the utterances of philosophers of past ages. If these words were written by man, we might reject them, but oh, let me think the solemn thought—that this book is God’s handwriting, that these words are God’s. Let me look at its date: it is dated from the hills of heaven. Let me look at its letters: they flash glory on my eye. Let me read the chapters: they are big with meaning and mysteries unknown. Let me turn over the prophecies: they are pregnant with unthought-of wonders.

Oh, book of books! And wast thou written by my God? Then will I bow before thee. Thou book of vast authority, thou art a proclamation from the Emperor of Heaven; far be it from me to exercise my reason in contradicting thee. Reason! thy place is to stand and find out what this volume means, not to tell what this book ought to say. Come thou my reason, my intellect, sit thou down and listen, for these words are the words of God. I do not know how to enlarge on this thought. Oh! if you could ever remember that this Bible was actually and really written by God! Oh! if ye had been let into the secret chambers of heaven, if ye had beheld God grasping his pen and writing down these letters, then surely ye would respect them. But they *are* just as much God’s hand-writing as if you had seen God write them. This Bible is a book of *authority*, it is an authorized book, for God has written it. Oh, tremble, tremble, lest any of you despise it; mark its authority, for it is the Word of God.

Its Truthfulness

Then, since God wrote it, mark its *truthfulness*. If I had written it, there would be worms of critics who would at once swarm on it, and would cover it with their evil spawn. Had I written it, there would be men who would pull it to pieces at once, and perhaps quite right too. But this is the Word of God; come, search ye critics, and find a flaw; examine it from its Genesis to its Revelations, and find an error. This is a vein of pure gold, unalloyed by quartz or any earthy substance. This is a star without a speck, a sun without a blot, a light without darkness, a moon without its paleness, a glory without a dimness.

O Bible! it cannot be said of any other book that it is perfect and pure, but of thee we can declare all wisdom is gathered up in thee without a particle of folly. This is the judge that ends the strife where wit and reason fail. This is the book untainted by any error; but is pure, unalloyed, perfect truth. Why? because God wrote it! Ah, charge God with error if ye please; tell Him that His book is not what it ought to be. I have heard men with prudish and mock-modesty, who would like to alter the Bible; and (I almost blush to say it) I have heard minister’s alter God’s Bible, because they were afraid of it. Have you never heard a man say, “He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved;

but he that believeth not”—what does the Bible say?—“shall be damned” (Mar 16:16). But that does not happen to be polite enough, so they say, “shall be condemned.” Gentlemen! pull the velvet out of your mouths; speak God’s word; we want none of your alterations. I have heard men in prayer, instead of saying, “Make your calling and election sure” (2Pe 1:10), say, “Make your calling and salvation sure.” Pity they were not born when God lived, far, far back, that they might have taught God how to write!

Oh, impudence beyond all bounds! Oh! full-blown self-conceit! To attempt to dictate to the All-wise—to teach the Omniscient and instruct the Eternal! Strange that there should be men so vile as to use the penknife of Jehoiakim, to cut passages of the Word, because they are unpalatable (Jer 36:23). Oh ye who dislike certain portions of the Holy Writ, rest assured that your taste is corrupt, and that God will not stay for your little opinion. Your dislike is the very reason why God wrote it, because you ought not to be suited; you have no right to be pleased. God wrote what you do not like: He wrote the truth! Oh, let us bend in reverence before it, for God inspired it! It is pure truth. Here from this fountain gushes *aqua vitae*—“the water of life,” without a single particle of earth. Here from this sun there cometh forth rays of radiance, without the mixture of darkness. Blessed Bible; thou art all truth!

Its Nature

Yet once more, before we leave this point, let us stop and consider the merciful nature of God, in having written us a Bible at all. Ah! He might have left us without it, to grope our dark way as blind men seek the wall; He might have suffered us to wander on with the star of reason as our only guide. I recollect a story of Mr. Hume, who so constantly affirmed that the light of reason is abundantly sufficient. Being at a good minister’s house one evening, he had been discussing the question, and declaring his firm belief in the sufficiency of the light of nature. On leaving, the minister offered to hold him a candle, to light him down the steps. He said, “No, the light of nature would be enough, the moon would do.” It so happened that the moon was covered with a cloud, and he fell down the steps. “Ah,” said the minister, “you had better have had a little light from above after all, Mr. Hume.” So, supposing the light of nature to be sufficient, we had better have a little light from above too, and then we shall be sure to be right. Better have two lights than only one. The light of creation is a bright light. God may be seen in the stars; His name is written in gilt letters on the brow of night; you may discover His glory in the ocean waves, yea, in the trees of the field—but it is better to read it in two books than in one. You will find it here more clearly revealed, for He has written this book Himself, and He has given you the key to understand it, if you have the Holy Spirit. Ah, beloved, let us thank God for this Bible; let us love it; let us count it more precious than much fine gold (Psa 119:127).

But let me say one thing before I pass on to the second point. If this be the Word of God, what will become of some of you who have not read it for the last month? “Month! Sir, I have not read it for this year.”—Ay, there are some of you who have not read it at all. Most people treat the Bible very politely. They have a small pocket volume, neatly bound; they put a white pocket-handkerchief around it, and carry it to their places of worship. When they get home, they lay it up in a drawer till next Sunday morning. Then it comes out again for a little bit of a treat and goes to chapel. That is all the poor Bible gets in the way of an airing; that is your style of entertaining this heavenly messenger. There is dust enough on some of your Bibles to write “damnation” with your fingers. There are some of you who have not turned over your Bibles for a long, long, long while, and what think you? I tell you blunt words, but true words. What will God say at last? When you shall come before Him, He shall say, “Did you read My Bible?” “No.” “I wrote you a letter of mercy; did you read it?” “No.” “Rebel! I have sent thee a letter inviting thee to Me: didst thou ever read it?” “Lord I never broke the seal; I kept it shut up.” “Wretch!” says God, “then thou deservest hell, if I sent thee a loving epistle and thou wouldst not even break the seal. What shall I do unto thee?” Oh! let it not be so with you. Be Bible readers; be Bible searchers!

2. The Subjects of the Bible

Our second point is, the subjects on which the Bible treats. The words of the text are these: “I have written to him *the great things* of my law.” The Bible treats of great things, and of great things only. There is nothing in this Bible that is unimportant. Every verse in it has a solemn meaning, and if we have not found it out yet, we hope yet to do it. You have seen mummies wrapped round and round with folds of linen. Well, God’s Bible is like that; it is a vast roll of white linen, woven in the loom of truth. So you will have to continue unwinding it, roll after roll, before you get the real meaning of it from the very depth; and when you have found, as you think, a part of the meaning, you will still need to keep on unwinding, unwinding, and all eternity you will be unwinding the words of this wondrous volume (Rev 14:4). Yet there is nothing in the Bible but great things. Let me divide, so as to be more brief. First, all things in this Bible are great; but secondly, some things are the greatest of all.

All things in the Bible are great.

Some people think it does not matter what doctrines you believe, that it is immaterial what church you attend, that all denominations are alike. Well, I dislike Mrs. Bigotry above almost all people in the world, and I never give her any compliment or praise. But there is another woman I hate equally as much, and that is Mrs. Latitudinarianism, a well-known character, who has made the discovery that all of us are alike. Now, I believe that a man may be saved in any church. Some have been saved in the church of Rome—a few blessed men, whose names I could mention here. I know, blessed be God, that multitudes are saved in the Church of England; she has a host of pious, praying men in her midst. I think that all sections of Protestant Christians have a remnant according to the election of grace, and they had need to have, some of them, a little salt, for otherwise they would go to corruption.

But when I say that, do you imagine that I think them all on a level? Are they all alike truthful? One sect says infant baptism is right, another says it is wrong, yet you say they are both right. I cannot see that. One teaches we are saved by free grace, another says that we are not, but are saved by free will; and yet you believe they are both right. I do not understand that. One says that God loves His people and never leaves off loving them; another says that He did not love His people before they loved Him; that He often loves them, and then ceases to love them, and turns them away. They may be both right in the main, but can they be both right when one says “Yes,” and the other says “No.” I must have a pair of spectacles to enable me to look backwards and forwards at the same time, before I can see that. It cannot be, sirs, that they are both right.

But some say they differ upon non-essentials. This text says, “I have written to him the great things of my law.” There is nothing in God’s Bible which is not great. Did ever any of you sit down to see which was the purest religion? “Oh,” say you, “we never took the trouble. We went just where our father and mother went.” Ah! that is a profound reason indeed. You went where your father and mother did. I thought you were sensible people; I didn’t think you went where other people pulled you, but went of your own selves. I love my parents above all that breathe, and the very thought that they believed a thing to be true, helps me to think it is correct; but I have not followed them. I belong to a different denomination, and I thank God I do. I can receive them as Christian brethren and sisters, but I never thought that because they happened to be one thing I was to be the same. No such thing. God gave me brains, and I will use them; and if you have any intellect, use it too.

Never say it doesn’t matter. It does matter! Whatever God has put here is of eminent importance; He would not have written a thing that was indifferent. Whatever is here is of some value; therefore, search all questions, try all by the Word of God. I am not afraid to have what I preach tried by this book. Only give me a fair field and no favor, and this book, if I say anything contrary to it, I will withdraw it the next Sabbath-day. By this I stand, by this I fall. Search and see; but don’t say, “It does not matter.” If God says a thing, it must always be of importance.

Some things in the Bible are greatest of all.

But while all things in God’s Word are important, all are not equally important. There are certain fundamental and vital truths that must be believed, or otherwise no man would be saved. If you want to know what you must believe if ye would be saved, you will find the great things of God’s Law between these two covers; they are all contained here. As a sort of digest or summary of the great things of the Law, I remember an old friend of mine once saying, “Ah! you preach the three R’s, and God will always bless you.” I said, “What are the three R’s?” And he answered, “Ruin, redemption, and regeneration.” They contain the sum and substance of divinity.

“R” for *ruin*. We were all ruined in the fall; we were all lost when Adam sinned, and we are all ruined by our own transgressions; we are all ruined by our own evil hearts and our own wicked wills; and we all shall be ruined unless grace saves us. Then there is a second “R” for *redemption*. We are ransomed by the blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish and without spot; we are rescued by His power; we are ransomed by His merits; we are redeemed by His strength. Then there is “R” for *regeneration*. If we would be pardoned, we must also be regenerated, for no man can partake of redemption unless he is regenerate. Let him be as good as he pleases; let him serve God, as he imagines, as much as he likes; unless he is regenerate and has a new heart, a new birth, he will still be in the first R, that is, ruin.

These things contain an epitome¹ of the Gospel. I believe there is a better epitome in the five points of Calvinism:² Election according to the foreknowledge of God; the natural depravity and sinfulness of man; particular redemption by the blood of Christ; effectual calling by the power of the Spirit; and ultimate perseverance by the efforts of God’s might. I think all those need to be believed in order to salvation; but I should not like to write a

¹ **epitome** – a brief summary of something containing its essential points.

² **Calvinism** – a term applied to the historic theology of the Reformation, upheld by Martin Luther, John Knox, the Westminster Assembly (1643-1649), and the founders of the Southern Baptist Convention in the USA.

creed like the Athanasian,³ beginning with “Whosoever should be saved, before all things it is necessary that he should hold the Catholic⁴ faith, which faith is this”—when I got so far, I should stop, because I should not know what to write. I hold the Catholic faith of the Bible, the whole Bible and nothing but the Bible. It is not for me to draw up creeds; but I ask you to search the Scriptures, for this is the word of life.

God says, “I have written to him the great things of my law.” Do you doubt their greatness? Do ye think they are not worth your attention? Reflect a moment, man. Where art thou standing now?

*“Lo, on a narrow neck of land
‘Twixt two unbounded seas I stand;
An inch of time, a moment’s space,
May lodge me in yon heavenly place,
Or shut me up in hell.”*

I recollect standing on a sea-shore once, upon a narrow neck of land, thoughtless that the tide might come up. The tide kept continually washing up on either side, and wrapped in thoughts I still stood there, until at last there was the greatest difficulty in getting on shore; the waves had washed between me and the shore. You and I stand each day on a narrow neck, and there is one wave coming up there see; how near it is to your foot; and lo, another follows at every tick of the clock: “our hearts, like muffled drums, are beating funeral marches to the tomb.” We are always tending downwards to the grave each moment that we live. This Book tells me that if I am converted, when I die there is a heaven of joy and love to receive me; it tells me that angels’ pinions shall be stretched, and I, borne by strong cherubic wings, shall out-soar the lightning, and mount beyond the stars, up to the throne of God, to dwell for ever,

*“Far from a world of grief and sin
With God eternally shut in.”*

Oh! it makes the hot tear start from my eye; it makes my heart too big for this my body; and my brain whines at the thought of

*“Jerusalem, my happy home,
Name ever dear to me.”*

Oh! that sweet scene beyond the clouds; sweet fields arrayed in living green, and rivers of delight. Are not these great things?

But then, poor unregenerate soul, the Bible says if thou art lost, thou art lost for ever; it tells thee that if thou diest without Christ, without God, there is no hope for thee; that there is a place without a gleam of hope where thou shalt read in burning letters, “Ye knew your duty, but ye did it not.” It tells you that ye shall be driven from His presence with a “depart from me, ye cursed” (Mat 25:41). Are not these great things? Yes, sirs, as heaven is desirable, as hell is terrible, as time is short, as eternity is infinite, as the soul is precious, as pains are to be shunned, as heaven is to be sought, as God is eternal, and as His words are sure—these are great things, things ye ought to listen to!

3. The Treatment the Bible Receives

Our last point is the treatment which the poor Bible receives in this world. It is accounted a strange thing! What does that mean—the Bible accounted a strange thing? In the first place, it means that it is very strange to some people, because they never read it. I remember reading on one occasion the sacred story of David and Goliath; and there was a person present, positively grown up to years of maturity, who said to me, “Dear me! what an interesting story; what book is that in?” And I recollect a person once coming to me in private; I spoke to her about her soul, she told me how deeply she felt, how she had a desire to serve God, but she found another law in her members. I turned to a passage in Romans, and read to her, “The good that I would I do not; and the evil which I would not that I do!” (Rom 7:19). She said, “Is that in the Bible? I did not know it.” I did not blame her because she had no interest in the Bible till then, but I did wonder that there could be found persons who knew nothing about such a passage. Ah, you know more about your ledgers than your Bible; you know more about your day-books than what God has written! Many of you will read a novel from beginning to end, and what have you got?—a mouthful of froth when you have done. But you cannot read the Bible—that solid, lasting, substantial, and satisfying food goes uneat-

³ **Athanasius** (c. 295-373) – Bishop of Alexandria, Egypt; defender of the deity of Christ at the council of Niceae. He was the 20th bishop of Alexandria (c. 328 - 373). He was a renowned Christian theologian and the chief defender of Trinitarianism against Arianism, at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 (Arius denied that Jesus is deity). The creed attributed to his name was the first to identify and uphold the doctrine of the Trinity.

⁴ **Catholic** – universal; applying to all men.

en, locked up in the cupboard of neglect; while anything that man writes, a catch of the day, is greedily devoured. “I have written unto him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing.”

Ye have *never read it*. I bring the broad charge against you. Perhaps ye say, I ought not to charge you with any such thing. I always think it better to have a worse opinion of you than too good an one. I charge you with this: you do not read your Bibles. Some of you never have read it through. I know I speak what your heart must say, is honest truth. You are not Bible readers. You say you have the Bible in your houses; do I think you are such heathens as not to have a Bible? But when did you read it last? How do you know that your spectacles, which you have lost, have not been there for the last three years? Many people have not turned over its pages for a long time, and God might say unto them, “I have written unto you the great things of my law, but they have been accounted unto you a strange thing”!

Others there be who read the Bible, but when they read it, they say it is so *horribly dry*. That young man over there says it is a “bore”; that is the word he uses. He says, “My mother said to me, when you go up to town, read a chapter every day. Well, I thought I would please her, and I said I would. I am sure I wish I had not. I did not read a chapter yesterday or the day before. We were so busy. I could not help it.” You do not love the Bible, do you? “No, there is nothing in it which is interesting.” Ah, I thought so! But a little while ago I could not see anything in it. Do you know why? Blind men cannot see, can they? But when the Spirit touches the scales of the eyes, they fall off; and when he puts eye-salve on, then the Bible becomes precious.

I remember a minister who went to see an old lady, and he thought he would give her some precious promises out of the Word of God. Turning to one he saw written in the margin, “P,” and he asked, “What does this mean?” “That means precious, sir.” Further down he saw “T. and P.,” and he asked what the letters meant. “That,” she said, “means tried and proved, for I have tried and proved it.” If you have tried God’s Word and proved it, if it is precious to your souls, then you are Christians; but those persons who despise the Bible, have “neither part nor lot in the matter.” If it is dry to you, you will be dry at last in hell. If you do not esteem it as better than your necessary food (Job 23:12), there is no hope for you, for you lack the greatest evidence of your Christianity.

Alas! alas! the worst case is to come. There are some people who *hate* the Bible, as well as despise it. Is there such an one stepped in here? Some of you said, “Let us go and hear what the young preacher has to say to us.” This is what he hath to say to you: “Behold ye despisers, and wonder and perish” (Act 13:41). This is what he hath to say to you: “The wicked shall be turned into hell,” and all that forget God (Psa 9:17). And this, again he has to say to you: Behold there shall come in the last days, mockers like yourselves, “walking after their own lusts” (Jude 1:16) But more: he tells you tonight that if you are [to be] saved, you must find salvation here.

Therefore, despise not the Bible, but search it, read it, and come unto it. Rest thee well assured, Oh scorner, that thy laughs cannot alter truth, thy jests cannot avert thine inevitable doom. Though in thy hardihood thou shouldst make a league with death and sign a covenant with hell—yet swift justice shall o’ertake thee, and strong vengeance strike thee low. In vain dost thou jeer and mock, for eternal verities are mightier than thy sophistries: nor can thy smart sayings alter the diving truth of a single word of this volume of revelation. Oh! why dost thou quarrel with thy best friend, and ill-treat thy only refuge? There yet remains hope even for the scorner. Hope in a Savior’s veins. Hope in the Father’s mercy. Hope in the Holy Spirit’s omnipotent agency!

I have done when I have said one word. My friend, *the philosopher*, says it may be very well for me to urge people to read the Bible, but he thinks there are a great many sciences far more interesting and useful than theology. Extremely obliged to you for your opinion, sir. What science do you mean?—the science of dissecting beetles, and arranging butterflies?; No,” you say, “certainly not.” The science, then, of arranging stones and telling us of the strata of the earth? “No, not exactly that.” Which science then? “Oh, all sciences,” say you, “are better than the science of the Bible.” Ah! sir, that is your opinion, and it is because you are far from God that you say so. But the science of Jesus Christ is the most excellent of sciences. Let no one turn away from the Bible because it is not a book of learning and wisdom. It *is*! Would ye know astronomy? It is here: it tells you of the Sun of Righteousness and the Star of Bethlehem. Would you know botany? It is here: it tells you of the plant of renown—the Lily of the Valley and the Rose of Sharon. Would you know geology and mineralogy? You shall learn it here: for you may read of the Rock of Ages, and the White Stone with a name graven thereon which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it. Would ye study history? Here is the most ancient of all the records of the history of the human race.

Whatever your science is, come and bend o’er this book; your science is here. Come and drink out of this fair fount of knowledge and wisdom, and ye shall find yourselves made wise unto salvation. Wise and foolish, babes and men, gray-headed sires, youths and maidens—I speak to you, I plead with you, I beg of you—respect your Bibles and search them out, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and these are they which testify of Christ (Joh 5:39).

I have done. Let us go home and practice what we have heard. I have heard of a woman who, when she was asked what she remembered of the minister's sermon, said, "I don't recollect anything of it. It was about short weights and bad measures, and I didn't recollect anything but to go home and burn the bushel." So if you will remember to go home and burn the bushel—if you will recollect to go home and read your Bibles—I shall have said enough. And may God, in His infinite mercy, when you read your Bibles, pour into your soul the illuminating rays of the Sun of Righteousness, by the agency of the ever-adorable Spirit; then you will read to your profit and to your soul's salvation. We may say of the Bible:

*"God's cabinet of revealed counsel 'tis!
Where weal and woe, are ordered so
That every man may know which shall be his;
Unless his own mistake, false application make.*

*"It is the index to eternity.
He cannot miss of endless bliss
That takes this chart to steer by
Nor can he be mistook, that speaketh by this book.*

*"It is the book of God. what if I should
Say, God of books, let him that looks
Angry at that expression, as too bold,
His thoughts in silence smother, till he find such another."*

Sermon No. 15, The New Park Street Pulpit Vol. 1. Available in print from Chapel Library with two other sermons under the title "The Bible."

THE WORD: A SWORD

"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

—Hebrews 4:12

THOSE who are fond of a labyrinth of exposition will find a maze perplexing to the last degree, if they will read the various commentators and expositors upon this verse. This is the question: By the Word of God are we here to understand the *Incarnate Word*, the divine Logos, who was in the beginning with God; or, does the passage relate to this *inspired Book*, and to the Gospel, which is the kernel of it, as it is set forth in the preaching of the truth in the power of the Holy Ghost? You shall find Dr. John Owen (1616-1683), with a very large number of eminent servants of God, defending the first theory, that the Son of God is doubtless here spoken of; and I confess that they seem to me to defend it with arguments that I should not like to controvert. Much more is to be said on this side of the question than I can here bring before you. On the other side, we find John Calvin, with an equally grand array of divines, all declaring that it must be the Book that is meant, the Gospel, the revelation of God in the Book. Their interpretation of the passage is not to be set aside, and I feel convinced that they all give us good reasons for their interpretation as those who come to the other conclusion.

Where such Doctors differ, I am not inclined to present any interpretation of my own that can be set in competition with theirs, though I may venture to propound one that comprehends them all, and so comes into conflict with none. It is a happy circumstance if we can see a way to agree with all those who did not themselves agree. But I have been greatly instructed by the mere fact that it should be difficult to know whether in this passage the Holy Ghost is speaking of the Christ of God or the Book of God. This shows us a great truth, which we might not otherwise have so clearly noted. How much that can be said of the Lord Jesus may be also said of the inspired volume! How closely are these two allied! How certainly do those who despise the one reject the other! How intimately are the Word made flesh, and the Word uttered by inspired men, joined together!

It may be most accurate to interpret this passage as relating both to the Word of God incarnate, and the Word of God inspired. Weave the two into one thought, for God hath joined them together, and you will then see fresh lights and new meanings in the text. The Word of God, namely, this revelation of Himself in Holy Scripture, is all it is here described to be, because Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, is in it. He doth, as it were, incarnate Himself as the divine truth in this visible and manifest revelation—and thus it becomes living and powerful, dividing and discerning. As the Christ reveals God, so this Book reveals Christ, and therefore it partakes, as the Word of God, in all the attributes of the Incarnate Word. And we may say many of the same things of the written Word as of the embodied Word; in fact, they are now so linked together that it would be impossible to divide them.

This I like to think of, because there are some nowadays who deny every doctrine of revelation, and yet, forsooth, they praise the Christ. The Teacher is spoken of in the most flattering style, and then His teaching is rejected, except so far as it may coincide with the philosophy of the moment. They talk much about Jesus, while that which is the real Jesus, namely, His Gospel and His inspired Word, they cast away. I believe I do but correctly describe them when I say that, like Judas, they betray the Son of man with a kiss. They even go so far as to cry up the names of the doctrines, though they use them in a different sense that they may deceive. They talk of loyalty to Christ and reverence for the Sermon on the Mount, but they use vain words. I am charged with sowing suspicion. I do sow it, and desire to sow it. Too many Christian people are content to hear anything so long as it is put forth by a clever man, in a taking manner; I want them to try the spirits, whether they be of God, for many false prophets have gone forth into the world (1Jo 4:1). What God has joined together these modern thinkers willfully put asunder, and separate the Revealer from His own revelation. I believe the Saviour thinks their homage to be more insulting than their scorn would be. Well may He do so, for they bow before Him, and say, “Hail, Master!” while their foot is on the blood of His covenant, and their souls abhor the doctrine of His substitutionary sacrifice. They are crucifying the Lord afresh and putting Him to an open shame, by denying the Lord that bought them (2Pe 2:1), by daring to deride His purchase of His people as a “mercantile transaction,” and I know not what of blasphemy beside.

Christ and His Word must go together. What is true of the Christ is here predicated both of Him and of His Word. Behold, this day the everlasting Gospel has Christ within it. He rides in it as in a chariot. He rides in it as, of old, Jehovah “did ride upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind” (Psa 18:10). It is only because Jesus is not dead that the Word becomes living and effectual “and sharper than any two-edged sword”; for, if you leave Christ out of it, you have left out its vitality and power. As I have told you that we will not have Christ without the Word, so neither will we have the Word without Christ. If you leave Christ out of Scripture, you have left out the essential truth which it is written to declare. Ay, if you leave out of it Christ as a Substitute, Christ in His death, Christ in His garments dyed in blood, you have left out of it all that is living and powerful. How often have we reminded you that as concerning the Gospel, even as concerning every man, “the blood is the life thereof”; a bloodless Gospel is a lifeless Gospel!

A famous picture has been lately produced that represents our Lord before Pilate. It has deservedly won great attention. A certain excellent newspaper, which brings out for a very cheap price a large number of engravings, has given an engraving of this picture; but, inasmuch as the painting was too large for the paper to give the whole, they have copied a portion of it. It is interesting to note that they have given us Pilate here, and Caiaphas there, but since there was no room for Jesus upon the sheet, they have left out that part of the design. When I saw the picture, I thought it was wonderfully characteristic of a great deal of modern preaching. See Pilate here, Caiaphas there, and the Jews yonder—but the Victim, bound and scourged for human sin, is omitted.

Possibly, in the case of the publication, the figure of the Christ will appear in the next number; but even if He should appear in the next sermon of our preachers of the new theology, it will be as a moral example, and not as the Substitute for the guilty, the Sin-bearer by whose death we are redeemed. When we hear a sermon with no Christ in it, we hope that He will come out next Sunday; at the same time, the preaching is so far spoilt, and the presentation of the Gospel is entirely ruined, so long as the principal figure is left out. Oh, it is a sad thing to have to stand in any house of prayer and listen to the preaching, and then have to cry, “They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him” (Joh 20:13)! Rest assured that they have laid Him in a tomb; you may be quite certain of that. They have put Him away as a dead thing, and to them He is as good as dead. True believer, you may comfort your heart with this recollection, that He will rise again. He cannot be holden by the bonds of death in any sense; and, though His own church should bury Him, and lay the huge lid of the most enormous sarcophagus of heresy upon Him, the Redeemer will rise again, and truth with Him, and He and His Word will live and reign together forever and ever.

Brethren, you will understand I am going to speak about the Word of God as being, like the Lord Jesus, the revelation of God. This inspired volume is that Gospel whereby you have received life, unless you have heard it in

vain. It is this Gospel, with Jesus within it, Jesus working by it, which is said to be living and effectual, and “sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” I shall only talk with you in very simple style: first, concerning the qualities of the Word of God; and, secondly, concerning certain practical lessons which these qualities suggest to us.

1. The Qualities of the Word of God

First let me speak concerning the *qualities* of the Word of God. It is “quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.”

It is quick.

The Word of God is said to be *quick*. I am sorry the translators have used that word, because it is apt to be mistaken as meaning speedy, and that is not the meaning at all; it means alive or living. “Quick” is the old English word for alive, and so we read of the “quick and dead.” The Word of God is alive. This is a living Book. This is a mystery that only living men, quickened by the Spirit of God, will fully comprehend. Take up any other book except the Bible, and there may be a measure of power in it, but there is not that indescribable vitality in it that breathes, and speaks, and pleads, and conquers [as] in the case of this sacred volume.

We have in the book-market many excellent selections of choice passages from great authors, and in a few instances the persons who have made the extracts have been at the pains to place under their quotations from Scripture the name “David,” or “Jesus,” but this is worse than needless. There is a style of majesty about God’s Word, and with this majesty a vividness never found elsewhere. No other writing has within it a heavenly life whereby it works miracles, and even imparts life to its reader. It is a *living* and incorruptible seed. It moves, it stirs itself, it lives, it communes with living men as a living Word.

Solomon saith concerning it, “When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee” (Pro 6:22). Have you never known what that means? Why, the Book has wrestled with me; the Book has smitten me; the Book has comforted me; the Book has smiled on me; the Book has frowned on me; the Book has clasped my hand; the Book has warmed my heart. The Book weeps with me, and sings with me; it whispers to me, and it preaches to me; it maps my way, and holds up my goings; it was to me the Young Man’s Best Companion, and it is still by Morning and Evening Chaplain. It is a live Book, all over alive—from its first chapter to its last word full of strange, mystic vitality, which makes it have pre-eminence over every other writing for every living child of God.

See, my brothers, our words, our books, our spoken or our printed words by-and-by die out. How many books there are which nobody will ever read now because they are out of date! There are many books that I could read profitably when I was a youth, but they would teach me nothing now. There are also certain religious works which I could read with pleasure during the first ten years of my spiritual life; but I should never think of reading them now, any more that I should think of reading the “a-b ab,” and the “b-a ba,” of my childhood. Christian experience causes us to outgrow the works that were the class-books of our youth.

We may outgrow teachers and pastors, but not apostles and prophets. That human system which was once vigorous and influential may grow old, and at length lose all vitality; but the Word of God is always fresh, and new, and full of force. No wrinkle mars its brow; no trembling is in its foot. Here, in the Old and New Testaments, we have at once the oldest and the newest of books. Homer and Hesiod are infants to the more ancient parts of this venerable volume, and yet the Gospel that it contains is as truly new as this morning’s newspaper. I say again that our words come and go; as the trees of the forest multiply their leaves only to cast them off as withered things, so the thoughts and theories of men are but for the season, and then they fade and rot into nothingness. “The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever” (1Pe 1:24).

Its vitality is such as it can impart to its readers. Hence, you will often find, when you converse with revelation, that if you yourself are dead when you begin to read, it does not matter—you will be quickened as you peruse it. You need not bring life to the Scripture; you shall draw life from the Scripture. Oftentimes a single verse has made us start up, as Lazarus came forth at the call of the Lord Jesus. When our soul has been faint, and ready to die, a single word applied to the heart by the Spirit of God, has aroused us; for it is a *quickening* as well as a *living* Word. I am so glad of this, because at times I feel altogether dead; but the Word of God is not dead; and coming to it we are like the dead man, who, when he was put into the grave of the prophet, rose again as soon as he touched his bones. Even these bones of the prophets, these words of theirs spoken and written thousands of years ago, will impart life to those who come into contact with them. The Word of God is thus overflowingly alive.

Hence, I may add, it is so alive that you need never be afraid that it will become extinct. They dream—they dream that they have put us among the antiquities, those of us who preach the old Gospel that our fathers loved! They sneer at the doctrines of the apostles and of the reformers, and declare that believers in them are left high and dry, the relics of an age that has long since ebbed away. Yes, so they say! But what they say may not after all be true; for the Gospel is such a living Gospel that, if it were cut into a thousand shreds, every particle of it would live and grow. If it were buried beneath a thousand avalanches of error, it would shake off the incubus and rise from its grave. If it were cast into the midst of the fire, it would walk through the flame as it has done many a time, as though it were in its natural element.

The Reformation was largely due to a copy of the Scriptures left in the seclusion of a monastery, and there hidden till Luther came under its influence, and his heart furnished soil for the living seed to grow in. Leave but a single New Testament in a Popish community, and the evangelical faith may at any moment come to the front, even though no preacher of it may ever have come that way. Plants unknown in certain regions have suddenly sprung from the soil; the seeds have been wafted on the winds, carried by birds, or washed ashore by the waves of the sea. So vital are seeds that they live and grow wherever they are borne; and even after lying deep in the soil for centuries, when the upturning spade has brought them to the surface, they have germinated at once. Thus is it with the Word of God; it liveth and abideth for ever, and in every soil and under all circumstances it is prepared to prove its own life by the energy with which it grows and produces fruit to the glory of God.

How vain, as well as wicked, are all attempts to kill the Gospel. Those who attempt the crime, in any fashion, will be forever still beginning, and never coming near their end. They will be disappointed in all cases, whether they would slay it with persecution, smother it with worldliness, crush it with error, starve it with neglect, poison it with misrepresentation, or drown it with infidelity. While God liveth His Word shall live. Let us praise God for that. We have an immortal Gospel, incapable of being destroyed, which shall live and shine when yon lamp of the sun has consumed its scant supply of oil.

It is powerful.

In our text the Word is said to be *powerful* or “active.” Perhaps “energetic” is the best rendering, or almost as well, “effectual.” Holy Scripture is full of power and energy. Oh, the majesty of the Word of God! They charge us with *Bibliolatry*; it is a crime of their own inventing, of which few are guilty. If there be such things as venial⁵ sins, surely an undue reverence of Holy Scripture is one of them. To me the Bible is not God, but it is God’s voice, and I do not hear it without awe. What an honour to have it as one’s calling, to study, to expound, and to publish this sacred Word! I cannot help feeling that the man who preaches the Word of God is standing, not upon a mere platform, but upon a throne. You may study your sermon, my brother, and you may be a great rhetorician, and be able to deliver it with wonderful fluency and force; but the only power that is effectual for the highest design of preaching is the power which does not lie in your word, nor in my word, but in the Word of God. Have you never noticed, when persons are converted, that they almost always attribute it to some text that was quoted in the sermon? It is God’s Word, not our comment on God’s Word, which saves souls. The Word of God is powerful for all sacred ends. How powerful it is to convince men of sin! We have seen the self-righteous turned inside out by the revealed truth of God. Nothing else could have brought home to them such unpleasant truth, and compelled them to see themselves as in a clear mirror, but the searching Word of God.

How powerful it is for conversion! It comes on board a man, and without asking any leave from him, it just puts its hand on the helm, and turns him round in the opposite direction from that in which he was going before; and the man gladly yields to the irresistible force which influences his understanding and rules his will. The Word of God is that by which sin is slain, and grace is born in the heart. It is the light which brings life with it.

How active and energetic it is, when the soul is convinced of sin, in bringing it forth into Gospel liberty! We have seen men shut up as in the devil’s own dungeon, and we have tried to get them free. We have shaken the bars of iron, but we could not tear them out so as to set the captives at liberty. But the Word of the Lord is a great breaker of bolts and bars. It not only casts down the strongholds of doubt, but it cuts off the head of Giant Despair.⁶ No cell or cellar in Doubting Castle can hold a soul in bondage when the Word of God, which is the master-key, is once put to its true use, and made to throw back bolts of despondency. It is living and energetic for encouragement and enlargement. O beloved, what a wonderful power the Gospel has to bring us comfort! It brought us to Christ at the first, and it still leads us to look to Christ till we grow like Him. God’s children are not sanctified by legal methods, but by gracious ones. The Word of God, the Gospel of Christ, is exceedingly powerful in promoting sanctifica-

⁵ *venial* – unimportant; excusable.

⁶ *Giant Despair* – character from Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, who rules in Doubting Castle, where Christian found himself imprisoned after leaving the strait and narrow way commanded him.

tion, and bringing about that whole-hearted consecration which is both our duty and our privilege. May the Lord cause His Word to prove its power in us by its making us fruitful unto every good work to do His will! Through the “washing of water by the Word” (Eph 5:26)—that is, through the washing by the Word—may we be cleansed every day, and made to walk in white before the Lord, adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things!

The Word of God, then, is quick and powerful in our own personal experience, and we shall find it to be so if we use it in labouring to bless our fellowmen. Dear brethren, if you seek to do good in this sad world, and want a powerful weapon to work with, stick to the Gospel, the living Gospel, the old, old Gospel. There is a power in it sufficient to meet the sin and death of human nature. All the thoughts of men, use them as earnestly as you may, will be like tickling Leviathan with a straw. Nothing can get through the scales of this monster but the Word of God. This is a weapon made of sterner stuff than steel, and it will cut through coats of mail. Nothing can resist it. “Where the word of a king is, there is power.” About the Gospel, when spoken with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, there is the same omnipotence as there was in the Word of God when in the beginning He spoke to the primeval darkness saying, “Let there be light,” and there was light (Gen 1:3). Oh how we ought to prize and love the revelation of God; not only because it is full of life, but because that life is exceedingly energetic and effectual, and operates so powerfully upon the lives and hearts of men!

It is cutting.

Next, the apostle tells us that this Word is *cutting*. “Cutting” would be as correct a translation as that of our own version: it is “more cutting than any two-edged sword.” I suppose the apostle means by the description “two-edged” that it is all edge. A sword with two edges has no blunt side: it cuts both this way and that. The revelation of God given us in Holy Scripture is edge all over. It is alive in every part, and in every part keen to cut the conscience and wound the heart. Depend upon it: there is not a superfluous verse in the Bible, nor a chapter that is useless. Doctors say of certain drugs that they are inert: they have no effect upon the system one way or the other. Now, there is not an inert passage in the Scriptures; every line has its virtues. Have you never heard of one who heard read, as the lesson for the Sabbath-day, that long chapter of names, wherein it is written that each patriarch lived so many hundred years, “...and he died”? Thus it ends the notice of the long life of Methuselah with “and he died.” The repetition of the words “and he died,” woke the thoughtless hearer to a sense of his mortality, and led to his coming to the Saviour. I should not wonder that, away there in the Chronicles, among those tough Hebrew names, there have been conversions wrought in cases unknown to us as yet.

Anyhow, any bit of Holy Writ is very dangerous to play with, and many a man has been wounded by the Scriptures when he has been idly or even profanely reading them. Doubters have meant to break the Word to pieces, and it has broken them. Yea, fools have taken up portions and studied them on purpose to ridicule them, and they have been sobered and vanquished by that which they repeated in sport. There was one who went to hear Mr. Whitefield—a member of the “Hell-fire Club,” a desperate fellow. He stood up at the next meeting of his abominable associates, and he delivered Mr. Whitefield’s sermon with wonderful accuracy, imitating his very tone and manner. In the middle of his exhortation he converted himself, and came to a sudden pause, sat down broken-hearted, and confessed the power of the Gospel. That club was dissolved. That remarkable convert was Mr. Thorpe of Bristol, whom God so greatly used afterwards in the salvation of others. I would rather have you read the Bible to mock at it than not read it at all. I would rather that you came to hear the Word of God out of hatred to it than that you never came at all.

The Word of God is so sharp a thing, so full of cutting power, that you may be bleeding under its wounds before you have seriously suspected the possibility of such a thing. You cannot come near the Gospel without its having a measure of influence over you; and, God blessing you, it may cut down and kill your sins when you have no idea that such a work is being done. Dear friends, have you not found the Word of God to be very cutting, more cutting than a two-edged sword, so that your heart has bled inwardly, and you have been unable to resist the heavenly stroke? I trust you and I may go on to know more and more of its edge till it has killed us outright, so far as the life of sin is concerned. Oh, to be sacrificed unto God, and His Word to be the sacrificial knife! Oh, that His Word were put to the throat of every sinful tendency, every sinful habit, and every sinful thought! There is no sin-killer like the Word of God. Wherever it comes, it comes as a sword, and inflicts death upon evil.

Sometimes when we are praying that we may feel the power of the Word we hardly know what we are praying for. I saw a venerable brother the other day, and he said to me, “I remember speaking with you when you were nineteen or twenty years of age, and I never forgot what you said to me. I had been praying with you in the prayer-meeting that God would give us the Holy Ghost to the full, and you said to me afterwards, ‘My dear brother, do you know what you asked God for?’ I answered ‘Yes.’ But you very solemnly said to me, ‘The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of judgment and the Spirit of burning, and few are prepared for the inward conflict which is meant by these two

words.” My good old friend told me that at the time he did not understand what I meant, but thought me a singular youth. “Ah!” said he, “I see it now, but it is only by a painful experience that I have come to the full comprehension of it.” Yes, when Christ comes, He comes not to send peace on the earth, but a sword (Mat 10:34); and that sword begins at home, in our own souls, killing, cutting, hacking, breaking in pieces. Blessed is that man who knows the Word of the Lord by its exceeding sharpness, for it kills nothing but that which ought to be killed. It quickens and gives new life to all that is of God; but the old depraved life that ought to die, it hews in pieces, as Samuel destroyed Agag before the Lord (1Sa 15:33). “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.”

It is piercing.

But I want you to notice next, that it has a further quality: it is *piercing*. While it has an edge like a sword, it has also a point like a rapier, “Piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit.” The difficulty with some men’s hearts is to get at them. In fact, there is no spiritually penetrating the heart of any natural man except by this piercing instrument, the Word of God. But the rapier of revelation will go through anything. Even when the “heart is as fat as grease,” as the Psalmist says, yet this Word will pierce it. Into the very marrow of the man the sacred truth will pass, and find him out in a way in which he cannot even find himself out. As it is with our own hearts, so it is with the hearts of other men. Dear friends, the Gospel can find its way anywhere. Men may wrap themselves up in prejudice, but this rapier can find out the joints of their harness; they may resolve not to believe and may feel content in their self-righteousness, but this piercing weapon will find its way. The arrows of the Word of God are sharp in the hearts of the King’s enemies, whereby the people fall under Him. Let us not be afraid to trust this weapon whenever we are called up to face the adversaries of the Lord Jesus. We can pin them, and pierce them, and finish them with this!

It is discriminating.

And next, the Word of God is said to be *discriminating*. It divides “asunder soul and spirit.” Nothing else could do that, for the division is difficult. In a great many ways writers have tried to describe the difference between soul and spirit, but I question whether they have succeeded. No doubt it is a very admirable definition to say, “The soul is the life of the natural man, and the spirit the life of the regenerate or spiritual man.” But it is one thing to *define* and quite another thing to *divide*.

We will not attempt to solve this metaphysical problem. God’s Word comes in, and it shows man the difference between that which is of the soul, and that which is of the spirit; that which is of man, and that which is of God; that which is of grace, and that which is of nature. The Word of God is wonderfully decisive about this. Oh, how much there is of our religion that is—to quote a spiritual poet—“The child of nature finely-dressed, but not the living child”: it is of the soul and not of the spirit! The Word of God lays down very straight lines, and separates between the natural and the spiritual, the carnal and the divine. You would think sometimes, from the public prayers and preaching of clergymen, that we were all Christian people; but Holy Scripture does not sanction this flattering estimate of our condition. When we are gathered together, [these false] prayers are for us *all*, and the preaching is for us all, as being all God’s people—all born so, or made so by baptism, no question about that! Yet the way the Word of God takes is of quite another sort. It talks about the dead and the living; about the repentant and the impenitent; about the believing and the unbelieving; about the blind and the seeing; about those called of God and those who still lie in the arms of the wicked one. It speaks with keen discrimination, and separates the precious from the vile. I believe there is nothing in the world that divides congregations, as they ought to be divided, like the plain preaching of the Word of God.

This it is that makes our places of worship to be solemn spots, even as Dr. Watts (1674-1748) sings—

*“Up to her courts with joys unknown
The holy tribes repair;
The Son of David holds his throne,
And sits in judgment there.*

*“He hears our praises and complaints;
And, while his awful voice
Divides the sinners from the saints,
We tremble and rejoice.”*

The Word of God is *discriminating*.

It is revealing.

Once more, the Word of God is marvelously revealing to the inner self. It pierces between the joints and marrow, and marrow is a thing not to be got at very readily. The Word of God gets at the very marrow of our manhood; it lays bare the secret thoughts of the soul. It is “a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Have you not often, in hearing the Word, wondered how the preacher could so unveil that which you had concealed? He says the very things in the pulpit that you had uttered in your bed-chamber. Yes, that is one of the marks of the Word of God: that it lays bare a man’s inmost secrets; yea, it discovers to him that which he had not even himself perceived. The Christ that is in the Word sees everything. Read the next verse: “All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:13).

The Word not only lets you see what your thoughts are, but it criticizes your thoughts. The Word of God says of this thought, “it is vain,” and of that thought, “it is acceptable”; of this thought, “it is selfish,” and of that thought, “it is Christ-like.” It is a judge of the thoughts of men. And the Word of God is such a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart that when men twist about, and wind and wander, yet it tracks them. There is nothing so difficult to get at as a man. You may hunt a badger and run down a fox, but you cannot get at a man—he has so many doublings and hiding-places; yet the Word of God will dig him out, and seize on him. When the Spirit of God works with the Gospel, the man may dodge and twist, but the preaching goes to his heart and conscience, and he is made to feel it, and to yield to its force.

Many times, I do not doubt, dear brothers, you have found comfort in the discerning power of the Word. Unkind lips have found great fault with you; you have been trying to do what you could for the Lord, and an enemy has slandered you, and then it has been a delight to remember that the Master discerns your motive. Holy Scripture has made you sure of this by the way in which it understood and commended you. He discerns the true object of your heart and never misinterprets you, and this has inspired you with a firm resolve to be the faithful servant of so just a Lord. No slander will survive the judgment-seat of Christ. We are not to be tried by the opinions of men, but by the impartial Word of the Lord; and therefore we rest in peace!

2. Lessons from the Qualities of the Word

I have been all this while over the first part of the discourse. I have only a minute or two just to show one or two lessons we ought to gather from the qualities of the Word of God that I have described. The first is this: Brothers and sisters, let us *greatly reverence the Word of God*. If it be all this, let us read it, study it, prize it, and make it the man of our right hand. And you that are not converted, I do pray you treat the Bible with a holy love and reverence, and read it with the view of finding Christ and His salvation in it. Augustine (AD 354-430) used to say that the Scriptures are the swaddling-bands of the child Christ Jesus; while you are unrolling the bands I trust you will meet with Him.

Next, dear friends, let us, whenever we feel ourselves dead, and especially in prayer, *get close to the Word*, for the Word of God is alive. I do not find that gracious men always pray alike. Who could? When you have nothing to say to your God, let Him say something to you. The best private devotion is made up, half of searching Scripture in which God speaks to us, and the other half of prayer and praise, in which we speak to God. When thou art dead, turn from thy death to that Word which still lives.

Next, *whenever we feel weak in our duties, let us go the Word of God*, and the Christ in the Word, for power; and this will be the best of power. The power of our natural abilities, the power of our acquired knowledge, the power of our gathered experience, all these may be vanity; but the power that is in the Word will prove effectual. Get thou up from the cistern of thy failing strength to the fountain of omnipotence; for they that drink here—while the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall—“shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint (Isa 40:31).

Next, if you need as a minister or a worker, anything that will *cut your hearers to the heart*, go to this Book for it. I say this because I have known preachers try to use very cutting words of their own. God save us from that! When our hearts grow hot and our words are apt to be sharp as a razor, let us remember that “the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God” (Jam 1:20). Let us not attempt to carry on Christ’s war with the weapons of Satan. There is nothing so cutting as the Word of God. Keep to that! I believe also that one of the best ways of convincing men of error is not so much to denounce the error, as to proclaim the truth more clearly. If a stick is very crooked, and you wish to prove that it is so, get a straight one, and quietly lay it down by its side—and when men look they will surely see the difference. The Word of God has a very keen edge about it, and all the cutting words you want you had better borrow therefrom.

And next, the Word of God is *very piercing*. When we cannot get at people by God's truth, we cannot get at them at all. I have heard of preachers who have thought they ought to adapt themselves a little to certain people, and leave out portions of the truth that might be disagreeable. Brothers, if the Word of God will not pierce, our words will not, you may depend upon that. The Word of God is like the sword of Goliath, which has been laid up in the sanctuary, of which David said "There is none like that, give it me" (1Sa 21:9). Why did he like it so well? I think he liked it all the better because it had been laid up in the Holy Place by the priests; that is one thing. But I think he liked it best of all because it had stains of blood upon it—the blood of Goliath.

I like my own sword because it is covered with blood right up to the hilt: the blood of slaughtered sins, errors, and prejudices has made it like the sword of Don Rodrigo,⁷ "of a dark and purple tint." The slain of the Lord have been many by the old Gospel. We point to many vanquished by this true Jerusalem blade. They desire me to use a new one; I have not tried it. What have I to do with a weapon that has seen no service? I have proved the Sword of the Lord, and of Gideon (Jdg 7:14), and I mean to keep to it. My dear comrades in arms, gird this sword about you, and disdain the wooden weapons with which enemies would delude you! Let us use this blade of steel, well tempered in the fire, against the most obstinate, for they cannot stand against it. They may resist it for a time, but they will have to yield. They had better make preparations for surrender; for if the Lord comes out against them with his own Word, they will have to give in, and cry to him for mercy.

Next, if we want to discriminate at any time between the soul and the spirit, and the joints and marrow, let us *go to the Word of God for discrimination*. We need to use the Word of God just now upon several subjects. There is that matter of holiness, upon which one saith one thing, and another another. Never mind what they all say, go to the Book, for this is the umpire on all questions. Amidst the controversies of the day about a thousand subjects, keep to this infallible Book, and it will guide you unerringly.

And lastly, since this Book is meant to be a discernor or critic of the thoughts and intents of the heart, *let the Book criticize us*. When you have issued a new volume from the press—which you do every day, for every day is a new treatise from the press of life—take it to this great critic, and let the Word of God judge it. If the Word of God approves you, you are approved; if the Word of God disapproves you, you are disapproved! Have friends praised you? They may be your enemies in so doing. Have other observers abused you? They may be wrong or right, let the Book decide. A man of one Book—if that Book is the Bible—is a *man*, for he is a man of God. Cling you to the living Word, and let the Gospel of your fathers, let the Gospel of the martyrs, let the Gospel of the Reformers, let the Gospel of the blood-washed multitude before the throne of God, the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ—be your Gospel, and none but that. It will save you and make you the means of saving others, to the praise of God.

Portion of Scripture read before sermon: Psalm 119:105-120; Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Vol. 34, No. 2010; Available in print from Chapel Library with two other sermons under the title "The Bible."

EVANGELISTIC TRACTS

A JUST GOD

WHEN I was under conviction of sin, I had a deep and sharp sense of the justice of God. Sin, whatever it might be to other people, became to me an intolerable burden. It was not so much that I feared the wrath to come, but that I feared *sin*. I knew myself to be so horribly guilty that I remember feeling that if God did not punish me for sin, He ought to do so. I felt

⁷ **Don Rodrigo** – in the 8th century, the last Visigothic king of Spain, based in Toledo.

that the judge of all the earth ought to condemn such sin as mine. I sat on the judgment seat and I condemned myself to perish, for I confessed that, had I been God, I could have done no other than send such a guilty creature as I was down to the lowest hell. All the while, I had upon my mind a deep concern for the honor of God's name and the integrity of His moral government. I felt that it would not satisfy my conscience if it could be forgiven unjustly. The sin that I had committed must be punished. But then there was the question how God could be just—and yet justify me who had been so guilty. I asked my heart, How can He be just and yet the Justifier? (Rom 3:26). I was worried and wearied with this question; neither could I see any answer to it. Certainly I could never have invented an answer which would have satisfied my conscience.

The doctrine of the atonement⁸ is to my mind one of the surest proofs of the divine inspiration of Holy Scripture. Who would or could have thought of the just Ruler dying for the unjust rebel? This is no teaching of human mythology or dream of poetical imagination. This method of expiation⁹ is only known among men because it is a fact. Fiction could not have devised it. God Himself ordained it. It is not a matter which could have been imagined.

I had heard the plan of salvation by the sacrifice of Jesus from my youth up, but I did not know any more about it in my innermost soul than if I had been born a Hottentot.¹⁰ It came to me as a new revelation, as fresh as if I had never read the Scriptures, that Jesus was declared to be “the propitiation for our sins” (1Jo 2:2), that God might be just.

When I was anxious about the possibility of a just God pardoning me, I understood and saw by faith that He who is the Son of God became man and, in His own blessed Person, bore my sin in His own body on the tree. I saw the chastisement of my peace was laid upon Him, and with His stripes I was healed (Isa 53:5). Have you ever seen that? Have you ever understood how God can be just to the full, not remitting penalty nor blunting the edge of the sword, and yet can be infinitely merciful and can justify the ungodly who turn to Him? It was because the Son of God, supremely glorious in His matchless person, undertook to vindicate the Law, by bearing the sentence due me, that therefore God is able to pass by my sin. The Law of God was more vindicated by the death of Christ than it would have been had all transgressions been punished forever. For the Son of God to suffer for sin was a more glorious establishment of the government of God than for the whole race to suffer.

“Jesus has borne the death penalty on our behalf!” Behold the wonder! There He hangs upon the Cross! This is the greatest sight you will ever see: Son of God and Son of man! There He hangs, bearing pains unutterable—“the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1Pe 3:18). Oh, the glory of that sight! The Innocent suffering! The Holy One condemned! The Ever-blessed made a curse! The Infinitely Glorious put to a shameful death!

The more I look at the sufferings of the Son of God, the more sure I am that they must meet my case. Why did He suffer, if not to turn aside the penalty from us? If, then, He turned it aside by His death, it is turned aside, and those who believe in Him need not fear it. It must be so, that since expiation is made, God is able to forgive without shaking the basis of His throne or in the least degree blotting out the statute book. Conscience gets a full answer to her tremendous question.

The wrath of God against iniquity, whatever that may be, must be beyond all conception terrible. Well did Moses say, “Who knoweth the power of thine anger!” (Psa 90:11). Yet, when we hear the Lord of Glory cry, “Why hast thou forsaken me?” (Psa 22:1) and see Him yielding up the ghost, we feel that the justice of God has received abundant vindication by obedience so perfect and death so terrible, rendered by so divine a Person. If God Himself bows before His own Law, what more can be done? There is more in the atonement by way of merit than there is in all human sin by way of demerit. The great gulf of Jesus' loving self sacrifice can swallow up the mountains of our sin, all of them.

For the sake of the infinite good of this one representative Man, the Lord may well look with favor upon other men, however unworthy they may be in and of themselves. It was a miracle of miracles that the Lord Jesus Christ should stand in our stead and “bear, that we might never bear, His Fathers righteous Ire.” But He has done so. “It is finished” (Joh 19:30). God will save the sinner because He did not spare His Son. God can pass by your transgressions because He laid those transgressions upon His only begotten Son.

What is it to believe in Him? It is not merely to say, “He is God and the Saviour,” but to trust Him wholly and entirely, and take Him for all your salvation from this time forth and forever—your Lord, your Master, your All. If you will have the Lord Jesus, He has you already. If you believe on Him, I tell you, you cannot go to hell, for that were to make the perfect sacrifice of Christ to none effect.

If the Lord Jesus Christ died in my stead, why should I die also? Every believer by faith has laid his hands on the Sacrifice, and made it his own, and therefore may rest assured that he can never perish. The Lord would not receive this offering on our behalf and then condemn us to die. The Lord cannot read our pardon written in the blood of His own Son and then smite us. That were impossible! Oh, that you may have grace given you at once to look away to Jesus, Who is the fountain-head of mercy to guilty man! Will you come into this lifeboat just as you are? Here is safety from the wreck. Accept the sure deliverance. Leap for it just as you are, and leap now!

⁸ **atonement** – reconciliation with God by removing or covering the guilt of sin; this was accomplished through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ at the Cross.

⁹ **expiation** – making satisfaction for offense by removing the guilt of sin.

¹⁰ **Hottentot** – the native people of southwestern Africa of the Khoi ethnic group, labeled “Hottentots” by the European settlers because of the sound of their language.

I will tell you this thing about myself to encourage you. My sole hope for heaven lies in the full atonement made upon Calvary's Cross for the ungodly. On that I firmly rely. I have not a shadow of hope anywhere else. You are in the same condition as I am, for we, neither of us, have anything of our own worth thinking of as a ground of trust. Let us join hands and stand together at the foot of the Cross and trust our souls once for all to Him who shed His blood for the guilty. We will be saved by the one and the same Saviour. If you perish trusting Him, I must perish too. What can I do more to prove my own confidence in the Gospel which is set before you? ❧

Available in print as a tract from Chapel Library.

NOT SAVED

"The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved"

—Jeremiah 8:20

NOT SAVED! Dear reader, is this your mournful plight? Warned of the judgment to come, bidden to escape for your life, and yet at this moment *not saved*? You know the way of salvation, you read it in the Bible, you hear it from the pulpit, it is explained to you by friends, and yet you neglect it, and therefore are not saved. You will be without excuse when the Lord shall judge the quick and dead. The Holy Spirit has given more or less of blessing upon the word which has been preached in your hearing, and times of refreshing have come from the divine presence, and yet you are without Christ. All these hopeful seasons have come and gone—your summer and your harvest have past—and yet you are not saved!

Years have followed one another into eternity, and your last year will soon be here; youth has gone, manhood is going, and yet you are not saved. Let me ask you—*Will you ever be saved*? Is there any likelihood of it? Already the most propitious seasons have left you unsaved: will other occasions alter your condition? Means have failed with you—the best of means, used perseveringly and with the utmost affection—what more can be done for you? Affliction and prosperity have alike failed to impress you; tears and prayers and sermons have been wasted on your barren heart.

Are not the probabilities dead against your ever being saved? Is it not more than likely that you will abide as you are till death forever bars the door of hope? Do you recoil from the supposition? Yet it is a most reasonable one: he who is not washed in so many waters will in all probability go filthy to his end. The convenient time never has come; why should it ever come? It is logical to fear that it never will arrive, and that, Felix-like (Act 24:25), you will find no convenient season till you are in hell. Oh, bethink you of what that hell is, and of the dread probability that you will soon be cast into it!

Reader, suppose you should die unsaved: your doom no words can picture. Write out your dread estate in tears and blood; talk of it with groans and gnashing of teeth—you will be punished with everlasting destruction from the glory of the Lord, and from the glory of His power. A brother's voice would fain startle you into earnestness. Oh, be wise, be wise in time, and ere another year begins, believe in Jesus, who is able to save to the uttermost. Consecrate these last hours to lonely thought, and if deep repentance be bred in you, it will be well; and if it lead to a humble faith in Jesus, it will be best of all. Oh, see to it that this year pass not away, and you an unforgiven spirit. Let not the new year's midnight peals sound upon a joyless spirit. Now, *Now*, **NOW**, believe, and live. "*Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed*" (Gen 19:17).

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Taken from Spurgeon's Evening by Evening devotional, pp. 368-369. Available in print as a tract from Chapel Library.

THE GROUND OF THE SINNERS FAITH

ON what ground does the sinner dare to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ?

My dear friends, it is true that no man will believe in Jesus unless *he feels his need of Him*. But you have often heard me say, and I repeat it again, that I do not come to Christ pleading that I feel my need of Him; my reason for believing in Christ is not that I *feel* my need of Him, but that I *have* a need of Him. The ground on which a man comes to Jesus is not as a *sensible* sinner, but *as* a sinner, and nothing but a sinner. He will not come unless he is awakened; but when he comes, he does not say, “Lord, I come to thee because I am an awakened sinner, save me.” But he says, “Lord, I am a sinner, save me.” Not his awakening, but his sinnership is the method and plan upon which he dares to come. You will, perhaps, perceive what I mean, for I cannot exactly explain myself just now. If I refer to the preaching of a great many Calvinistic divines, they say to a sinner, “Now, *if you feel* your need of Christ, *if* you have repented so much, *if* you have been harrowed by the Law to such-and-such a degree, then you may come to Christ on the ground that you are an awakened sinner.” I say that is false! No man may come to Christ on the ground of his being an awakened sinner; he must come to him *as a sinner*. When I come to Jesus, I know I am not come unless I am awakened, but still, I do not come as an awakened sinner. I do not stand at the foot of His cross to be washed because I have repented; I bring nothing when I come but *sin*. A sense of need is a good feeling, but when I stand at the foot of the cross, I do not believe in Christ because I have got good feelings, but I believe in Him whether I have good feelings or not.

*“Just as I am without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God I come.”*

Mr. Roger, Mr. Sheppard, Mr. Flavel (1630-1691), and several excellent divines in the Puritanic age (1600-1750), and especially Richard Baxter (1615-1691), used to give descriptions of what a man must feel before he may dare to come to Christ. Now, I say in the language of good Mr. Fenner, another of those divines, who said he was but a babe in grace when compared with them—“I dare to say it, that all this is not Scriptural. Sinners do feel these things before they come, but they do not come on the ground of having felt it; they come on the ground of being sinners, and on no other ground whatever.” The gate of Mercy is opened, and over the door it is written, “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save *sinners*” (1Ti 1:15). Between that word “save” and the next word “sinners,” there is no adjective. It does not say, “penitent sinners,” “awakened sinners,” “sensible sinners,” “grieving sinners,” or “alarmed sinners.” No, it only says, “sinners”! And I know this: that when I come, I come to Christ today, for I feel it is as much a necessity of my life to come to the cross of Christ today as it was to come ten years ago. When I come to Him, I dare not come as a conscious sinner or an awakened sinner, but I have to come still as a sinner with nothing in my hands. I saw an aged man this week in the vestry of a chapel in Yorkshire. I had been saying something to this effect, and the old man, [who] had been a Christian for years...said, “I never saw it put exactly so, but still I know that is just the way I come; I say, ‘Lord, Nothing in my hands I bring, Simply to thy cross I cling; Naked, look to thee for dress; Helpless, come to thee for grace; Black [blackened by sin]’—‘Black enough,’ said the old man, ‘I to the fountain fly, Wash me, Saviour, or I die.’”

Faith is getting right *out of yourself* and getting into Christ. I know that many hundreds of poor souls have been troubled because the minister has said, “if you feel your need, you may come to Christ.” “But,” say they, “I do not feel my need enough; I am sure I do not.” Many a score letters have I received from poor troubled consciences who have said, “I would venture to believe in Christ to save me if I had a tender conscience; if I had a soft heart—but oh my heart is like a rock of ice which will not melt. I cannot feel as I would like to feel, and therefore I must not believe in Jesus.” Oh! down with it, down with it! It is a wicked anti-Christ; it is flat Popery! It is not your soft heart that entitles you to believe. You are to believe in Christ to renew your hard heart, and come to Him with nothing about you but sin. The ground on which a sinner comes to Christ is that he is black; that he is *dead*, and not that he knows he is dead; that he is *lost*, and not that he knows he is lost. I know he will not come unless he does know it, but that is not the ground on which he comes. It is the secret reason why, but it is not the public positive ground that he understands. Here was I, year after year, afraid to come to Christ because I thought I did not feel enough; and I used to read that hymn of Cowper’s (William, 1731-1800) about being insensible as steel: “If aught is felt ’tis only pain To find I cannot feel.”

When I believed in Christ, I thought I did not feel at all. Now, when I look back, I find that I had been feeling all the while most acutely and intensely, and most of all because I thought I did not feel. Generally, the people who repent the most think they are impenitent, and people feel most their need when they think they do not feel at all—for we are no judges of our feelings. And hence the gospel invitation is not put upon the ground of anything of which we can be a judge; it is put on the ground of our being sinners and nothing but sinners. “Well,” says one, “but it says, ‘Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest’ (Mat 11:28)—then we [first] must be weary and heavy-laden.” Just so; so it is in the text, but then there is another: “Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev 22:17); and that does not say anything about “weary and heavy-laden.” Besides, while the invitation is given to the weary and heavy-laden, you will perceive that the promise is not made to them *as* weary and heavy-laden, but it is made to them as *coming* to Christ. They did not know that they were weary and heavy-laden when they came; they thought they were not. They really were, but part of their weariness was that they could not be as weary as they would like to be, and part of their load was that they did not feel their load *enough*. They came to Christ just as they were, and He saved them, not because there was any merit in their weariness or any efficacy in their being heavy-laden, but He saved them as sinners and nothing but sinners, and so they were washed in His blood and made clean! My dear hearer, do let me put this truth home to thee. If thou wilt come to Christ this morning, as nothing but a sinner, He *will not cast thee out*!

Old Tobias Crisp (1600-1643) says in one of his sermons upon this very point, “I dare to say it, but if thou dost come to Christ, whosoever thou mayest be, if He does not receive thee, then He is not true to His word, for He says, ‘Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.’ (Joh 6:37)” If thou comest, never mind qualification or preparation. He needeth no qualification of duties or of feelings either. Thou art to come just as thou art, and if thou art the biggest sinner out of hell, thou art as fit to come to Christ as if thou wert the most moral and most excellent of men. There is a bath: who is fit to be washed? A man’s blackness is no reason why he should not be washed, but the clearer reason why he *should* be. When our city magistrates were giving relief to the poor, nobody said, “I am so poor, therefore I am not fit to have relief.” Your poverty is your preparation, the “black” is the “white” here—strange contradiction! The only thing you can bring to Christ is your sin and your wickedness. All He asks is that you will come *empty*. If you have anything of your own, you must leave all before you come (Luk 14:33). If there be anything good in you, you cannot trust Christ, you must come with nothing in your hand. Take Him as all in all, and that is the only ground upon which a poor soul can be saved—as a sinner, and nothing but a sinner! ❧

Available in print from Chapel Library as a tract.

HOW MEN COME TO CHRIST

“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.”

—John 6:44

HOW then does the Father draw men? Arminian preachers generally say that God draws men by the preaching of the gospel. Very true; the preaching of the gospel is the instrument of drawing men, but there must be something more than this. Let me ask to whom did Christ address these words? Why, to the people of Capernaum, where He had often preached, where He had uttered mournfully and plaintively the woes of the Law and the invitations of the gospel. In that city He had done many mighty works and worked many miracles. In fact, such teaching and such miraculous attestation had He given them, that He declared that Tyre and Sidon would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes if they had been blessed with such privileges.

Now, if the preaching of Christ Himself did not avail to the enabling these men to come to Christ, it cannot be possible that all that was intended by the drawing of the Father was simply preaching. No, brethren, you must note again, He does not say no man can come except the minister draw him, but except the Father draw him. Now there is such a thing as being drawn by the gospel, and drawn by the minister, without being drawn by God. Clearly, it is a divine drawing that is meant, a drawing by the Most High God—the First Person of the most glorious Trinity sending out the Third Person the Holy Spirit, to induce men to come to Christ.

Another person turns around and says with a sneer, "Then do you think that Christ drags men to Himself, seeing that they are unwilling?" I remember meeting once with a man who said to me, "Sir, you preach that Christ takes people by the hair of their heads and drags them to Himself." I asked him whether he could refer to the date of the sermon wherein I preached that extra-ordinary doctrine, for if he could, I should be very much obliged. However, he could not. But said I, while Christ does not drag people to Himself by the hair of their heads, I believe that He draws them by the heart quite as powerfully as your caricature would suggest.

Mark that in the Father's drawing there is no compulsion whatever; Christ never compelled any man to come to Him against his will. If a man be unwilling to be saved, Christ does not save him against his will. How, then, does the Holy Spirit draw him? Why, by making him willing. It is true He does not use "moral suasion"; He knows a nearer method of reaching the heart. He goes to the secret fountain of the heart, and He knows how, by some mysterious operation, to turn the will in an opposite direction, so that, as Ralph Erskine (1685-1752) paradoxically puts it, the man is saved "with full consent against his will"; that is, against his old will he is saved. But he is saved with full consent, for he is made willing in the day of God's power. Do not imagine that any man will go to heaven kicking and struggling all the way against the Hand that draws him. Do not conceive that any man will be plunged in the bath of a Saviour's blood while he is striving to run away from the Saviour. Oh, no! It is quite true that first of all man is unwilling to be saved. When the Holy Spirit hath put His influence into the heart, the test is fulfilled: "Draw me and I will run after thee" (Song 1:4). We follow on while He draws us, glad to obey the Voice which once we had despised.

But the gist of the matter lies in the turning of the will. How that is done no flesh knoweth; it is one of those mysteries that is clearly perceived as a fact, but the cause of which no tongue can tell, and no heart can guess. The apparent way, however, in which the Holy Spirit operates, we can tell you. The first thing the Holy Spirit does when He comes into a man's heart is this: He finds him with a very good opinion of himself. "Why," says the man, "I don't want to come to Christ. I have as good a righteousness as anybody can desire. I feel I can walk into heaven on my own rights." The Holy Spirit lays bare his heart, lets him see the loathsome cancer that is there eating away his life, uncovers to him all the blackness and defilement of that sink of hell, the human heart, and then the man stands aghast. "I never thought I was like this. Oh! Those sins I thought were little, have swelled out to an immense stature. What I thought was a molehill has grown into a mountain; it was but the hyssop on the wall before, but now it has become a cedar of Lebanon. Oh," saith the man within himself, "I will try and reform; I will do good deeds enough to wash these black deeds out." Then comes the Holy Spirit and shows him that he cannot do this, takes away all his fancied power and strength, so that the man falls down on his knees in agony, and cries, "Oh! Once I thought I could save myself by my good works, but now I find that,

*'Could my tears forever flow, Could my zeal no respite know,
All for sin could not atone, Thou must save and Thou alone.'*"

Then the heart sinks, and the man is ready to despair. And, saith he, "I never can be saved. Nothing can save me." Then comes the Holy Spirit and shows the sinner the cross of Christ, gives him eyes anointed with heavenly eye-salve, and says, "Look to yonder cross; that Man died to save sinners. You feel that you are a sinner; He died to save you." And He enables the heart to believe, and to come to Christ. And when it comes to Christ, by this sweet drawing of the Spirit, it finds "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, which keeps his heart and mind through Christ Jesus" (Phi 4:7). Now you will plainly perceive that all this may be done without any compulsion. Man is as much drawn willingly as if he were not drawn at all. And he comes to Christ with full consent, with as full a consent as if no secret influence had ever been exercised in his heart. But that influence must be exercised, or else there never has been and there never will be, any man who either can or will come to the Lord Jesus Christ. ❧

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SALVATION

YET THERE IS ROOM

“And yet there is room.”

—Luke 14:22.

I REMINDED you this morning that there was no room for Christ and His parents in the inn at Bethlehem, and also that there were then other places where, although there was no room for Christ, far inferior persons found a welcome and entertainment. I want this evening to convince you that, although there are still many sinners who seem to have no room for Christ in their hearts and lives, yet there is plenty of room for sinners in the heart and love of Christ, and I am going to give them an earnest, tender, affectionate invitation to come to Christ while “yet there is room.” Ye who have hitherto been strangers to the grace of God, ye who, as yet, have never feasted at the gospel banquet, ye who have, until now, been content with this world’s frothy dainties, and have never tasted that which is substantial and satisfying for time and for eternity—to you, even to you, comes the message of our text, “yet there is room.”

1. Where Is There Room?

My first question concerning the text is: *where is there room?* And the answer is, there is room in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, room for you to be washed and to be made clean. Vast multitudes have gone into that fountain black as the thickest night, and they have come up from the washing “whiter than snow” (Psa 51:7). Innumerable offenses have there been washed away, but the fountain has lost none of its cleansing power, nor will it until the last elect soul has been washed therein, as Cowper (1731-1800) so confidently and so truly sings,

*“Dear dying Lamb, thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransom’d Church of God
Be saved to sin no more.”*

It is our joy to be able to assure you that, in that blessed bath of cleansing, “yet there is room.”

There is room, too, in that chariot of *love* which carries the washed ones all the way to heaven—that chariot of which Solomon’s was a type, and of which we read,

*“he made the pillars thereof of silver,
the bottom thereof of gold, the covering
of it of purple, the midst thereof being paved
with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem” (Song 3:10).*

In this chariot there is room for millions more; and if thou art washed in His precious blood, He who is greater than Solomon will take thee up, and carry thee on and over the rough and rugged road of this wilderness world, and conduct thee safely to His Father’s house above. Thou shalt travel joyously in the best of company; so, enter while there is room, sinner, and there is room *now*.

There is room, too, in the Father’s *great family*. He has adopted an innumerable multitude of those who once were children of wrath and servants of Satan. He has selected some of the vilest of the sons and daughters of Adam, but they are washed, they are cleansed, they are regenerate, and they have received the seal of their adoption into the family of God, and are joyously crying, “Abba, Father” (Rom 8:15)—but there is room for millions more in that great family. Earthly fathers, as a general rule, have no room for strangers in their home; the house is crowded already with their own boys and girls, so they cannot receive other people’s children into their family. But there is still room in the great Father’s heart for all who will come unto Him by Jesus Christ His Son. All whom He has

chosen unto eternal life have not yet believed in Jesus, and been “sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession” (Eph 1:14). All whom He intends to save have not yet been brought to recognize Him as their Father and their God. So again I say that there is still room in the great Father’s heart for all who will come unto Him by Jesus Christ His Son.

There is room, too, in the *church visible* here below. We gladly welcome every new convert, and we say to each one,

“Come in, thou blessed of the Lord,
Stranger nor foe art thou;
We welcome thee with warm accord,
Our friend, our brother now.”

“The Lord knoweth them that are his” (2Ti 2:19), but all that are the Lord’s are not yet added to His visible church. Thousands of them still stray in the paths of sin, millions of them are as yet like jewels hidden away in the mire, or pearls lying many fathoms deep in the caverns of the sea. There is still room for more stars in the diadem that adorns the brows of the church on earth; there is still room for more golden candlesticks to give her light; room hath she still for many more children to be dandled on her knees, and to suck at her breasts. Use whatever metaphor we may, we can still say, in the words of our text, “yet there is room.”

There is room, too, in the *ordinances* of God’s house. There is room for thee, Christian brother or sister, in the liquid tomb which is the emblem of thy Saviour’s grave; thou mayest be buried with Him by baptism into death, and rise from the baptismery in the likeness of His resurrection, thenceforth to walk with Him in newness of life (Rom 6:4-6). There is room for thee, too, at that communion table where, in eating bread and drinking wine, we spiritually eat Christ’s flesh and drink His blood, and so prove that He dwells in us, and we dwell in Him.

There is room for thee at the *children’s table*; thou wilt not overcrowd us. We are not like the elder brother, who was jealous because the prodigal was welcomed back to his father’s house and his father’s table (Luk 15). We shall have none the less enjoyment, but all the more, if thou wilt come and join us at the feast of love; there is abundant room for thee there.

Better still, and more to thy soul’s solace, there is room for thee *in heaven*. The long procession has been streaming through the gates of pearl from the day when Abel, the proto-martyr, entered the heavenly city until this moment, while I am speaking to you. The last emancipated soul has just flapped its wings for joy, left its mortal cage behind, and entered into everlasting liberty. The redeemed from among men have been taking their appointed places before the throne, waving their palms, wearing their crowns, playing their golden harps, and singing their songs of victory—but there is still room in heaven for many more.

There are crowns there without heads to wear them, and harps without hands to play them, and mansions without tenants to inhabit them, and streets of gold that shall have something lacking until you have trodden them, if you are one of the Lord’s own people. There is room for multitudes, whom God has chosen, yet to come to swell the hallelujah chorus of the skies. It is very sweet even now, but it has not yet reached its full force and grandeur; it needs to have ten thousand times ten thousand voices added to the already mighty choir. And then the glorious chorus shall roll up to the throne of God louder than the noise of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder, Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! “for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth” (Rev 19:7); and He shall reign forever and ever.

What a dreary message I should have to deliver if I had to tell you that there was no room! Let me give you one or two illustrations. In passing over some of the more difficult passes of the Alps, the traveler sees small habitations by the side of the road, marked “Refuge No. 1,” “Refuge No. 2,” and so on, up to the hospice on the summit, and then down the other side more refuges similarly marked. When the storm comes on and the wind and snow beat in the man’s face so that he cannot discover his road, and he sinks more than knee-deep in the drifts, it is a happy circumstance for him that, perhaps a little way ahead, there is a refuge where he and others in the like plight may find shelter till hospitable monks come and take them to the hospice, or send them on their way. Imagine that, one dark night, the snow is pouring down; the flakes fall so thickly that you cannot see a star; the wind howls among the Alps. And the poor traveler, nearly blinded, staggers up to the door of the refuge, but he sees outside of it a dozen or two other travelers all clustered together, nearly frozen to death, and they say to him, “The refuge is crammed; we can’t get in, so we must perish though we have reached the door of the refuge, for there is no room for us inside.”

Ah! but I have no such ill news as that to bring to you tonight. Crowded as you are here, this great building has scarcely room enough to hold you; but the love of Christ is not so cramped that I need say to you, “There is no room here.” “Yet there *is* room.” All who are inside the refuge are but a small number compared with those who are

yet to come; for, in later and brighter ages, of which this is but the dawn, we believe that conversion work will go on far more rapidly, and that the Lord's elect will be brought to Him in much greater numbers than in these days. Whether it will be so or not, it is our joy to tell you that "yet there is room" in the great gospel refuge which the Lord of the way has so graciously provided for all who will enter it.

Here is another picture. There has been a wreck out there upon the coast. The ship has struck upon the rocks, and she is fast going to pieces. Some of the poor mariners are clinging to the mast; they have been hanging there for hours. Heavy seas have broken over them and they can hardly retain their hold. Some of the crew have already become exhausted and have fallen off into the deep, and the others, who are clinging for dear life, are almost frozen with cold. But see there! a rocket goes up; they believe that they have been perceived, and after a while, they see that the lifeboat is coming to their rescue. Perhaps the brave men give a cheer as they row with all their might to let the poor shipwrecked sailors know that there is help at hand.

As the lifeboat comes nearer, its captain cries, "Oh, what a lot of men! What can we do with so many? We will take as many of you as we can, but there is not room for all." The men are helped off the wreck one after the other until they seem to fill the boat. Each man's place has two crammed into it, but at last the captain says, "It's no use; we can't take any more. Our boat is so full that she'll go down if we put in another man." It's all over with those poor souls that must be left behind; for before the gallant boat can make another trip, they must all have fallen into the trough of the sea and been lost.

But I have no such sad tale to tell you tonight, for my Master's gospel lifeboat has thus far taken in but few compared with those she will yet take. I know not how many she will hold; but this I know, that a multitude which no man can number shall be found within her (Rev 7:9), and amid songs of everlasting joy they shall all be safely landed on the blessed shore, where rocks and tempests will never again trouble them. The lifeboat is not yet full; there is still room in her for all who will trust in Jesus. Poor mariner, give up clinging to that wreck on the rocks! Poor sinner, give up clinging to thy works and to thy sins. There is room in the gospel lifeboat for thee, and all who will put themselves under the care of the great Captain of salvation, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

2. When Is There Room?

Now we will change our view of the subject by asking and answering a second question: *when is there room?* Lay the emphasis upon the word "yet" in the text. "*Yet* there is room." "*Yet!*" Ages have marched along with solemn tramp, generations have followed generations, and all have yielded their quota to the great Church of Jesus Christ—but "yet there is room" for millions more. There have been multitudes passing through the valley of repentance up to the cross of Calvary; multitudes beyond all human calculation have found peace and pardon in Christ—but, for all that, "yet there is room."

A few years ago the churches of our land, and especially the churches of Ireland, had a visitation of grace when many were converted to God; and in this church we have had a revival that has lasted all the years of our pastorate. We have had no special season of revival; there has been a continual revival, practically all the time at New Park Street, at Exeter Hall, at the Surrey Gardens, and here in this Tabernacle. The blessed work of conversion goes on, never slowly, but quite as fast as we can keep pace with it. The Lord is constantly adding to our numbers; sometimes, as on the last occasion, seventy-four in a single month; on another occasion, a hundred; but we can still say, "yet there is room." And if all the churches in London, and throughout the whole kingdom, were to be multiplied exceedingly, we feel that we could still come to our pulpits as revival years passed over us, and say, "yet there is room."

Besides, sinner, you are *getting old* now. Those grey hairs tell a tale of years that have passed. Your youth fled long ago, and your early manhood is now over—God knoweth how you have spent it. But you are here tonight, like an old, barren tree, almost ready for the everlasting burning, unless sovereign grace shall save you even now—but I am here to tell you that "yet there is room." How old are you? Are you sixty? Are you past seventy? Can you look back over eighty years? Are you getting on toward ninety? Well, even then, "yet there is room" for you. And if you had outnumbered the years of Moses, ay, and if you had lived as long as Methuselah lived, I would still say to you, "yet there is room."

Think, too, of the many times that you have *rejected Christ*. Again and again have the invitations of the great Giver of the gospel feast been sent to you, but you have refused them all. Before I was born, some of you old people had many loving warnings and entreaties from godly ministers who have long since gone home. You were not altogether unmoved by your mother's prayers and your father's supplications, and now, in these later times, it has pleased God to speak to you by one who is so much younger, in words that should burn if they could, coming as they do red-hot from a heart that is all on fire with love to your souls.

My words have often reached your ears, and have sometimes reached your consciences too. Yet the Lord knoweth how many vows have been made in this house and broken at the door, how many impressions have been made during the sermon and obliterated before you have reached your homes! There are some of you who will find in me a swift witness against you at the bar of God. If you should say that you never heard the gospel, I will testify that you have heard it plainly and faithfully declared time after time.

I have not preached as I wish I could, but you have always been able to understand my message. I have not sought to find gaudy words and polished periods with which I might tickle your ears; but, in God's name, I have told you that, unless you repent and believe, you shall surely perish (Mar 1:15). And I have preached to you the love of Jesus, and pointed you to His wounds, and bidden you look unto Him and live. Yet you have rejected every warning and every invitation that I have given you up till now; but, notwithstanding that, I am still sent to say to you, "Yet there is room,—yet there is room."

It may be that some of you have been *adding sin to sin* till you have now got to such a pitch as you never dreamed that you would reach. There is that young man, over there in the gallery, who used to be at every prayer-meeting, and used to attend one of the Bible-classes and all the services; *you* know, young man, to whom I am referring. That young man did run well, but he first went astray just a little way, and then still further, then he went from bad to worse, and now he has gone to the worst of all—let it never be told, where it may reach his father's ear, what sin he has committed only this week.

Ah, young man! if you had been told, even a little while ago, that you would sin thus, you would have said, as Hazael said to Elisha, "But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" (2Ki 8:13). You would not have believed yourself capable of falling so low as to commit the offence in which you have now indulged; and I venture to prophesy that, although you think you have repented of it, you will return to it as the dog turns to his own vomit again, and as the sow that was washed returns to her wallowing in the mire.

There are some sinners who never seem to be satisfied till they have gone to the full limit of their tether. They are like the waves of the sea that must keep on advancing until they have reached their flood-tide and can go no further. Yet sinner, though all this is so terribly true of thee, though thou hast gone as far as thou canst go in sin, "yet there is room" even for thee in that cleansing fountain of which I spoke a few minutes ago.

Probably I am addressing some who will *never see another year* roll over their heads; nay, I may say that it is an absolute certainty concerning not merely one or two, but concerning many here present. I do not know how many, out of the six or seven thousand persons now present, will, according to the ordinary rate of mortality, die within a year from this night, but certainly a considerable number will; therefore I am not talking fanatical nonsense, but solid truth. There are some persons here who will not even see another month on earth, and very many who will never see this day twelvemonth—and there may be at least one here who will not see even another day. How near this makes us feel to the unseen world, how close to death!

I have known many such cases as this. One of the officers or members of the church meets me as I am coming in, and says to me, "Do you remember So-and-so?" "Yes, I think I do; where does he sit?" "Well, there is his seat." "Oh, yes!" I reply, "I remember him well; what about him?" "Why," says the friend, "last Sunday morning, as he was walking home after the service here, he was taken ill, went straight to bed, and died." Some of you know the brother to whom I am referring.

Not long ago another friend said to me, "Do you know Mrs. So-and-so?" "Oh, yes!" I answered, "why do you ask?" "Well, dear pastor," he said, "the Lord has been pleased to call her to Himself quite suddenly." It is often thus; the stroke falls where it was least expected, and God in a moment calls one and another of our friends to meet their final doom. We cannot say to any of those who have been called away from our midst, "yet there is room;" but we *can* say it to you who are here.

3. Why Is There Room?

I think I have dwelt long enough on that word "yet." I want, in closing, to ask another question: *why is there room?* How do we know that there is still room? Well, our text is enough to make us sure, even if we had nothing else; but we have other reasons for knowing that "yet there is room," and the first reason is, because *the decree of election is vast and wide*.

Those individuals who try to caricature our doctrinal sentiments are in the habit of saying that we teach that God has chosen a few to be saved, and left the great majority of mankind to perish. They know that we have never said any such thing, and they also know that no man of any standing in our denomination has ever said any such thing. On the contrary, we believe that God has ordained a countless host, so numerous that no man can number it,

who shall be everlastingly saved. And we think we have some warrant for believing that the number of the saved will vastly exceed the number of the lost, that in all things Christ may have the preeminence (Col 1:18).

Certainly, whatever may be our opinion upon that matter, we rejoice that the lines of divine election are not narrow, that the chosen people of God are not a mere handful. And we believe that, when the time comes for the great King to make up His jewels, it shall be found that the casket contains such multitudes of them that they shall be beyond all human calculation. It is our joy to know that God has chosen a great host to be saved, and as they have not all been saved yet, it is clearly proved that “yet there is room.”

Again, we believe that Christ offered *an infinite sacrifice* for the redemption of His people. We cannot look at His blessed Person as the God-man, Christ Jesus, without believing that the sufferings of such a Substitute for sinners must have had an infinite value. So we are fully persuaded that no limit can be set to the merit of Christ’s death—although we also believe that Christ had a definite purpose in His death, which cannot be frustrated, and that this purpose was the salvation, not of all men, but of as many as His Father had given Him. According to His own words, “I lay down my life for the sheep” (Joh 10:15); and according to Paul’s words, “Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Eph 5:25). Yet so great a sacrifice as that of Christ could not have been offered without a great object in view; in fact, He told His disciples that “the Son of man came...to give his life a ransom for many” (Mat 20:28). We therefore believe that, in the great fold wherein the good Shepherd preserves His blood-bought sheep, there yet is room for many more to enter.

Further, we come to the same conclusion by considering the great design of God in the whole of *His providential arrangements*—in the permission of the Fall, and in the wondrous plan by which the Fall itself is made to minister to God’s glory by being a foil, a dark background, to set forth the brightness of the grace that delivers sinners from eternal ruin. We believe that the object of the covenant of grace, and of the plan of redemption, so amazing as that which is revealed in the Scriptures, could not have been a small one. It must be a great multitude of redeemed souls that will satisfy Christ for the terrible travail of soul that He endured. It cannot be an insignificant company that will be won by His almighty hand and His holy arm, but a mighty host who shall be the fulfillment of the Lord’s eternal design, and bring to Him due honour and glory forever and ever. Therefore, for this reason also we are persuaded that “yet there is room.”

Moreover, brethren, when we consider *the prevalence of Jesus’ plea and the omnipotence of the Holy Spirit’s agency*, when we see the daily preparation which God makes for sending out fresh ministers of the gospel, when we understand that the earth is to be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea, when we believe that the millennial reign of Christ will certainly begin at the time that God has appointed—we are persuaded that there are unnumbered millions yet to come to the gospel feast, and therefore we still cry, “yet there is room.” At that great banquet there shall not be one seat that shall be empty at the last. God has made provision for just as many as will come, and it shall be found that the provision is sufficient for all the guests who accept the King’s invitation, that the great eternal design of God was not frustrated, and that even the perversity of man’s wicked will, which keeps him from coming to God, shall be made, somehow or other, to reflect honour on the great Giver of the feast. But not a chair shall be vacant at that feast, and not one of the redeemed shall be missing when the roll is called at that day. We have not yet reached that period, so we still can say, “yet there is room.”

Well, sinner, as it is true that “yet there is room,” we have a word of warning to say to you. There is room in the precious blood of Christ; there is room at the gospel feast; there is room in the church on earth; there is room in heaven—but if you will not occupy this room, I must solemnly tell you that there is room for you elsewhere, alas! *there is room in hell!* There may hardly be prisons enough for all the criminals on earth, but there is room for them in hell! There are “nations that forget God”; there are myriads that hate Him; there are millions that neglect His great salvation—but there is room for them all in hell if they will not repent and believe the gospel.

Blasphemer, there is room in hell for you. Despiser of God’s day and of God’s Word, there is room in hell for you; and for some of you it may be that there are only a few more weeks or days, and then you will enter upon your terrible heritage. Grow on, ye tares, till ye ripen; and then, when you are bound up in bundles to be burned, let the bundles be never so big, there is room for them all in hell (Mat 13:24-30)! Proud boasters, you may speak what Jude calls “great swelling words” now (Jude 1:16), declaring that you will fight the matter out with God; but you will find that, in hell, there is room to humble you, and room to destroy you there to all eternity!

Is it not enough to make a man’s heart break even to think of such a terrible doom? Then what will it be to have to endure it without any hope of release forever? I remind you again that some of you will be there ere long, except you repent. Oh, by the living God, in whose name I speak to you, I do conjure you, if you love yourselves, consider these things; for if ye will not have Christ as your Saviour, ye shall have His wrath remaining upon you forever and ever. If the message of God be despised by you, how shall ye escape if ye neglect so great salvation (Heb 2:3)?

Sinner, art thou resolved to make thy bed in hell? Soul, hast thou set thy heart on it? Wilt thou tonight give thy hand to Satan, and promise to be his slave forever? Stay, man! This may be the last time that thy conscience will ever be alarmed! So I conjure thee to trust in Christ ere I send thee away to thy home. Think thou seven times before thou dost reject Him this once more, lest the slighted, grieved, almighty Spirit should depart from thee, and never strive with thee again (1Th 5:19)!

My last thought, which I pass on to every *unconverted sinner*, is this: as there is room in the blood of Christ, as there is room in heaven, *why not for me?* Will not each sinner here also say, *why not for me?* Soul, what does God say to thee tonight? “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Act 16:31)? So this is what thou hast to do, to obey the gracious message, and to believe on Christ. To believe on Christ is to trust Him, and I am sure that He deserves thy trust. He is God, able to save thee; and He is man, willing to save thee. He would not have died if He had not loved sinners. He stands pleading with thee tonight, blessed be His name, and though it has been with stern words that He has spoken to thy conscience, now He asks thee to trust Him, and He says that, if you do, you shall be saved.

Soul, wilt thou trust him now? I hope the Spirit of God will lead you to say, “Yes, I will trust Jesus tonight. I feel utterly unworthy, but then He died to save the unworthy (Rom 5:6). My heart is very hard, but I know that He can soften it. I do not feel my need of Him as I should feel it, but He did not tell me I was to feel my need and make that my qualification. He said, ‘Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely’ (Rev 22:17). I will venture to come to him while ‘yet there is room.’”

Perhaps the black doubt comes to thee, “*Is there room for me?*” My answer to that question is this: thou art commanded to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (Act 16:31). It is impossible for thee to do that and yet be lost. Thou shalt find that there *is* room for thee, room which no one but thyself can occupy, room in that kingdom of which Christ says that it was *ordained* for thee before the foundation of the world. Your business, sinner, is now to trust Christ just as you are, and just where you are. Oh my hearers, you whose souls are committed to my trust, I feel that I must have your souls for my Master! He knows that I care for no wages but your immortal souls. He knows that, if He denies me your souls, I shall feel that I have laboured in vain, and spent my strength for nought.

This year God has blessed the Word to many, many hearts; hardly a day has passed without someone being blessed, and not a sermon have I preached in this Tabernacle without hearing afterwards of conversions through it, and I do trust that so it may continue. Lord, speak thou to hearts that have resisted Thee until now! Sovereign grace, there is nothing that can stand against Thee; Thy goings forth are mighty and irresistible. Thou speakest and it is done; Thou commandest and it stands fast forever; speak, Lord, and Thy servants shall hear, and this night they shall say, “We will come unto Thee while yet there is room.” May God grant that many shall come to Jesus this very moment, for His dear name’s sake! Amen. ❧

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ALL COMERS TO CHRIST WELCOME

“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out”

—John 6:37

CHRIST will not die in vain. His Father gave him a certain number to be the reward of His soul travail, and He will have every one of them, as He said, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.” Almighty grace shall sweetly constrain them all to come. My father gave me recently some letters that I wrote to him when I began to preach. They are almost boyish epistles; but, in reading through them again, I noticed in one of them this expression, “How I long to see thousands of men saved; but my great comfort is that some will be saved, must be saved, shall be saved, for it is written, ‘All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.’”

The question for each of you to ask is, “Do I belong to that number?” I am going to preach with the view of helping you to find out whether you belong to that “all” whom the Father gave to Christ, the “all” who shall come to Him. We can use the second part of the verse to help us to understand the first. “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out,” will explain our Saviour’s previous words, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.”

I shall have no time for any further preface; I must at once get to my subject, and try to put everything in a condensed form. Kindly give heed to the Word, think about it, pray over it; and may God the Holy Ghost apply it to all your hearts!

1. The Necessity of Character

First, notice in the text the *necessity of character*. “Him that cometh to me.” If you want to be saved, you must *come* to Christ. There is no other way of salvation under heaven but coming to Christ. Go wherever else you will, you must be disappointed and lost; it is only by coming to Him that you can by any possibility have eternal life.

What is it to come to Christ? Well, *it implies leaving all other confidences*. To come to anybody is to leave everybody else. To come to Christ is to leave everything else, to leave every other hope, every other trust. Are you trusting to your own works? Are you trusting to a priest? Are you trusting to the merits of the Virgin Mary, or the saints and angels in heaven? Are you trusting to anything but the Lord Jesus Christ? If so, leave it, and have done with it. Come away from every other reliance, and trust to Christ crucified, for this is the only way of salvation, as Peter said to the rulers and elders of Israel, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Act 4:12).

*“To Jesus bleeding on the tree, Turn thou thine eye, thine heart,”
and come to Him at once, and thy soul shall live for ever.*

To come to Jesus means, in brief, *trusting Him*. He is a Saviour; that is His business—come you to Him, and trust Him to save you. If you could save yourself, you would not need a Saviour; and now that Christ has set up to be a Saviour, let Him do the business. He will! Come, and lay all your needs at His feet, and trust Him. Resolve that, if lost, you will be lost trusting alone in Jesus; and that can never be. Tie up all your hopes into one bundle, and put that bundle upon Christ. Let Him be all thy salvation, and all thy desire, and so thou shalt be surely saved.

I have sometimes tried to explain to you what the life of faith is like. It is very much like a man walking on a tight rope. The believer is told that he shall not fall; he trusts in God that he shall not—but every now and then he says, “What a way it is down there if I did fall!” I have often had this experience: I have gone up an invisible staircase—I could not see the next step—but when I put my foot down on it, I found that it was solid granite. I could not see the next stair, and it seemed as if I should plunge into an abyss—yet have I gone on upward, steadily, one step at a time, never able to see farther into absolute darkness, as it seemed, and yet always with a light just where the light was wanted.

When I used to hold a candle to my father, of an evening, when he was sawing wood out in the yard, he used to say, “Boy, do hold the candle where I am sawing, don’t look over there.” And I have often thought to myself, when I wanted to see something in the middle of next week, or next year, that the Lord seemed to say to me, “Hold your candle on the piece of work which you have to do today; and if you can see that, be satisfied, for that is all the light you want just now.” Suppose that you could see into next week, it would be a great mercy if you lost your sight a while, for a far-seeing gaze into care and trouble is no gain. “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Mat 6:34), as sufficient unto the day will be the good thereof.

But the Lord does train His people for the skies by testing their faith in the matter of His daily care of them. Often, a man’s reliance upon God for the supply of his earthly wants proves that he has trusted the Lord for the weightier affairs relating to his soul’s salvation. Do not draw a line between the temporal and the spiritual, and say, “God will go just so far; but I must not take such and such a thing to Him in prayer.” I remember hearing of a certain good man, of whom one said, “Why, he is a very curious man; he prayed about a key the other day!” Why not pray about a key? Why not pray about a pin? Sometimes, it may be as important to pray about a pin as to pray about a kingdom. Little things are often the linchpins of great events. Take care that you bring everything to God in faith and prayer. “Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phi 4:6).

I have turned aside from my subject for a minute, but let us now think again of this matter of coming to Christ. To come to Jesus, not only implies leaving all other confidences, and trusting Christ, it also means *following Him*. If you trust Him, you must obey Him. If you leave your soul in His hands, you must take Him to be your Master and your Lord, as well as your Saviour. Christ has come to save you *from* sin, not *in* sin. He will therefore help you

to leave your sin, whatever it is. He will give you the victory over it; He will make you holy. He will help you to do whatever you should do in the sight of God. He is able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by Him (Heb 7:25); but you must come to Him if you would be saved by Him.

To put together all I have said, you must quit every other hope; you must take Jesus to be your sole confidence, and then you must be obedient to His command, and take Him to be your Master and Lord. Will you do that? If not, I have nothing to say to you except this: he that believeth not in Him will perish without hope. If you will not have God's remedy for your soul malady, the only remedy that there is, there remaineth for you nothing but blackness and dismal darkness for ever and ever.

2. Universality of Persons

But, now, secondly, while there is this necessity of character, notice also the *universality of persons*. "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Granted that he *comes* to Christ, that is all that is needed. Does some one say, "Sir, I am a very *obscure* person. Nobody knows me; my name was never in the papers, and never will be. I am a nobody"? Well, if Mr. Nobody comes to Christ, He will not cast him out! Come along, you unknown person, you anonymous individual, you that everybody but Christ forgets! If even you come to Jesus, He will not cast you out.

Another says, "I am so very *odd*." Do not say much about that, for I am odd too. But, dear friends, however odd we are, though we may be thought very eccentric, and some may even consider us a little touched in the head, yet, nevertheless, for all that, Jesus says, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Come along with you, Mr. Oddman! You shall not be lost for want of brains, nor yet for having too many, though that is not a very common misfortune. If you will but come to Christ, though you have no talent, though you are but poor, and will never make much headway in the world, Jesus says, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

"Ah!" says a third friend, "I do not mind about being obscure, or being eccentric; but it is the greatness of my *sin* that keeps me back from Christ." Let us read the text again: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." If he had been guilty of seven murders, and all the whoredoms and adulteries that ever defiled mortal man, if impossible sins could be charged against him—yet if he came to Christ, mark you, *if he came to Christ*, the promise of Jesus would be fulfilled even in his case: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

"But," says another, "I am completely *worn out*; I am good for nothing. I have spent all my days and years in sin. I have come to the very end of the chapter, I am not worth anybody's having." Come along with you, you fag-end¹¹ of life! Jesus says, "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." You have to walk with two sticks, do you? Never mind, come you to Jesus. You are so feeble that you wonder that you are alive at your advanced age. My Lord will receive you if you are a hundred years of age; there have been many cases in which persons have been brought to Christ even after that age. There are some very remarkable instances of that fact on record. Christ says, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." If he were as old as Methuselah (Gen 5:25), if he did but come to Christ, he should not be cast out.

"Alas!" says one, "I am in a worse case than even that aged friend, for beside being old, I have *resisted the Spirit of God*. I have been many years troubled in my conscience; but I have tried to cover it all up. I have stifled every godly thought." Yes, yes; and it is a very sad thing, too. But for all that, if you come to Christ, if you can even make a dash for salvation, and come to Jesus, He cannot cast you out.

One friend perhaps says, "I am afraid that I have committed *the unpardonable sin*." If you come to Christ, you have not—I know; for him that cometh to Him Jesus will in no wise cast out. He cannot, therefore, have committed the unpardonable sin. Come along with you, man, and if you are blacker than all the rest of the sinners in the world, so much the more glorious shall be the grace of God when it shall have proved its power by washing you whiter than snow in the precious blood of Jesus.

"Ah!" says one, "you do not know me, Sir." No, dear friend, I do not; but, perhaps, one of these days I may have that pleasure. "It will not be any pleasure to you, Sir, for I am an *apostate*. I used to be a professor of religion; but I have given it all up, and I have gone back to the world, willfully and wickedly doing all manner of evil things." Ah! well, if you can but come to Christ, though there were seven apostasies piled one upon another, still His promise stands true, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Whatever the past, or whatever the present, Backslider, return to Christ, for He standeth to His plighted Word, and there are no exceptions mentioned in my text: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

"Well, Sir," cries another, "I should like to come to Christ; but I do not *feel fit to come*." Then, come all unfit, just as you are. Jesus says, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." If I were woke up in the middle of

¹¹ **fag-end** – the last and worst part of anything.

the night by a cry of “Fire!,” and I saw that someone was at the window with a fire-escape, I do not think that I should keep in bed and say, “I have not my black necktie on,” or “I have not my best waistcoat on.” I should not speak in that way at all. I would be out of the window as quickly as ever I could, and down the fire-escape. Why do you talk about your fitness, fitness, fitness? I have heard of a cavalier,¹² who lost his life because he stopped to curl his hair when Cromwell’s¹³ soldiers were after him. Some of you may laugh at the man’s foolishness, but that is all that your talk about fitness is. What is all your fitness but the curling of your hair when you are in imminent danger of losing your soul? Your fitness is nothing to Christ. Remember what we sang at the beginning of the service:

*“Let not conscience make you linger, Nor of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness he requireth, Is to feel your need of him:
This he gives you; ‘Tis the spirit’s rising beam.”*

Come to Christ just as you are: foul, vile, careless, godless, Christless. Come now, even now, for Jesus said, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”

Is there not a glorious width about my text: “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” What *him* is this? It is *him that cometh*. What *him that cometh*? Any *him that cometh* in all the world. If he comes to Christ, he shall not be cast out. A red man, or a black man, or a white man, or a yellow man, or a copper-colored man—whatever he is, if he comes to Jesus, he shall in no wise be cast out!

When you mean to put a thing broadly, it is always best to state it, and leave it. Do not go into details; the Saviour does not. Some years ago, there was a man, a kind, loving husband, who wished to leave to his wife all his property. Whatever he had, he intended her to have it all, as she ought. So he put down in his will, “I leave to my beloved wife, Elizabeth, all that I have.” That was all right. Then he went on to describe in detail what he was leaving her, and he wrote, “All my freehold and personal estate.” The most of his property happened to be leasehold, so the wife did not get it because her husband gave a detailed description—it was in the detail that the property slipped away from the good woman. Now, there is no detail at all here: “Him that cometh.” That means that every man, and woman, and child, beneath the broad heavens, who will but come and trust in Christ, shall in no wise be cast out. I thank God that there is no allusion to any particular character, in order specially to say, “People of that character shall be received,” for then the characters left out might be supposed to be excluded; but the text clearly means that every soul that comes to Christ shall be received by Him.

3. The Unmistakeableness of the Promise

The flight of time hurries me on, therefore, I beg you to listen earnestly while I speak to you, in the third place, about *the unmistakableness of the promise*. “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise”—that is, for no reason, under no circumstances, at no time, under no conditions whatever—“I will in no wise cast out”; which means, being interpreted, “I will receive him; I will save him; I will bless him.”

Then if you, my dear friend, come to Christ, how could the Lord cast you out? How could He do it in consistency with His truthfulness? Imagine my Lord Jesus making this declaration, and giving it to us as an inspired Scripture, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out,” and yet casting out somebody, even that unknown somebody up in the corner. Why, it would be a lie; it would be an acted lie! I pray you, blaspheme not my Lord, the truthful Christ, by supposing that He could be guilty of such conduct as that. He could do as He likes about whom He would receive until He made the promise; but after He had pledged His word, He bound Himself by the veracity of His nature to keep it; and as long as Christ is the truthful Christ, He *must* receive every soul that comes to Him.

But let me also ask you, suppose that you came to Jesus, and He cast you out, *with what hands could He do it*? “With His own hands,” you answer. What! Christ coming forward to cast out a sinner who has come to Him? I ask again, with what hands could He do it? Would He do it with those pierced hands that still bear the marks of the nails? The Crucified rejecting a sinner? Ah! no; He hath no hand with which to do such a cruel work as that, for He has given both His hands to be nailed to the tree for guilty men. He hath neither hand, nor foot, nor heart with which to reject sinners, for all these have been pierced in His death for them; therefore He cannot cast them out if they come to Him.

Let me ask you another question, *What profit would it be to Christ if He did cast you out*? If my dear Lord, of the thorny crown, and the pierced side, and the wounded hands, were to cast you away, what glory would it bring to Him? If He cast you into hell, you who have come to Him, what happiness would that bring to Him? If He were to

¹² **cavalier** – an upperclass gentlemen associated with the royal court.

¹³ **Oliver Cromwell** (1599-1658) – leader of the parliamentary soldiers in the English civil war against Charles I.

cast you away, you who have sought His face, you who trust His love and His blood, by what conceivable method could that ever render Him the happier or the greater? It *cannot* be!

What would such a supposition involve? Imagine for a moment that Jesus did cast away one who came to Him. If it were ascertained that one soul came to Christ, and yet He had cast him away, what would happen? Why, there are thousands of us who would never preach again! For one, I would have done with the business. If my Lord can cast away a sinner who comes to Him, I cannot, with a clear conscience, go and preach from His words, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” Moreover, I should feel that, if He failed in one promise, He might fail in the others. I could not go and preach a possible but doubtful gospel. I must have “shalls” and “wills” from the eternal throne of God; and if it is not so, our preaching is in vain, and your faith is also vain (1Co 15:14).

See what would follow if one soul came to Christ and Christ cast him out. All the saints would lose their confidence in Him. If a man breaks his promise once, it is of no use for him to say, “Well, I am generally truthful.” You have caught him false to his word once, and you will not trust him again, will you? No; and if our dear Lord, whose every word is truth and verity, could break one of His promises only once, He would not be trusted by His people any more, and His Church would lose the faith that is her very life.

Ah me!; and then they would hear of it up in heaven; and one soul that came to Christ, and was cast away, would stop the music of the harps of heaven, would dim the lustre of the glory-land and take away its joy, for it would be whispered among the glorified, “Jesus has broken His promise. He cast away a praying, believing soul; He may break His promise to us, He may drive us out of heaven.” When they begin to praise Him, this one act of His would make a lump come in their throats, and they would be unable to sing. They would be thinking of that poor soul that trusted Him and was cast away; so how could they sing, “Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood,” if they had to add, “But He did not wash all that came to Him, though He promised that He would”?

I do not like even to talk of all that the supposition would involve. It is something so dreadful to me, for they would hear of it in hell, and they would tell it to one another, and an awful glee would take possession of the fiendish hearts of the devil and all his companions, and they would say, “The Christ is not true to His word; the boasted Saviour rejected one who came to Him. He used to receive even harlots, and He let one wash His feet with her tears (Luk 7:38); and publicans and sinners came and gathered about him, and he spoke to them in tones of love (Mat 9:10); but here is one—well, he was too vile for the Saviour to bless; he was too far gone, Jesus could not restore him, Christ could not cleanse him. He could save little sinners, but not great ones; he could save sinners eighteen hundred years ago. Oh! he made a fine show of them; but His power is exhausted now, He cannot save a sinner now.” Oh, in the halls of Hades, what jests and ridicule would be poured upon that dear name, and, I had almost said, justly, if Christ cast out one who came to Him! But, beloved, that can *never be*; it is as sure as God’s oath, as certain as Jehovah’s being, that he who comes to Christ shall in no wise be cast out. I gladly bear my own witness before this assembled throng that—

*“I came to Jesus as I was, Weary, and worn, and sad:
I found in Him a resting-place, And He has made me glad.”*

Come, each one of you, and prove the text to be true in your own experience, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen. ❧

Available in print as a tract from Chapel Library.

ADVICE FOR SEEKERS

1. Do Not Try to Save Yourself

If you think about it, God’s value of heaven and yours are very different things. His salvation, when He set a price upon it, was to be brought to men only through the death of his Son. But you think that your good works can win the heaven which Jesus Christ, the Son of God, procured at the cost of His own blood! Do you dare to put your

miserable life in comparison with the life of God's obedient Son, Who gave Himself even to death? Does it not strike you that you are insulting God? If there is a way to heaven by works, why did He put His dear Son to all that pain and grief? Why the scenes of Gethsemane? Why the tragedy on Golgotha, when the thing could be done so easily another way? You insult the wisdom of God and the love of God.

There is no attribute of God which self-righteousness does not impugn.¹⁴ It debases the eternal perfections which the blessed Saviour magnified, in order to exalt the pretensions of the creature which the Almighty spurns as vain and worthless. The trader may barter his gold for your trinkets and glass beads, but if you give all that you have to God it would be utterly rejected. He will bestow the milk and the honey of His mercy without money and without price, but if you come to Him trying to bargain for it, it is all over for you; God will not give you choice provisions of His love that you do not know how to appreciate.

The great things you propose to do, these works of yours, what comparison do they bear to the blessing which you hope to obtain? I suppose by these works you hope to obtain the favour of God and procure a place in heaven. What is it then, you propose to offer? What could you bring to God? Would you bring Him rivers of oil, or the fat of ten thousand animals? Count up all the treasures that lie beneath the surface of the earth; if you brought them all, what would they be to God? If you could pile up all the gold reaching from the depths of the earth to the highest heavens, what would it be to Him? How could all this enrich his coffers or buy your salvation? Can He be affected by anything you do to augment the sum of His happiness, or to increase the glory of His kingdom? If He were hungry He would not tell you. "The cattle upon ten thousand hills are mine," He says (Psa 50:10). Your goodness may please your fellow-creatures, and your charity may make them grateful, but will God owe anything to you for your gifts, or be in debt to you for your influence? Absurd questions! When you have done everything, what will you be but a poor, unworthy, unprofitable servant? You will not have done what you ought, much less will there be any balance in your favour to make atonement for sin, or to purchase for you an inheritance in the realms of light.

You who are going to save yourselves by reforms, and by earnest attempts and endeavours, let me ask you, if a man could not perform a certain work when his arm had strength in it, how will he be able to perform it when the bone is broken? When you were young and inexperienced, you had not yet fallen into evil habits and customs. Though there was depravity in your nature then, you had not become bound in the iron net of habit, yet even then you went astray like a lost sheep and you followed after evil. What reason have you to suppose that you can suddenly change the bias of your heart, the course of your actions and the tenor of your life, and become a new man? "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" (Jer 13:23). Are there not ten thousand probabilities against one that as you sinned before you will sin still? You found the pathway of evil to be so attractive and fascinating that you were enticed into it, and you will still be enticed and drawn away from that path of integrity which you are now so firmly resolved to tread.

The way to heaven, by following the law given at Mount Sinai, is very steep and narrow, and it takes only one wrong step for a man to be dashed to pieces. Stand at the foot and look up at it if you dare. On its brow of stone there is the black cloud, out of which lightning leaps and the blast of the trumpet sounds loud and long. Do you not see Moses tremble, and will you dare to stand unabashed where Moses is fearful and afraid? Look upwards, and give up the thought of climbing those steep crags, for no one has ever striven to clamber up there in the hope of salvation without finding destruction among the terrors of the way! Be wise, give up that deceitful hope of salvation which your pride leads you to choose and your presumption would soon cause you to rue.¹⁵

Suppose you could do some great thing, which I am sure you cannot, and it were possible that you could from now on be perfect, and never sin again in thought, or word, or deed; how would you be able to atone for your past delinquencies? Shall I call for a resurrection in that graveyard of your memory? Let your sins rise up for a moment, and pass in review before you. Ah, the sins of your youth may well frighten you; those midnight sins; those midday sins; those sins against light and knowledge; those sins of body; those sins of soul! You have forgotten them, you say, but God has not. Look at the file! They are all placed there, all registered in God's daybook, not one forgotten—all to be read against you in the day of the last judgment.

How can future obedience make up for past transgression? The cliff has fallen and though the wave washes up ten thousand times, it cannot set the cliff up again. The day is bright but still there was a night, and the brightest day does not obliterate the fact that once it was dark. The self-righteous man knows that what he is doing cannot satisfy God, for it cannot satisfy himself; and though he may perhaps drug his conscience, there is generally enough left of the divine element within the man to make him feel and know that it is not satisfactory.

¹⁴ **impugn** – to oppose

¹⁵ **rue** – to feel sorry for.

To believe what God says, to do what God commands, to take that salvation which God provides—this is man's highest and best wisdom. Open your Bible. It is the pilgrim's guide, in which God describes the glory yet to be revealed. This is the one message of the Gospel, "believe and live." Trust in the incarnate Saviour, whom God appointed to stand in the place of sinners. Trust in Him and you shall be saved.

2. Despised Ones Seeking Jesus

"Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him" (Luk 15:1). The most depraved and despised classes of society formed an inner ring of hearers around our Lord. I gather from this that He was a most approachable person, that He welcomed human confidence and was willing that men should commune with Him.

Eastern monarchs affected great seclusion, and were likely to surround themselves with impassible barriers of state. It was very difficult for even their most loyal subjects to approach them. You remember the case of Esther, who, even though the monarch was her husband, still risked her life when she presented herself before King Ahasuerus, for there was a commandment that no one should come before the king unless they were called, at peril of their lives. It is not so with the King of kings. His court is far more splendid; His person is far more worshipful; but you may draw near to Him at all times without hindrance. He has set no men-at-arms around His palace gate. The door of His house of mercy is wide open. Over the lintel of His palace gate is written, "For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Mat 7:8).

Even in our own day great men are not easily approached. There are so many back stairs to be climbed before you can reach the official who might help you, so many servants to be passed by, that it is very difficult to achieve your objective. The good men may be affable enough themselves, but they remind us of the old Russian fable of the hospitable house-holder in a village who was willing to help all the poor who came to his door, but who kept so many big dogs loose in his yard that nobody was able to get to the threshold, and therefore his personal affability was of no use to anyone. It is not so with our Master.

Though the Lord Jesus Christ is greater than the greatest, and higher than the highest, He has been pleased to put out of the way everything which might keep the sinner from entering into His halls of gracious entertainment. From His lips we hear no threats against intrusion, but hundreds of invitations to enter into the dearest intimacy. Jesus is to be approached not every now and then, but at all times, and not by some favoured few, but by all in whose hearts His Holy Spirit has kindled the desire to enter into His secret presence.

The philosophical teachers of our Lord's day affected very great seclusion. They considered their teachings to be so profound that they were not to be uttered in the hearing of the common multitude. "Far hence, ye profane," was their scornful motto. They stood on a lofty pillar of their fancied self-conceit and occasionally dropped down a stray thought upon the common herd beneath, but they did not condescend to talk familiarly with them, considering it a dishonour to their philosophy to communicate it to the multitude. One of the greatest philosophers wrote over his door, "Let no one who is ignorant of geometry enter here." But our Lord, compared with whom all wise men are fools—who is, in fact, the wisdom of God—never drove away a sinner because of his ignorance, never refused a seeker because he was not yet initiated and had not taken the previous steps in the ladder of learning, and never permitted any thirsty spirit to be chased away from the crystal spring of divine truth. His every word was a diamond, and His lips dropped pearls, but He was never more at home than when speaking to the common people, and teaching them about the kingdom of God.

Our Lord Jesus is said to be the *Mediator* between God and man. The office of mediator implies at once that he should be approachable. A mediator is not a mediator for one side—he must be close to both the parties between whom he mediates. If Jesus Christ is to be a perfect mediator between God and man, He must be able to come so near to God that God shall call Him his fellow, and then He must approach man so closely that He shall not be ashamed to call Him brother. This is precisely the case with our Lord.

Think about this, you who are afraid of Jesus, He is a mediator, and as a mediator you may come to Him. Jacob's ladder reached from earth to heaven, but if He had cut away half a dozen of the bottom rungs, what use would the ladder have been? Who could climb up it to the hill of the Lord? Jesus Christ is the great conjunction between earth and heaven, but if He will not touch the poor mortal man who comes to Him, then of what use is He to the sons of men? You do need a mediator between your soul and God; you must not think of coming to God without a mediator; but you do not want any mediator between yourselves and Christ. There is a necessary qualification for coming to God—you must not come to God without a perfect righteousness; but you may come to Jesus without any qualification, and without any righteousness, because as Mediator He has in Himself all the righteousness and fitness that you require, and is ready to bestow them upon you. You may come boldly to Him right now; He waits to reconcile you to God by His blood.

Another of Christ's offices is that of *Priest*. That word "priest" has come to smell very badly nowadays; but it is a very sweet word as we find it in Holy Scripture. The word "priest" does not mean a gaudily-dressed pretender, who stands apart from other worshippers, two steps higher than the rest of the people, and professes to have power to dispense pardon for human sin. The true priest was truly the brother of all the people. There was no man in the whole camp of Israel so brotherly as Aaron. In fact, Aaron and the priests who succeeded him were so much the first points of contact with men, on God's behalf, that when a leper became too unclean for anybody else to approach, the last man who touched him was the priest. The house might be leprous, but the priest went into it; the man might be leprous, but he talked with him and examined him; and if afterwards that diseased man was cured, the first person who touched him must be a priest. "Go, show thyself to the priest," was the command to every recovering leper; and until the priest had entered into fellowship with him, and had given him a certificate of health, he could not be received into the Jewish camp.

The priest was the true brother of the people, chosen from among themselves, at all times to be approached; living in their midst, in the very centre of the camp, ready to make intercession for the sinful and the sorrowful. Surely, you will never doubt that if Jesus perfectly sustains the office of priest, as He certainly does, He must be the most approachable of beings; approachable by the poor sinner, who has given himself up to despair, whom only a sacrifice can save; approachable by the foul harlot who is put outside the camp, whom only the blood can cleanse; approachable by the miserable thief who has to suffer the punishment of his crimes, whom only the great High Priest can absolve. No other man may care to touch you, O trembling outcast, but Jesus will. You may be separated from all of humankind, justly and righteously, by your iniquities, but you are not separated from that great Friend of sinners who at this very time is willing that publicans and sinners should draw near to Him.

As a third office, let me mention that the Lord Jesus is our *Saviour*; but I do not see how He can be a Saviour unless He can be approached by those who need to be saved. The priest and the Levite passed by on the other side when the bleeding man lay on the road to Jericho; they were not saviours, therefore, and could not be, but he was the saviour who came where the man was, stooped over him, and took wine and oil and poured them into the gaping fissures of his wounds, and lifted him up with tender love and set him on his own beast, and led him to the inn. He was the true saviour; and, O sinner, Jesus Christ will come just where you are, and your wounds of sin, even though they are putrid, will not drive Him away from you. His love shall overcome the nauseating offensiveness of your iniquity, for He is able and willing to save those who are like you. I might mention many other offices of Christ, but these three are sufficient. Certainly if the Spirit blesses them, you will be led to see that Jesus is not hard to reach.

3. Seekers Touching Christ

Some of us have ourselves been healed, and therefore speak from assured experience. One man I know was secretly bowed down with despondency and depression of an unusual sort—his life had been spent at the very gates of hell because of a great sorrow of heart when he was a youth; yet, in a moment, he was lifted into perfect peace by simply looking to Him who was crucified upon the cross. That one form of healing is typical of others; for all other evils are overcome in the same manner. Jesus can heal you of your pride; He can deliver you from anger; He can cure you of sluggishness; He can purge you from envy, from lasciviousness, from malice, from gluttony, from every form of spiritual malady. And this He can do, not by the torturing process of penance, or the exhausting labours of superstitious performance, or the fiery ordeals of suffering; but the method is simply a word from Him, and a look from you, and all is done. You have only to trust in Jesus and you are saved; made a new creature in an instant; set on your feet again to start a new life with a new power within you which shall conquer sin. We who bear this testimony claim to be believed. We are not liars. Not even for God's honour would we palm a pious fraud upon you. We have felt in ourselves the healing power of Christ. We have seen it, and see it every day, in the cases of others, in persons of all ranks, and of all ages. All who have obeyed the word of Jesus have been made new creatures by His power. It is not one or two of us that bear this witness; there are hundreds of thousands who certify to the self-same fact; and not ministers alone, but other professions and callings. There are tradesmen, there are gentlemen, there are working men, there are persons high and low, who could say, "We too are witnesses that Christ can heal the soul."

Here, then, is the marvel—that those who know this do not immediately throng to Christ to obtain the self-same blessing. The behaviour of those of whom we read in the Gospels was a rational one. They heard that Christ had healed many, and their practical logic was, "Let us be healed too!" Where is He? Let us reach Him. Are there crowds about Him? Let us jostle one another, let us force our way into the mass until we touch Him, and feel the healing virtue flowing from Him. But now men seem to have taken leave of their reason. They know that the bless-

ing is available, an eternal blessing not to be weighed with gold, nor compared with diamonds; and yet they turn their backs upon it! Selfishness usually attracts men to places where good things are to be gained; but here is the best thing of all—the possession of a sound soul, the gaining of a new nature which will enable a man to share eternal glory with angels of light—which is freely available, yet man, being untrue to himself, does not even let a right-minded selfishness govern him, turns away from the fountain of all goodness and goes into the wilderness to perish of eternal thirst.

The Gospel is preached to you, and God has not sent it with the intention that after you have heard it you should seek mercy and not find it. God does not tantalize, He does not mock the sons of men. He asks you to come to Him. Repent and believe, and you shall be saved. If you come with a broken heart, trusting in Christ, there is no possibility that He will reject you; otherwise He would not have sent the Gospel to you. There is nothing that so delights Jesus Christ as to save sinners. We never find that Jesus was in a huff because the people pressed about Him to touch Him. No, it gave Him divine pleasure to give out His healing power. You who are in a trade are never happier than when business is brisk; and my Lord Jesus, who follows the trade of soul-winning, is never happier than when His great business is moving on rapidly. What pleasure it gives a physician when at last he brings a person through a severe illness into health! I think the medical profession must be one of the happiest engagements in the world when a man is skilful in it. Our Lord Jesus feels a most divine pleasure as He bends over a broken heart and binds it up. It is the very heaven of Christ's soul to be doing good to the sons of men. You misjudge Him if you think He wants to be argued with and persuaded to have mercy; He gives it as freely as the sun pours out light, as the heavens drop with dew and as clouds yield their rain. It is His honour to bless sinners; it makes Him a name, and an everlasting sign that shall never be removed.

I know that I, too, once belied¹⁶ Him; when I felt my sins to be a great burden I said within myself, "I will go to Jesus, but perhaps He will reject me." I thought I had much to feel and to do to make myself ready for Him, and I therefore did this and that, but the more I did the worse I became. I was like the woman who spent her money on physicians and did not get better, but rather grew worse. I fully understood that there was life in a look at Christ, that all I needed to do was simply to trust, to come as I was and put my case into His dear pierced hands, and leave it there, yet I still did not think it could be so; it seemed so simple—how could it be true? Was that all? I thought when I came to Him He would say to me, "Sinner, you have rejected Me so long, you have mocked Me by saying prayers which you did not feel; you have been a hypocrite and joined with God's people in singing My praises when you did not praise Me in your heart." I thought He would chide me and bring ten thousand sins to my remembrance. Instead of that, it took only a word, and it was all done. I looked to Him, the burden was gone. I could have sung, "Hosanna! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord, with pardon in His right hand and acceptance in His left, with abundant blessings to the least deserving of the sons of men." Now, I have to tell you that Jesus Christ still has the same ability to save as He had when He walked on earth. He ever lives to make intercession for sinners. He is therefore able to save those who come to Him; and it is still true that he who comes will not be cast out. There has never been an instance of a man who trusted Christ and perished, and there never shall be an instance.

Do not delay in trusting Christ. Do not entertain a hope that it will ever be easier to trust Jesus than it is now. Do not think that you will ever be in a better state for coming to Him than you are in now. The best state in all the world for washing is to be filthy; the best state in all the world to obtain help from a physician is to be terribly sick; the best state for asking for alms is to be a beggar. Do not try to patch up those rags, to improve your character, or to make yourself better before you come to Christ. Come in all your poverty and vileness, just as you are, and say to Him, "My Lord and my God, You have suffered as a man for all the sins of all those who trust You: I trust You; accept me, give me peace and joy."

And tell the world, I ask you, whether He accepts you or not. If He casts you away, you will be the very first—then let us know about it; but if He receives you, you will be only one among ten thousand who have been accepted—then publish it so that our faith may be confirmed.

Never be content with merely coming close to Christ. When there is a gracious season in a church, and people are converted, many others rest satisfied because they have been in the congregation where works of mercy have been performed. It is dreadful to reflect that there are in our churches men and women who are perfectly satisfied with having spent Sunday in a place of worship. Now, suppose a man has leprosy and he goes to the place where Jesus is: he sees the people thronging to get near, and he joins the press; he pushes on for a certain length of time, and then he returns home perfectly content because he has joined the crowd. The next day the great Master is dispensing healing virtue right and left, and this same man joins the throng, and once more elbows himself tolerably

¹⁶ belied – to charge with falsehood.

near to the Saviour, and then retires. "Well," he says, "I got into the crowd; I pressed and squeezed, and made my way, and so I was in the way, perhaps I might have got a blessing." Now that would be precisely similar to the condition of hundreds and thousands of people who go to a place of worship on Sunday. There is the Gospel; they come to hear it; they come next Sunday, there is the Gospel again; they listen to it, and they go their way each time. "Fool!" you say to the man with leprosy, "Why, you did nothing; getting into the crowd was nothing; if you did not touch the Lord who dispensed the healing, you lost all your time; and besides, you incurred responsibility because you got near to Him, and yet for not putting out your hand to touch Him, you lost the opportunity." It is the same for you good people, who go where Jesus Christ is faithfully preached. You come and go, and come and go continually; and what fools you are, what gross fools, to get into the throng and to be satisfied with that, and never touch Christ! Tell me of your church-goings and your chapel-goings! They are not a morsel of use to you unless you touch the Saviour through them.

I must caution you not to be content with touching those who are healed. There are many in the crowd who, having touched the Master, clapped their hands and said, "Glory be to God, my withered arm is restored," "My eyes are opened," "My dropsy has vanished," "My palsy is gone." One after another they praise God for His great wonders; and sometimes their friends who were sick would go away with them and say, "What a mercy! Let us go home together." They would hear all about it, and talk about it, and tell it to others; but all the while, though they rejoiced in the good that was done to others, and sympathized in it, they never touched Jesus for themselves. Noah's carpenters built the ark, but were all drowned. Oh, I beseech you, do not be satisfied with talking about revivals, and hearing about conversions; get an interest in them. Let nothing content any one of us but actual spiritual contact with the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us never sleep or slumber until we have really looked to that Great Sacrifice which God has lifted up for the sins of men. Let us not think of Christ as another man's Saviour, but be passionately in earnest till we get Him for our own.

A young man once said to me, "I want to know what I must do to be saved." I am reminded of that verse,

"A guilty, weak, and helpless worm, On Thy kind arms I fall."

He said, "Sir, I cannot fall." "Oh," I said, "You do not understand me. I do not mean a fall which demands any strength in you; I mean a fall caused by the absence of all strength." It is to tumble down into Christ's arms because you cannot stand upright. Faint into the arms of Christ; that is faith. Just give up doing, give up depending upon anything that you are, or do, or ever hope to be, and depend upon the complete merits, and finished work, and precious blood of Jesus Christ. If you do this you are saved.

Anything of your own doing spoils it all. You must not have a jot or a tittle of your own; you must give up relying upon your prayers, your tears, your baptism, your repentance, and even your faith itself. Your reliance is to be on nothing but that which is in Jesus Christ. Those dear hands, those blessed feet, are ensigns of His love—look to them. That bleeding, martyred, murdered Person is the grand display of the heart of the ever blessed God. Look to it. Look to the Saviour's pangs, griefs and groans. These are punishments for human sin. This is God's wrath spending itself on Christ instead of spending itself on the believer. Believe in Jesus, and it is certain that He suffered this for you. Trust in Him to save you, and you are saved.

4. Still No Light, and Why?

It shall be my happy task to endeavour to assist into the light those who want to flee from darkness. We will do so by trying to answer the query, "How is it that I, wanting light, have not found it yet? Why am I left to grope like a blind man for the wall, and stumble at noon as if it were the night? Why has the Lord not revealed Himself to me?" You may have been seeking the light in the wrong place. Many, like Mary, seek the living among the dead. It is possible that you may have been the victim of the false doctrine that peace with God can be found in the use of ceremonies.

It is possible, too, that you have been looking for salvation in the mere belief of a certain creed. You have thought that if you could discover pure orthodoxy, and could then consign your soul into its mold, you would be a saved man; and you have consequently believed unreservedly, as far as you have been able to do so, the set of truths which have been handed to you by the tradition of your ancestors. It may be that your creed is Calvinistic; it is possible that it is Arminian; it may be Protestant; it may be Romish—it may be truth; it may be a lie—but, believe me, solid peace with God is not to be found through the mere reception of any creed, however true or scriptural. Mere head-notion is not the road to heaven. "Ye must be born again" means a good deal more than you must believe certain dogmas. It is of the utmost possible importance, I grant you, that you should search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; but recollect how our Lord upbraided the Pharisees. He told them that they searched the Scriptures, but He added, "Ye will not come to *me* that ye might have life" (John 5:40). You stop

short at the Scriptures, and therefore short of eternal life. The study of these, good as it is, cannot save you; you must press beyond this—you must come to the living, personal Christ, once crucified, but now living to plead at the right hand of God, or else your acceptance of the soundest creed cannot affect the salvation of your soul. You may be misled in some other manner; some other mistaken way of seeking peace may have beguiled you, and if so, I earnestly pray that you may see the mistake.

You must understand that there is only one Door to salvation, and that is Christ; there is one Way, and that is Christ; one Truth, and that is Christ; one Life, and that is Christ. Salvation lies in Jesus only; it does not lie in you, in your doings, or your feelings, or your knowings, or your resolutions. In *Him* all life and light for the sons of men are stored up by the mercy of God the Father. This may be one reason why you have not found the light; because you have sought it in the wrong place.

It is possible that you may have sought it in the wrong spirit. When we ask for pardon, reconciliation and salvation we must remember to whom we speak, and who we are who ask the favour. Some appear to deal with God as if He were bound to give them salvation; as if salvation indeed were the inevitable result of a round of performances, or the deserved reward of a certain amount of virtue. They refuse to see that salvation is a pure gift of God, not of works, not the result of merit, but of free favour only; not of man, neither by man, but of the Lord alone. Though the Lord has placed it on record in His Word, in the plainest language, that “it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy” (Rom 9:16) yet most men in their hearts imagine that everlasting life is tied to duties and earned by service. You must abandon such vainglorious notions; you must come before God as a humble petitioner, pleading the promises of mercy, abhorring all idea of merit, confessing that if the Lord condemns you He has a right to do it, and if He saves you, it will be an act of pure gratuitous mercy, a deed of sovereign grace. Oh, too many of you seekers hold your heads too high; to enter the lowly gate of light you must stoop. On the bended knee is the penitent’s true place—“God be merciful to me, a sinner” (Luk 18:13), is the penitent’s true prayer. If God should condemn you, you could never complain of injustice, for you have deserved it a thousand times; and if those prayers of yours were never answered, if no mercy ever came, you could not accuse the Lord, for you have no right to be heard. He could righteously withhold an answer of peace if He so willed.

Confess that you are an undeserving, ill-deserving, hell-deserving sinner and begin to pray as you have never prayed before. Cry out of the depths of self-abasement if you want to be heard. Come as a beggar, not as a creditor. Come to crave, not to demand. Use only this argument, “Lord, hear me, for you are gracious, and Jesus died; I cry to you as a condemned criminal who seeks pardon. Deliver me from going down into the pit, that I may praise your name.” This harbouring of a proud spirit, I fear, has been a great source of mischief with many, and if it has been so with you, amend it and go now with humble and contrite hearts, in lowliness and brokenness of spirit, to your Father Whom you have offended, for He will surely accept you as His children.

Others have not obtained peace, I fear, because they do not yet have a clear idea of the true way of finding it. Although it has been preached to us so often, it is still little understood. The way of peace with God is seen through a haze by most men, so that no matter how plainly you put it, they will, if it is possible, misunderstand you. Your salvation does not depend upon what *you* do, but upon what Christ did when He offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin. All your salvation takes root in the death throes of Calvary; the great Substitute bore your sin and suffered its penalty. Your sin shall never destroy you if upon that bloody tree the Lord’s chosen High Priest made a full expiation for your sins; they shall not be laid against you any more forever. What you have to do is simply to accept what Jesus has finished. I know your idea is that you are to bring something to Him; but that vainglorious idea has ruined many, and will ruin more. When you are brought empty-handed, made willing to accept a free and full salvation from the hand of the Crucified, then, and then only, will you be saved.

“There is life for a look at the Crucified One.”

But men will not look to the cross. No, they conspire to raise another cross; or they aspire to adorn that cross with jewels; or they labour to wreath it with sweet flowers; but they will not give a simple look to the Saviour, and rely alone on Him. Yet no soul can ever obtain peace with God by any other means; while this means is so effectual that it has never failed, and never shall.

The waters of Abana and Pharpar are preferred by proud human nature, but the waters of Jordan alone can take away the leprosy (see 2 Kings 5:1-14). Our repentings, our doings, our resolutions, these are simply broken cisterns; but the only life-draught is to be found in the fountain of living water opened up by our Immanuel’s death. Do you understand that a simple trust, a sincere dependence, a hearty reliance upon Christ is the way of salvation? If you do know this, may the God who taught you to understand the way give you grace to run in it, and then your light has come; arise and shine. Your peace has come, for Christ has bought it with His blood. For as many as trust in Him, He has been punished; their sins are gone:

*Lost as in a shoreless flood,
Drown'd in the Redeemer's blood;
Pardon'd soul, how bless'd art thou,
Justified from all things now.*

If none of these arguments have touched your case, let me further suggest that perhaps you have not found light because you have sought it in a half-hearted manner. None enter heaven who are only half-inclined to go there. Cold prayers ask God to refuse them. When a man manifestly does not value the mercy which he asks, and would be perfectly content not to receive it, it is small wonder if he is denied. Many a sinner lies, year after year, freezing outside the door of God's mercy, because he has never thoroughly bestirred himself to take the kingdom of heaven by violence. If you are willing to be unsaved, you shall be left to perish; but if you are inwardly set and resolved that you will give God no rest until you win a pardon from Him, He will give you your heart's desire. The man who must be saved, shall be. The man whose heart is set on finding the way to Zion's hill, shall find that way. I believe that usually a sense of our pardon comes to us when, Samson-like, we grasp the posts of mercy's door with desperate vehemence, as though we would pluck them up, post and bar and all, rather than remain shut out any longer from peace and safety. Strong crying and tears, groanings of spirit, vehement longings, and ceaseless pleadings—these are the weapons which, through the blood of Jesus, win us the victory in our warfare of seeking the Lord. Perhaps, then, you have not bestirred yourself as you should have done. May the Lord help you to be a mighty wrestler and then a prevailing prince!

5. "We Wait for Light" (Isaiah 59:9)

I address those who sincerely want to obtain the true and heavenly light, who have waited hoping to receive it, but instead of obtaining it are in a worse, at least in a sadder, state than they were. They are almost driven into the dark foreboding that for them no light will ever come, they shall be prisoners chained forever in the valley of the shadow of death. These people are in some degree aware of their natural darkness. They are looking for light. They are not content with their obscurity, they are waiting for brightness. There are a few who are not content to be what their first birth has made them; they discover in their nature much evil and would be glad to get rid of it; they find in their understanding much ignorance, and they long to be illuminated; they do not understand Scripture when they read it, and though they hear Gospel terms, they still fail to grasp Gospel-thought. They pant to escape from this ignorance, they desire to know the truth which saves the soul; and their desire is not only to know it in theory, but to know it by its practical power upon their inner selves. They really and anxiously want to be delivered from the state of nature, which they feel to be a dangerous one, and to be brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Oh, these are the best kind of hearers, these in whom right desires have begun to be awakened. Men who are dissatisfied with the darkness are evidently not altogether dead, for the dead shall slumber in the catacombs, heedless as to whether it is noon or night. Such men evidently have not fallen completely asleep, for they who slumber sleep better because of the darkness; they ask for no sunbeams to molest their dreams. Such people are evidently not completely blind, because it makes no difference to the blind whether the sun floods the landscape with glory, or night conceals it with her black veil. Those to whom our thoughts are directly turned are somewhat awakened, aroused, and bestirred, and this is no small blessing for, alas, most people are a stolid mass regarding spiritual things, and the preacher might almost as hopefully strive to create a soul within the ribs of death, or extort warm tears of pity from Sicilian marble, as evoke spiritual emotions from the people of this generation. So these people are hopeful in their condition who, just as the trees twist their branches toward the sunlight, they long after Jesus, the Light and Life of men.

Moreover, these persons have a high idea of what the light is. They call it *brightness*. They wait for it, and are grieved because it does not come. If you greatly value spiritual life you have not made a mistake; if you count it a priceless thing to obtain an interest in Christ, the forgiveness of your sins, and peace with God, you judge according to solemnity. You shall never exaggerate in your valuation of the one thing necessary. It is true that those who trust in God are a happy people; it is true that to be brought into sonship, and adopted into the family of the great God, is a boon for which kings might well exchange their diadems. You cannot think too highly of the blessings of grace; I would rather incite in you a sacred covetousness after them than in the remotest degree lower your estimate of their preciousness. Salvation is such a blessing that heaven hangs upon it; if you win grace you have the germ of heaven within you, the security, the pledge and earnest of everlasting bliss. So far, again, there is much that is hopeful in you. It is good that you loathe the darkness and prize the light.

The people I want to speak with have some hope that they may yet obtain this light; in fact, they are waiting for it, hopefully waiting, and are somewhat disappointed that after waiting for the light, instead, obscurity has come. They are evidently astonished at the failure of their hopes. They are amazed to find themselves walking in darkness, when they had fondly hoped that the candle of the Lord would shine round about them. I would encourage in you that spark of hope, for despair is one of the most terrible hindrances to the reception of the Gospel. So long as awakened sinners cherish a hope of mercy, we have hope for them. We hope, O seeker, that before long you will be able to sing of pardon bought with blood, and when this scene is closed, shall enter through the gates into the pearly city amongst the blessed who forever see the face of the Well-Beloved. Though it may seem too good to be true, yet even you, in your calmer moments, think that one day you will rejoice that Christ is yours, and take your seat amongst His people, though the poorest of them all, in your own estimation. Then you imagine in your heart how fervently you will love your Redeemer, how rapturously you will kiss the very dust of His feet, how gratefully you will bless Him Who has lifted the poor from the dunghill and set him among princes. May you no longer look through the window wistfully at the banquet, but come in to sit at the table, and feed upon Christ, rejoicing with His chosen!

The people I am describing are those who have learned to plead their case with God. “We wait for light, but only see obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness.” It is a declaration of inward feelings, a laying bare of the hearts agonies to the Most High. Although you have not yet found the peace you seek, it is good that you have begun to pray. Perhaps you think it is poor praying; indeed, you hardly care to call it prayer at all, but God does not judge as you do. A groan is heard in heaven; a deep-fetched sigh and a falling tear are prevalent weapons at the throne of God.

Yes, your soul cries to God, and you cannot help it. When you are about your daily work you find yourself sighing, “Oh, that my load of guilt were gone! Oh, that I could call the Lord my Father with an unfaltering tongue!” Night after night and day after day this desire rises from you like the morning mist from the valleys. You would tear off your right arm, and pluck out your right eye, if you might gain the unspeakable benefit of salvation in Jesus Christ. You are sincerely anxious for reconciliation with God, and your anxiety reveals itself in prayer and supplication. I hope these prayers will continue. I trust you will never cease your crying. May the Holy Spirit constrain you to continue to sigh and groan. Like the importunate woman (Luk 18:1-8), may you press your case until the gracious answer is granted through the merits of Jesus.

So far things are hopeful for you; but when I say hopeful, I wish I could say much more, for mere hopefulness is not enough. It is not enough to desire, it is not enough to seek, it is not enough to pray; you must actually obtain, you must actually *lay hold* on eternal life. You will never enjoy comfort and peace till you have passed out of the merely hopeful stage into a better and a brighter one, by making sure of your interest in the Lord Jesus by a living, appropriating faith. In the exalted Saviour all the gifts and graces which you need are stored up, in readiness to supply your wants. Oh, may you come to His fullness, and out of it receive grace for grace!

The person I wish to comfort may be described by one other touch of the pen. He is one who is *quite willing to lay bare his heart before God*, to confess his desires, whether right or wrong, and to expose his condition, whether unhealthy or sound. While we try to cloak anything from God, we are both wicked and foolish. It shows a rebellious spirit when we have a desire to hide away from our Maker; but when a man uncovers his wound, invites inspection of its sore, bids the surgeon cut away the leprous film which covered its corruption, and says to him, “Here, probe into its depths, see what evil there is in it; do not spare me, but make a sure cure of the wound,” then he is in a fair way to be recovered. When a man is willing to make God his confessor, and freely, and without hypocrisy, pours out his heart like water before the Lord, there is hope for him. You have told the Lord your position, you have spread your petitions before Him—I trust you will continue to do so until you find relief; but I have yet a higher hope, namely, that you may soon obtain peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

6. The Invitation

Do you desire eternal life? Is there within your soul a hungering and a thirsting after such things that may satisfy your spirit and make you live forever? Then “Come, for now *all things* are ready” (Luk 14:17)—all, not some, but all. There is nothing that you need between here and heaven which is not provided in Jesus Christ, in His person and in His work. All things are ready: life for your death, forgiveness for your sin, cleansing for your filth, clothing for your nakedness, joy for your sorrow, strength for your weakness, indeed, more than anything you could ever want is stored up in the boundless nature and work of Christ. You must not say, “I cannot come because I do not have this, or do not have that.” Are you to prepare the feast? Are you to provide anything? Are you bringing even salt or water? You do not know your true condition, or you would not dream of such a thing. The great Householder

Himself has provided the whole of the feast, you have nothing to do with the provision but to enjoy it. If you lack anything, come and take what you lack; the greater your need the greater is the reason why you should come where all things, that your need can possibly want, will be at once supplied. If you are so needy that you have nothing good at all about you, all things are ready. When God has provided all things, what more could you possibly provide? It would be a disgraceful insult if you thought of adding to His “all things”; it would be a presumptuous competing with the provisions of the Great King, and this He will not endure. All that you are lacking—between the gates of hell, where you now lie, and the gates of heaven, to which grace will bring you if you believe—is provided and prepared in Jesus Christ the Saviour.

And all things are *ready*. Dwell on that word. The oxen and the fatlings were killed; and what is more, they were prepared to be eaten, they were ready to be feasted on, they smoked on the board. It is something when the king gives orders for the slaughter of so many bullocks for the feast, but the feast is not ready then; and when the victims fall beneath the axe, and they are stripped and hung up ready for the fire, something has been done, but they are still not ready. It is only when the joints are served hot and steaming upon the table, and everything else that is wanted is brought out and laid in proper order for the banquet that all things are ready, and this is the case now. At this very moment you will find the feast is in the best possible condition; it was never better and never can be better than it is now. All things are ready, in the exact condition that you need them to be, in exactly the right condition that is best for your soul’s comfort and enjoyment. All things are ready; nothing needs to be further mellowed or sweetened, everything is as perfect as eternal love can make it.

But notice the word “now.” “All things are *now* ready”—just now, at this moment. At feasts, you know, the good housewife is often troubled if the guests come late. She would be sorry if they came half an hour too soon, but half an hour too late spoils everything, and she is in a great state of fret and worry when all things are ready yet her friends still delay. Leave food in the oven awhile, and it does not seem to be “now ready,” but more than ready, and even spoiled. So the great Householder lays stress upon this, all things are *now* ready, therefore come at once.

He does not say that if you delay for another seven years all things will then be ready: God grant that long before that space of time you may have got beyond the need to be persuaded to become a taster of the feast, but He says that everything is ready now, just now. Just now that your heart is so heavy and your mind is so careless, that your spirit is so wandering—all things are ready now.

If the reason why a sinner is to come is because all things are ready, then it is idle for him to say, “But I am not ready.” It is clear that all the readiness required on man’s part is a willingness to come and receive the blessing which God has provided. There is nothing else necessary; if men are willing to come, they may come, they will come. Where the Lord has been pleased to touch the will so that man has a desire towards Christ, where the heart really hungers and thirsts after righteousness, that is all the readiness which is wanted. All the fitness He requires is that first you feel your need of Him (and that He gives you), and that secondly, in feeling your need of Him you are willing to come to Him. Willingness to come is everything. A readiness to believe in Jesus, a willingness to cast the soul on Him, a preparedness to accept Him just as He is, because you feel that He is just the Saviour that you need—that is all: there was no other readiness, there could have been none, in the case of those who were poor and blind, and lame and maimed, yet came to the feast. The text does not say, “You are ready, therefore come”; that is a legal way of putting the Gospel; but it says, “All things are ready, the Gospel is ready, therefore you are to come.” As for *your* readiness, all the readiness that is possibly wanted is a readiness which the Spirit gives us—namely, willingness to come to Jesus.

Now notice that the *unreadiness* of those who were asked arose out of their possessions and out of their abilities. One would not come because he had bought a piece of land. What a great heap Satan casts up between the soul and the Saviour! With worldly possessions and good deeds he builds an earthwork of huge dimensions between the sinner and his Lord. Some gentlemen have too many acres ever to come to Christ: they think too much of the world to think much of Him. Many have too many fields of good works in which they are growing crops on which they pride themselves, and these cause them to feel that they are persons of great importance. Many a man cannot come to Christ for all things because he has so much already.

Others could not come because they had so much to do, and could do it well—one had bought five yoke of oxen and he was going to prove them. He was a strong man well able to plow; the reason why he did not come was because he had so much ability. Thousands are kept away from grace by what they have and by what they can do. Emptiness is more preparatory to a feast than fullness. How often does it happen that poverty and inability help to lead the soul to Christ. When a man thinks he is rich he will not come to the Saviour. When a man dreams that he is able at any time to repent and believe, and to do everything for himself that is wanted, he is not likely to come and by a simple faith repose in Christ. It is not what you have not, but what you have that keeps many of you from

Christ. Sinful Self is a devil, but Righteous Self is seven devils. The man who feels himself guilty may for a while be kept away by his guilt, but the man who is self-righteous will never come; until the Lord has taken his pride away from him he will still refuse the feast of free grace. The possession of abilities and honours and riches keeps men from coming to the Redeemer.

But on the other hand, personal condition does not constitute an unfitness for coming to Christ, for the sad condition of those who became guests did not debar them from the supper. Some were *poor*, and doubtless wretched and ragged; they did not have a penny to bless themselves with, as we say. Their garments were tattered, perhaps worse, they were filthy; they were not fit to be near respectable people, they would certainly be no credit to my Lord's table; but those who went to bring them in did not search their pockets, nor look at their coats, but they fetched them in. They were poor, but the messengers were told to bring in the poor, and therefore they brought them. Their poverty did not prevent their being ready; and Oh, poor soul, if you are poor literally, or poor spiritually, neither sort of poverty constitutes an unfitness for divine mercy. If you are brought to your last penny, or even if that penny is spent and you have pawned everything you have, yet you are still up to your eyes in debt and think that there is nothing left for you but to be laid by the heels in prison forever, nevertheless you may come, poverty and all.

Another class of them were *maimed*, and so were not very attractive in appearance: an arm had been lopped off, or an eye had been gouged out. One had lost a nose, and another a leg. They were in all stages and shapes of dismemberment. Sometimes we turn our heads away, and feel that we would rather give anything than look upon beggars who show their wounds, and describe how they were maimed. But it did not matter how badly they were disfigured; they were brought in, and not one of them was repulsed because of the ugly cuts he had received. So, poor soul, however Satan may have torn and lopped you, and whatsoever condition he may have brought you to, so that you feel ashamed to live; nevertheless this does not make you unfit for coming, you may come to His table of grace just as you are. Moral disfigurements are soon rectified when Jesus takes the character in hand. Come to Him, however sadly you are injured by sin.

There were others who were *lame*, They had lost a leg, or it was of no use to them, and they could not come except with the help of a crutch; but nevertheless that was no reason why they were not welcome. Ah, if you find it difficult to believe, that is no reason why you should not come and receive the grand absolution which Jesus Christ is ready to bestow upon you. Lame with doubting and distrusting, nevertheless come to the supper and say, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mar 9:24).

Others were *blind*, and when they were told to come they could not see the way, but in that case the messenger was not told to tell them to come, he was commanded to bring them, and a blind man can come if he is brought. All that was wanted was willingness to be led by the hand in the right direction. Now you who cannot fully understand the Gospel as you wish to do, who are puzzled and muddled, put your hand into the hand of Jesus, and be willing to believe what you cannot comprehend, and to grasp in confidence that which you are not yet able to measure with your understanding. The blind, however ignorant or uninstructed they are, shall not be kept away because of that.

Then there were the men in the *highways*, I suppose they were beggars; and the men in the *hedges*, I suppose they were hiding, and were probably thieves; but nevertheless they were told to come, and though they were highwaymen and hedge-birds, even that did not prevent their coming and finding welcome. Though outcasts, spiritual gypsies, people that nobody cared for; whatever they might be, that was not the question, they were to come because all things were ready. Come in rags, come in filth, come maimed, come covered with sores, come in all sorts of filthiness and abomination, yet because all things are ready they were to be brought or to be compelled to come in.

I think it was the very thing, which in any one of these people looked like unfitness, which was a help to them. It is a great truth that what we regard as unfitness is often our truest fitness. I want you to notice these poor, blind and lame people. Some of those who were invited would not come because they had bought some land, or five yoke of oxen, but when the messenger went up to the poor man in rags and said, "Come to the supper," it is quite clear he would not say he had bought a field, or oxen, for he could not do it, he did not have a penny to do the thing with, so he was delivered from that temptation. And when a man is invited to come to Christ and he says, "I do not want him, I have a righteousness of my own," he will stay away; but when the Lord Jesus came along to me I was never tempted in that way, because I had no righteousness of my own, and could not have made one if I had tried. I know some who could not patch up a garment of righteousness if they were to put all their rags together, and this is a great help to their receiving the Lord Jesus. What a blessedness it is to have such a sense of soul-poverty that you will never stay away from Christ because of what you possess.

Some could not come because they had married a wife. Now I think it very likely that those people who were maimed and cut were so injured that they had no wife, and perhaps could not get anybody to have them. Well then, they did not have that temptation to stay away. They were too maimed to attract the eye of anybody who was looking for beauty, and therefore they were not tempted that way. But they found at the ever-blessed supper of the Lamb an everlasting wedlock which was infinitely better. Thus do souls lose earthly joys and comforts, and by the loss they gain supremely: they are therefore made willing to close in with Christ and find a higher comfort and a higher joy. That maiming which looked like unfitness turned out to be fitness.

One excuse made was, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them." The lame could not do that. When the messenger touched the lame man on the shoulder and said, "Come," he could not say, "I am going out tonight to plow with my new teams." He had never been over the fields since he had lost his leg, so he could not make such an excuse. The blind man could not say, "I have bought a piece of land and I must go to see it"; he was free from all lusts of the eye, and so was all the more ready to be led to the supper. When a soul feels its own sinfulness, and wretchedness and lost estate, it thinks itself unfit to come to Christ, but this is an assistance to it, since it prevents its looking to anything else but Christ, kills its excuses, and makes it free to accept salvation by grace.

But how about the men that were in the highway? Well, it seems to me that they were already on the road, and at least out of their houses, if they had any. If they were out there begging, they were more ready to accept an invitation to a meal of victuals, for it was that they were sighing for. A man who is out of the house of his own self-righteousness, though he be a great sinner, is in a more favourable position and more likely to come to Christ than he who prides himself on his supposed self-righteousness.

7. Something To Be Set Right

When a man does wrong, and yet will not confess it, how wrong he must be! Or when, having confessed it, he does not feel proper shame; or after feeling ashamed for a while he returns to the same evil like the dog to his vomit, how deep must the evil be in his moral nature; how terribly diseased he must be, inasmuch as he does not feel sin to be sin at all! When a man has done wrong and knows it, and stands with bitter repentance to confess the evil, why, you think hopefully of him; after all, there are good points about the man; there is a vitality in him that will throw out the disease. But when the villain, having perpetrated a grave and causeless offence, does not for a moment acknowledge he has done wrong, but continues calmly to perpetrate the offence again; ah, then, where is there any good in him? Is he not thoroughly bad? Now, you are like that.

If you were at all right with God, you would fall at your Father's feet, and never rise until you were forgiven; your tears would flow day and night until you had the assurance of pardon. But since your heart seems to yourself to be made of hell-hardened steel, and to be like a millstone that feels nothing, then there is need for healing, and you seem the very man whom Christ came to save, for He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance; not to save those who had no need for healing, but to heal those like you, whose need is desperate indeed.

As if to prove your own need of healing, you are, according to your own statement, *unable to pray*. You have been trying to pray lately, and wished you could. You put yourself upon your knees, but your heart does not talk with God; a horrible dread comes over you, or else frivolous and vain thoughts distract you. "Oh," you have said, "I would give a thousand pounds for one tear of repentance; I would be ready to pluck out my eyes if I could call upon God as the poor publican did, with 'God be merciful to me a sinner,' (Luk 18:13). I once thought it the easiest thing in the world to pray, but now I find that a true prayer is beyond my power." You do need healing indeed, possessed with a dumb devil, and all your other devils also, and unable to cry out for mercy; yours is a sad case. You need healing, and I cannot help repeating to you, He "healed them that had need of healing" (Luk 9:11); why should He not heal you?

Ah, but you tell me your feelings, your desires after good things are very often dampened. Perhaps you are sincerely in earnest, but tomorrow you may be just as careless as ever. The other day you went into your chamber and wrestled with God, but a temptation came across your path, and you were as thoughtless about divine things as if you had never been aroused to a sense of their value. Ah! this shows your need for healing. You are vile indeed when you dare to trifle with eternity, to sport with death and judgment, and to be at ease while in danger of hell—your heart indeed needs healing; and though I grieve that you should be in such a plight, yet I rejoice that I am able to add, "He healed those who had need of healing."

Though you know your case is bad, at times you set up a kind of self-repentance and try to justify yourself in the sight of God. You say, "I have repented, or tried to do so; I have prayed, or tried to pray; I have done all I can to be saved, and God will not save me." That is to say, you throw the blame of your damnation upon God, and make yourself out to be righteous in His sight. You know this is wrong. If you are not saved, it is because you will not

believe in Jesus. There is the only hitch and the only difficulty. Your damnation is not of God, but of yourself; it is necessitated by your own willful wickedness in not believing in Christ; but inasmuch as you are so wicked as to dare to excuse yourself, you do need healing, you do urgently need to be saved. But, then, the minute that you have thus excused yourself, you rush to the opposite extreme; you declare that you have sinned past hope, that you deserve to be now in hell, and that God can never forgive you. You deny the mercy of God, you deny the power of Christ, to forgive you and cleanse you; you fly in the face of God's Word, and you make Him out to be a liar.

When He tells you that if you trust Jesus you shall find peace, you tell Him it is not possible there can be any peace to you; when He reminds you that He never rejected one, you insinuate that He will reject you; you thus insult the Divine Majesty by denying the truthfulness and honesty of God. You do need healing when you allow wicked despair to get the mastery of you like this; you are far gone, very far gone, but I rejoice to know that you are still among those Jesus is able to heal. He came to those who needed healing, and you cannot deny you are one of those. Why, even Satan himself will not have the impudence to tell you that you have no need of healing. Oh, if only you would cast yourself into the Saviour's arms—not trying to make yourself out to be good, but acknowledging all that I have laid to your charge, and then, trusting as a sinner to that Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

Remember you need healing, for unless you are healed of these sins, and of all these wicked tendencies and thoughts, as sure as you are a living man you will be cast into hell. I know of no truth that ever causes me such pain to preach as this, not that sinners will be damned, awful though the truth of that is, but that *awakened* sinners will be damned unless they believe in Jesus. You must not make a Christ out of your tears, you must not hope to find safety in your bitter thoughts and cruel despairs. Unless you believe, you shall never be established. Unless you come to Christ, you may be convinced of sin, of righteousness and judgment too, but those convictions will only be preludes to your destruction. You call yourself a seeker, but until you are a finder you are an enemy to God, and God is angry with you every day. I have no alternative for you, however tender and broken-hearted you may be, but this one—believe and live; refuse to believe, and you must perish, for your broken-heartedness, and tears, and professed contrition can never stand in the place of Christ. You must have faith in Jesus, or you must die eternally.

I need not enter into what your case is. Remember, Jesus has saved a parallel case to yours. Yours may seem to yourself to be exceedingly odd, but somewhere or other in the New Testament you will find one as singular as yours. You tell me that you are full of so much wickedness. Did He not cast seven devils out of Mary Magdalene? Yes, but your wickedness seems to be greater than even seven devils. Did He not drive a whole legion of devils out of the demoniac of Gadara? You tell me that you cannot pray, but He healed one possessed of a dumb devil; you feel hardened and insensible, but He cast out a deaf devil. You tell me you cannot believe; neither could the man with the withered arm stretch it out, but he did it when Jesus ordered him to. You tell me you are dead in sin, but Jesus made even the dead live. Your case cannot be so bad that it has not been matched, and Christ has conquered something like it. Remember again, Christ can save you, for there is no record in the world, nor has there ever been handed down to us by tradition a single case in which Jesus has failed. If I could meet anywhere in my wanderings a soul which had cast itself on Christ alone, and yet had received no pardon—if there could be found in hell a solitary spirit that relied upon the precious blood and found no salvation, then the Gospel might well be laid by in the dark, and no longer gloried in; but as that has not happened, and never shall happen, sinner, you shall not be the first exception. If you come to Christ—and to come to Him is only to trust Him wholly and simply—you cannot perish, for He has said, "Him that cometh to me I will in nowise cast out," (Joh 6:37). Will He prove a liar? Will you dare think so? O come, for He cannot cast you out. Think for a moment, sinner, and this may comfort you: He Whom I preach to you as the healer of your soul is God. What can be impossible with God? What sin cannot He forgive Who is God over all? If your transgressions were to be dealt with by an angel, they might surpass all Gabriel's power; but it is Immanuel, God with us, Who has come to save.

Moreover, you cannot doubt His will. Have you heard of Him—He Who was God and became man? He was as gentle as a woman, His heart is made of tenderness, It overflows with love.

It was not in Him to be harsh. When the woman found in the very act of adultery was brought to Him, what did He say? "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more," (Joh 8:11). It was said of Him, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them," (Luk 15:2) and He is not changed now that He reigns above; He is just as willing to receive sinners now as when He was here below.

Was the atonement a fiction? Was the death of the eternal Son of God ineffectual? There must be power enough there to take away sin. Come and wash, come and wash, you who are vile and stained with sin, come and wash, and you shall find instant cleansing the moment that by faith, you touch His purifying blood.

Jesus demands your trust. He deserves it, let Him have it. You need healing; He came to heal those who need healing: He can heal you. What is to be done in order that you may be healed, that all your sins may be forgiven and yourself saved? All that is to be done is to leave off your own doing, and let Him do for you; leave off looking to yourself, or looking to others, and just come and cast yourself on Him.

“Oh,” you say, “but I cannot believe.” Cannot believe! Then do you know what you are doing? You are making Him a liar. If you tell a man, “I cannot believe you,” that is only another way of saying, “You are a liar.” Oh, you will dare not say that of Christ. No, my friend, I take you by the hand and say another word—you *must believe Him*. He is God, dare you doubt Him? He died for sinners. Can you doubt the power of His blood? He has promised. Will you insult Him by mistrusting His word? “Oh, no,” you say, “I feel I must believe, I must trust Him; but suppose that trust of mine should not be of the right kind? Suppose it should be a natural trust?” Ah, my friend, a humble trust in Jesus is a thing that never grew in natural ground. For a poor soul to come and trust in Christ is always the fruit of the Spirit. You need not raise a question about that. Never did the devil, never did mere nature, empty a man of himself and bring him to Jesus. Do not be anxious on that point. “But,” says one, “the Spirit must lead me to believe Him!” Yes, but you cannot see the Spirit; His work is a secret and a mystery. What you have to do is to believe in Jesus; there He stands, God and yet a suffering man, making atonement, and He tells you if you trust Him you shall be saved. You must trust Him; you cannot doubt Him. Why should you? What has He done that should make you doubt Him?

“O believe the record true, God to you His Son has given.”

And if you trust Him, you need not raise the question as to where your faith came from. It must have come from the Holy Spirit, Who is not seen in His workings, for He works where He chooses. You see the fruit of His work, and that is enough for you. Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ? If so, you are born of God. If you have cast yourself, sink or swim, on Him, then you are saved.

We read how a man was saved from being shot. He had been condemned in a Spanish court, but being an American citizen, and also of English birth, the consuls of the two countries interposed, and declared that the Spanish authorities had no power to put him to death. And what did they do to secure his life? They wrapped him up in their flags, they covered him with the Stars and Stripes and the Union Jack, and defied the executioners. “Now fire a shot if you dare, for if you do, you defy the nations represented by those flags, and you will bring the powers of those two great nations upon you.” There stood the man, and before the soldiers, and though a single shot might have ended his life, yet he was as invulnerable as though in a coat of triple steel. In the same way, Jesus Christ has taken my poor guilty soul ever since I believed in Him, and has wrapped around me the blood-red flag of His atoning sacrifice, and before God can destroy me, or any other soul that is wrapped in the atonement, He must insult His Son and dishonour this sacrifice; and that He never will do, blessed be His name.

8. Hindrances to Coming to the Light

There may be some sin within you which you are harbouring to your soul’s peril. When a soldier’s foot has refused to heal, the surgeon has been known to examine it very minutely, and manipulate every part. Each bone is there, and in its place; there is no apparent cause for the inflammation, but yet the wound refuses to heal. The surgeon probes and probes again, until his lancet comes into contact with a hard foreign substance. “Here it is,” he says, “a bullet is lodged here; this must come out, or the wound will never close.” So my probe may discover a secret in you, and if so, it must come out, or you must die. You cannot expect to have peace with God, and still indulge in that drunkard’s glass. What, a drunkard reconciled to God? You cannot hope to enjoy peace with God, and yet refuse to speak with that relative who offended you years ago. What, look to be forgiven, when you will not yourself forgive? There are doubtful practices in your trade behind the counter; do you dare to hope that God will accept a thief?—for that is what you are, a thief and a liar. You brand your goods dishonestly, call them twenty when they are fifteen; do you expect God to be your friend while you remain a rogue? Do you think He will smile on you in your knavery, and walk with you when you choose dirty ways? Perhaps you indulge a haughty spirit, or it may be an idle disposition; it does not matter which kind of devil is in you, it must come out, or else the peace of God cannot come in. Now, are you willing to give sin up? If not, it is all lost time to preach Christ to you, for He is not meant to be a Saviour of those who persevere in sin. He came to save His people *from* their sins, not *in* them; and if you still cling to a darling sin, do not be deceived, for you can never enter within the gates of heaven.

Why have some not found the light? It may be that you have sought peace with God only occasionally; after an earnest sermon you have been awakened; but when the sermon has been concluded, you have gone back to your slumber like the sluggard who turns again upon his bed. After a sickness, or when there has been a death in the family, you have then zealously bestirred yourself; but before long you have declined into the same carelessness as

before. Remember he who wins the race is not the one who runs in spurts, but the one who continues running to the end. No man gets Christ by thinking of Him only now and then, and in the mean time regards vanity and falsehood in his heart. He only shall have Christ who must have Him, who must have Him now, and who gives His whole heart to Him, and cries, "I will seek Him till I find Him, and when I find Him I will never let Him go."

Let me remind you that the great reason why earnest souls do not get speedy rest lies in this: they are disobedient to the one plain Gospel precept, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," (Act 16:31). I would pin them to this point. It is not necessary at all to combat their doubts and fears; we may do it, but I do not know that we are called upon to do so; the plain matter of fact is, God lays down a way of peace, and you will not have it. God says by believing in Jesus you shall live: you will not believe in Christ, and yet hope to live! God reveals to you His dear Son and says, "Trust him," and moreover, "He that believeth not God hath made him a liar" (1Jo 5:10), and yet you dare to make God a liar; every minute that you live in a state of unbelief, you, as far as you can, make God to be a liar! What an atrocity for any one of us to fall into! What an amazing presumption for a sinner to live in who professes to be seeking peace with God!

I will suppose that I have you by the hand, and am gazing intently into your eyes. I fear for you because of the danger that you will become frost-bitten by your long sorrow, and fall into a fatal slumber. You have been seeking rest, but you have not found it; *what an unhappy state you are in!* You are now unreconciled to God; your sin clamours for punishment; you are among those with whom God is angry every day. Can you bear to be in such a condition? Does something not bid you arise and flee out of this city of destruction in case you are consumed? What happiness you are missing every day! If you lay hold on Christ by faith, you would possess a joy and peace passing all understanding. You are fretting in this low and miserable dungeon; you have been in the dark year after year, when the sun is shining, the sweet flowers are blooming, and everything is waiting to lead you forth with gladness. Oh, what joys you lose by being an unbeliever! Why do you stay so long in this evil state? Meanwhile, what good you might have done! Oh, if you had been led to look to Jesus Christ months ago, instead of sitting in darkness yourself, you would have been leading others to Christ, and pointing other eyes to that dear Cross that brought peace to you.

What sin you are daily committing! For you are daily an unbeliever, daily denying the ability of Christ, and so doing injury to His honour. Does the Spirit of God within you not make you say, "I will arise, and go to my Father?" Oh, if there is such a thought trembling in your soul, do not quench it, obey it, arise and go, and may your Father's arms be wrapped around your neck before today's sun goes down. Meanwhile, permit me to say, what a hardening process is insensibly going on within! If not better, you are certainly worse than twelve months ago. Why, those promises that cheered you then now yield no comfort! Those threats which once startled now cause you no alarm! Will you dawdle any longer? You have waited to be better, and you are growing worse and worse. You have said, "I will come at a more convenient season," and every season is more inconvenient than the one which came before it. You doubted then—you are the victim of deeper and more dastardly doubts today. Oh, that you could believe in Him Who must be true! Oh, that you could trust in Him Who ought to be trusted, for He can never deceive! I pray the day may come, even this very moment, when you will shake yourself from the dust, arise and put on your beautiful garments, for every hour you sit on the dunghill of your soul-destroying doubts you are being fastened by strong bands of iron to the seat of despair. Your eye is growing dimmer, your hand more palsied; and the poison in your veins is raging more furiously. Yonder is the Saviour's cross, and there is efficacy in His blood for you. Trust Jesus now, and this moment you will enter into peace. The gate of mercy swings readily on its hinge and opens wide to every soul which casts itself upon the bosom of the Saviour. Oh, why are you waiting? Mischievous will befall you. The sun is going down; hurry, traveller, in case you are overtaken with everlasting night.

There are many people around you, some of whom you may know, who have trusted Jesus and they have found light. They once suffered your disappointments, but they have now found rest to their souls. They came to Jesus just as they were, and at this moment they can tell you that they are satisfied in him. If others have found such peace, why not you? Jesus is still the same. It is not to Christ's advantage to reject a sinner, it is not for God's glory to destroy a seeker; rather, it is for His honour and glory to receive those who humbly rest in the sacrifice of His dear Son. What is holding you back? You are called, come. You are pressed to come, come. In the courts of law I have sometimes heard a man called as a witness, and no sooner is he called, though he may be at the end of the court, than he begins to press his way up to the witness-box. Nobody says, "Who is this man pushing here?" or, if they should say, "Who are you?" it would be a sufficient answer to say, "My name was called." "But you are not rich, you have no gold ring upon your finger!" "No, but that is not it, I was called." "But you are not a man of repute, or rank, or character!" "It does not matter, I was called. Make way." So make way, doubts and fears; make way, devils of the infernal lake; Christ calls the sinner. Sinner, come. Though you have nothing to recommend you,

because it is written, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37), come, and the Lord will bless you, for Christ’s sake.

9. Seekers Encouraged: The Substitute

The whole pith and marrow of the religion of Christianity lies in the doctrine of “substitution,” and I do not hesitate to affirm my conviction that a very large proportion of “Christians” are not Christians at all, for they do not understand the fundamental doctrine of the Christian creed; and, alas, there are preachers who do not preach, or even believe this cardinal truth. They speak of the blood of Jesus in an indistinct kind of way, and talk about the death of Christ in a hazy style of poetry, but they do not strike this nail on the head, and lay it down that the way of salvation is by Christ’s becoming a Substitute for guilty man. This shall make me the more plain and definite. Sin is an accursed thing. God, from the necessity of His holiness, must curse it; He must punish men for committing it; but the Lord’s Christ, the glorious Son of the everlasting Father, became a man and suffered in His own proper person the curse which was due to the sons of men, so that, by a vicarious offering God, having been just in punishing sin, could extend His bounteous mercy towards those who believe in the Substitute.

But, you inquire, how was Jesus Christ a curse? The answer is, He redeemed us, “*being made* a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). Christ was no curse in Himself. In His person He was spotlessly innocent, and nothing of sin could belong personally to Him. In Him was no sin. God “made him who knew no sin to be sin for us” (2Co 5:21). There must never be supposed to be any degree of blame-worthiness or censure in the person or character of Christ as He stands as an individual. He is in that respect without spot or wrinkle, the immaculate Lamb of God’s Passover. Nor was Christ made a curse out of necessity. There was no necessity for Him ever to suffer the curse; no necessity except that which His own loving pledge created. His own intrinsic holiness kept Him from sin, and that same holiness kept Him from the curse. He was made sin for us, not on His own account, not with any view to Himself, but wholly because He loved us and chose to put Himself in the place which we ought to have occupied. He was made a curse for us, not out of any personal desert or out of any personal necessity, but because He had voluntarily undertaken to be the Covenant Head of His people, and to be their representative, and as their representative, to bear the curse which was due to them.

I want to be very clear here, because very strong expressions have been used by those who hold the great truth which I am endeavouring to preach; strong expressions which have conveyed the truth they meant to convey, but also a great deal more. Martin Luther prized the *Epistle to the Galatians* so much that he called it his Catherine von Bora (that was the name of his beloved wife, and he gave this book the name of the dearest one he knew). In his book on that epistle he says plainly, but he reassured he did not mean what he said to be literally understood, that, “Jesus Christ was the greatest sinner that ever lived; that all the sins of man were so laid upon Christ that He became all the thieves, and murderers, and adulterers that ever were, in one.” Now he meant this: that God treated Christ as if He had been a great sinner; as if He had been all the sinners in the world in one; and such language teaches that truth very plainly. But Luther-like in his boisterousness, he overshoots his mark, and leaves room for the censure that he has almost spoken blasphemy against the blessed person of our Lord. Now, Christ never was and never could be a sinner; and in His person and in His character, in Himself considered, He never could be anything but well beloved of God, and blessed forever and well pleasing in Jehovah’s sight; so that when we say today that He was a curse, we must lay stress on those words, “He was *made* a curse”—constituted a curse, set as a curse; and then again we must emphasize those other words, *for us*—not on His own account at all; but entirely out of love to us, that we might be redeemed; He stood in the sinner’s place and was reckoned to be a sinner, and treated as a sinner and made a curse for us.

How was Christ made a curse? In the first place, He was made a curse because all the sins of His people were actually laid on Him. “He made him to be sin for us”; and let me quote from Isaiah, “The LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53:6); and yet another statement from the same prophet, “for he shall bear their iniquities” (Isa 53:11). The sins of God’s people were lifted from off them and imputed to Christ, and their sins were looked upon as if Christ had committed them. He was regarded as if He had been the sinner; He actually and in very deed stood in the sinner’s place. Next to the imputation of sin came the curse of sin. The law, looking for sin to punish, with its quick eye detected sin laid upon Christ and, as it must curse sin wherever it was found, it cursed the sin as it was laid on Christ. So Christ was made a curse.

Wonderful and awful words, but, as they are scriptural words, we must receive them. Sin being on Christ, the curse came on Christ, and in consequence, our Lord felt an unutterable horror of soul. Surely it was that horror which made Him sweat great drops of blood when He saw and felt that God was beginning to treat Him as if He had been a sinner. The holy soul of Christ shrank with deepest agony from the slightest contact with sin. So pure

and perfect was our Lord, that never an evil thought had crossed His mind, nor had His soul been stained by the glances of evil, and yet He stood in God's sight a sinner and therefore a solemn horror fell upon His soul. Then He began to be made a curse for us, nor did He cease till He had suffered all the penalty which was due on our account.

We have been accustomed to divide the penalty into two parts, the penalty of loss and the penalty of actual suffering. Christ endured both of these. It was due to sinners that they should lose God's favour and presence, and therefore Jesus cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mat 27:46, Mar 15:34). It was due to sinners that they should lose all personal comfort; Christ was deprived of every consolation and even the last rag of clothing was torn from Him and He was left, like Adam, naked and forlorn. It was necessary that the soul should lose everything that could sustain it, and so Christ lost every comfortable thing; He looked and there was no man to pity or help; He was made to cry, "But I am a worm and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people" (Psa 22:6). As for the second part of the punishment—namely, an actual infliction of suffering—our Lord endured this also to the extreme, as the evangelists clearly show. You have often read the story of His bodily sufferings; take care that you never depreciate them. There was an amount of physical pain endured by our Saviour which His body could never have borne unless it had been sustained and strengthened by union with His Godhead; yet the sufferings of His soul was the soul of His sufferings. That soul of His endured a torment equivalent to hell itself. The punishment that was due to the wicked was that of hell, and though Christ did not suffer hell, He suffered an equivalent for it; and now, can your minds conceive what that must have been? It was an anguish never to be measured, an agony never to be comprehended. It is to God, and God alone that His grieves were fully known. The Greek liturgy puts it well, "Thine unknown sufferings," for they must forever remain beyond human imagination.

The consequences are that He has redeemed us from the curse of the law. Those for whom Christ died are forever free from the curse of the law; for when the law comes to curse a man who believes in Christ, he says, "What have I to do with you, O law? You say, 'I will curse you,' but I reply, 'You have cursed Christ instead of me. Can you curse twice for one offence?'" And the law is silenced! God's law having received all it can demand is not so unrighteous as to demand anything more. All that God can demand of a believing sinner, Christ has already paid, and there is no voice in earth or heaven that can accuse a soul that believes in Jesus after that. You were in debt, but a Friend paid your debt; no writ can be served on you. It does not matter that *you* did not pay it, it is paid, and you have the receipt. That is sufficient in any fair court. So, all the penalty that was due to us has been borne by Christ. It is true I have not borne it; I have not been to hell and suffered the full wrath of God, but Christ has suffered that wrath for me, and I am as clear as if I had paid the debt to God and suffered His wrath. Here is a glorious bottom to rest upon! Here is a rock upon which to lay the foundation of eternal comfort! Let a man get to this truth: my Lord outside the city's gate bled for me as my Surety, and on the cross discharged my debt. Why then, great God, I no longer fear Your thunder. How can You condemn me now? You have exhausted the quiver of Your wrath; every arrow has already been used against my Lord, and I am in Him clear and clean, absolved and delivered, as if I had never sinned.

"He hath redeemed us," says the text. How often I have heard certain gentry of the modern school of theology sneer at the atonement, because they charge us with the notion of its being a sort of business transaction, or what they choose to call "the mercantile view of it." I do not hesitate to say that the mercantile metaphor rightly expresses God's view of redemption, for we find it so in Scripture; the atonement is a ransom—that is to say, a price paid; and in the present case the original word is more than unusually expressive; it is a payment for, a price instead of. Jesus in His sufferings performed what may be forcibly and fitly described as the payment of a ransom, the giving to justice a *quid pro quo* for what was due on our behalf for our sins. Christ suffered what we ought to have suffered. The sins that were ours were made His; He stood as a sinner in God's sight; though not a sinner in Himself, He was punished as a sinner, and died as a sinner upon the tree of the curse.

You have only to trust Christ, and you shall live. Whoever, or whatever, or wherever you are, even though you lie at hell's dark door to despair and die, the message comes to you: God hath made Christ to be a propitiation¹⁷ for sin (Rom 3:25). He made "him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2Co 5:21). Christ has delivered us "from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us" (Gal 3:13).

He who believes no longer has a curse upon him. He may have been an adulterer, a swearer, a drunkard, a murderer; but the moment he believes, God sees none of those sins in him. He sees him as an innocent man, and regards his sins as having been laid on the Redeemer, and punished in Jesus as He died on the tree. If you believe in Christ, though you are one of the most damnable wretches who ever polluted the earth, you shall not have a sin remaining

¹⁷ **propitiation** – an appeasement; a sin offering that turns away wrath.

on you after believing. God will look at you as pure; even Omniscience shall not detect a sin in you, for your sin shall be put on the Scapegoat, even Christ, and carried away into forgetfulness.

Put away your accursed and idolatrous dependence upon yourself; Christ has finished salvation-work, altogether finished it. Do not hold your rags in competition with His fair white linen. Christ has borne the curse; do not bring your pitiful penances, and your tears all full of filth, to mingle with the precious fountain flowing with His blood. Lay down what is your own, and come and take what is Christ's. Put away now everything that you have thought of being or doing by way of winning acceptance with God; humble yourselves, and take Jesus Christ to be the Alpha and Omega, the first and last, the beginning and end of your salvation. If you do this, not only will you be saved, but you are saved. Rest, O weary one, for your sins are forgiven; rise, you lame man, lame through want of faith, for your transgression is covered; rise from the dead, you corrupt one, rise, like Lazarus from the tomb, for Jesus calls you! Believe and live.

10. Seeking

My main intention, to which I have set my whole soul, is to deal with those mourners who are seeking Christ, but until now have sought Him in vain. Convinced of sin, awakened and alarmed, these unhappy ones wait for a long time outside the gate of mercy, shivering in the cold, pining to enter into the banquet which invites them, but declining to pass through the gate which stands wide open for them. Tremblingly, they refuse to enter within mercy's open door, although infinite love itself cries to them, "Come, and welcome: enter and be blessed." It is a most surprising thing that there should be in this world persons who have the richest consolation near to hand, and persistently refuse to take it. It seems so unnatural, that, if we had not been convinced by abundant observation, we should think it impossible that any miserable soul should refuse to be comforted. Does the ox refuse its fodder? Will the lion turn from his meat, or the eagle loathe its nest? The refusal of consolation is even more strange because the most admirable comfort is within reach. Sin can be forgiven; sin has been forgiven; Christ has made an atonement for it. God is graciously willing to accept any sinner who comes to Him confessing His transgressions, and trusting in the blood of the Lord Jesus. God waits to be gracious, He is not hard nor harsh; He is full of mercy; He delights to pardon the penitent, and is never more revealed in the glory of His God-head than when He is accepting the unworthy through the righteousness of Jesus Christ. There is so much comfort in the Word of God that it is as easy to set the limits of space as it is to measure the grace revealed there. You may seek to comprehend all the sweetness of divine love, but you cannot, for it passes knowledge. The abounding goodness of God made manifest in Jesus Christ is like the vast expanse of the ocean. It is extraordinary, then, that men refuse to receive what is so lavishly provided.

It is said that, some years ago, a vessel sailing on the northern coast of the South American continent was observed to make signals of distress. When hailed by another vessel, they reported themselves as "Dying for water!" "Dip it up, then," was the response; "you are in the mouth of the Amazon River." There was fresh water all around them, they had nothing to do but dip it up, and yet they were dying of thirst, because they thought themselves to be surrounded by the salt sea. How often are men ignorant of their mercies! How sad that they should perish for lack of knowledge!

But suppose, after the sailors had received the joyful information, they had still refused to draw up the water which was in boundless plenty all around them, would it not have been a marvel? Would you not at once conclude that madness had taken hold of the captain and his crew? Yet this is the sort of madness of many who hear the Gospel. They know that there is mercy provided for sinners; that unless the Holy Spirit interferes they will perish, not through ignorance, but because, for some reason or other, like the Jews of old, they judge themselves "unworthy of everlasting life"; yet they still exclude themselves from the Gospel, refusing to be comforted. This is even more remarkable because the comfort provided is so safe. If there were suspicions that the comforts of the Gospel would prove delusive, that they would only foster presumption and so destroy the soul, men would be wise to retreat as if from a cup of poison. But many have satisfied themselves at this life-giving stream; not one has been injured, but all who have drunk have been eternally blessed.

Why, then, does the thirsty soul hesitate, while the river, clear as crystal, flows at his feet? Moreover, the comfort of the Gospel is entirely suitable, it is *fully adapted* to the sinful, the weak, and the broken-hearted, adapted to those who are crushed by their need of mercy, and adapted equally as much to those who are least aware of their need of it. The Gospel bears a balm in its hand suited to the sinner in his worst state, when he has nothing good about him, and nothing within him can possibly be a ground of hope. Does the Gospel not declare that Christ died for the ungodly? Is it not a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom, said the apostle, "I am chief" (1Ti 1:15)? Is the Gospel not intended even for those who are

dead in sin? Do we not read words such as these, “God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved)” (Eph 2:4-5)? Are the invitations of the Gospel, so far as we can judge, not the kindest, tenderest, and most attractive that could be penned and addressed to the worst emergency in which a sinner can be placed? “Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isa 55:1). “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isa 55:7). No qualifying adjectives are used to set forth a degree of goodness in the person invited, but the wicked are asked to come, and the unrighteous are commanded to turn to God. The invitation deals with base, naked, unimproved sinnership. Grace seeks for misery, unworthiness, guilt, helplessness, and nothing else. Not because we are good, but because the Lord is gracious, we are bidden to believe in the infinite mercy of God in Christ Jesus, and so to receive comfort. It is strange that where consolation is so plentiful—where comfort is so safe, where the heart-cheer is so suitable—thousands of souls should be found who refuse to be comforted.

This fact grows still more remarkable because these persons greatly need comfort, and from what they say, and I trust also from what they feel, you might infer that comfort was the very thing they would clutch at, as a drowning man does at a rope. Why, they scarcely sleep at night by reason of their fears. By day their faces betray the sorrow which, like a tumultuous sea, rages within them. They can scarcely speak a cheerful sentence. They make their household miserable; the infection of their sorrow is caught by others. You would think that the very moment the word “hope” was whispered in their ears, they would leap towards it at once; but it is not so. You may put the Gospel into whatever shape you please, and yet these poor souls who need your pity, though, I fear, they must also have your blame, refuse to be comforted. Though food is placed before them, their soul abhors all kinds of meat, and they draw near to the gates of death; indeed, you may even put the heavenly cordial into their mouths, but they will not receive the spiritual nutrition; they pine in hunger rather than take what divine love provides.

When the dove was weary, she remembered the ark and flew into Noah’s hand at once; these people are weary and they know the ark, but they will not fly into it. When an Israelite had killed, inadvertently, his fellow, he knew the city of refuge, he feared the avenger of blood, and he fled along the road to the place of safety. These sinners know the refuge, and every Sabbath we set up the signposts along the road, but still they do not come to find salvation. The destitute waifs and strays of the streets of London find out the night-refuge and ask for shelter; they cluster round our workhouse doors like sparrows under the eaves of a building on a rainy day; they piteously crave for lodging and a crust of bread; yet crowds of poor benighted spirits, when the house of mercy is lit up and the invitation is plainly written in bold letters, “Whosoever will, let him turn in hither,” will not come.

For many sinners, their refusal to be comforted arises from *bodily and mental disease*. It is vain to ply with scriptural arguments those who are in more urgent need of healing medicine, or a generous diet. There is so close a connection between the sphere of the physician and the divine that they do well to hunt in couples when chasing the delusions of morbid humanity; and I am persuaded that there are many cases in which the minister’s presence is of little use until the physician has first wisely discharged his part.

In some people, the monstrous refusal is suggested by a *proud dislike to the plan of salvation*. They would be comforted, but may they not do something to earn eternal life? May they not at least contribute a feeling or emotion? May they not prepare themselves for Christ? Must salvation be all gratis? Must they be received into the house of mercy as paupers? Must they come with no other cry but, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luk 18:13)? Must it come to this—to be stripped, to have every rag of one’s own righteousness torn away, even the righteousness of feeling as well as the righteousness of doing? Must the whole head be confessedly sick, and the whole heart faint, and the man lie before Jesus as utterly undone and ruined, to take everything from the hand of the crucified Saviour? “Ah then”, says flesh and blood, “I will not have it.” The banner of self is held up by a giant standard-bearer; it floats on long after the battle has been lost. But what folly! For the sake of indulging a foolish dignity we will not be comforted. Down with you and your dignity! I beseech you, bow down now before the feet of Jesus and kiss the Feet which were nailed for your sins.

In others it is not pride, but an unholy resolve to retain some favourite sin. In most cases when the Christian minister tries to heal a wound that has long been bleeding, he probes and probes again with his lancet, wondering why the wound will not heal. It seems to him that all the circumstances argue a successful healing of the wound. He cannot imagine why it still continues to bleed, but at last he finds out the secret: “Ah, here I have it; here is an extraneous substance which continually frets and aggravates the wounds; it cannot heal while this grit of sin lies within it.” In some cases we have found out that the sorrowing person still indulged in a secret vice, or kept the society of the ungodly, or was undutiful to parents, or unforgiving, or slothful, or practiced that hideous sin, secret drunk-

eness. In such a case, if the man resolves, “I will not give up this sin,” is it any wonder he is not comforted? Would it not be an awful thing if he were? When a man carries a corroding substance within his soul, if his wound is filmed over, an internal disease will come of it and prove deadly. Confess to Jesus, Who will forgive all your foolishness and accept you, so that you shall refuse to be comforted no longer.

Some refuse to be comforted because of an obstinate determination only to be comforted in a way of their own selecting. They have read the life of a certain good man who was saved with a particular kind of experience. “Now,” they say, “if I feel like that man, then I shall conclude I am saved.” Many have hit upon the experience in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* [John Bunyan’s (1628-1688) autobiography, author of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*]; they have said, “Now, I must be brought just as John Bunyan was, or else I will not believe.” Another has said, “I must tread the path which John Newton (1725-1807) [a notorious slave trader] trod—my feet must be placed in the very marks where his feet went down, or else I cannot believe in Jesus Christ.” But what reason have you for expecting that God will yield to your self-will, and what justification have you for prescribing to the Great Physician the methods of His cure? Oh, if He brings me to heaven I will bless Him, even though He may conduct me there by the gates of hell. If I am brought to see the King in His beauty, in the land which is very far off, it shall not trouble my heart by what method of experience He brought me there. Come, lay aside this foolish choosing of yours, and say, “Lord, have mercy on me, enable me to trust Your dear Son, and my whims and my fancies will be given up.”

I fear, in many, there is another reason for refusing to be comforted, namely, a dishonouring unbelief in the love and goodness and truthfulness of God. They do not believe God to be gracious; they think Him a tyrant, or if not quite that, One so stern that a sinner needed to plead and beg for a long time before the heart of God will be touched. Oh, but you do not know my God! What is He? He is love. I tell you He wants no persuading to have mercy, any more than the sun needs to be persuaded to shine, or a fountain to pour out its streams. It is the nature of God to be gracious. He is never so godlike as when He is bestowing mercy. “Judgment is His strange work”; it is His left-handed work; but mercy, the last manifested of His attributes, is His Benjamin, the child of His right hand, He delights to exercise it. Is it not written, “He delighteth in mercy”? Alas! alas! that God should be slandered by those to whom He speaks so lovingly! “As I live, saith the Lord,” here He takes an oath, and will you not believe Him? “As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (Eze 33:11). He even seems to turn beggar to His own creatures, and to plead with them to come to Him. He yearns for their salvation as He cries, “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim, for I am God, and not man” (Hos 11:8-9). Oh, do not, I beseech you, be unbelieving any longer, but believe God’s word and oath, and accept the comfort which He freely offers to you in the word of His Gospel!

Some however, have refused comfort so long, that they have grown into *the habit of despair*. Ah, it is a dangerous habit, and trembles on the brink of hell. Every moment in which it is indulged a man grows inured to it. It is like the cold of the frigid zone, which benumbs the traveler after a while, till he feels nothing and drops into slumber, and from that into death. Some have despaired and despaired until they had reason for despair, and until despair brought them into hell. Despair has hardened some men’s hearts till they have been ready to commit sins which hope would have rendered impossible to them. Beware of nursing despondency. Does it creep upon you through unbelief? Oh, shake it off, if possible! Cry to the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to loose you from this snare of the fowler; for, depend upon it, doubting God is a net of Satan, and blessed is he who escapes its toils. Believing in God strengthens the soul and brings us both holiness and happiness, but distrusting, suspecting, surmising, and fearing, hardens the heart, and renders us less likely ever to come to God. Beware of despair; and may you, if you have fallen into this evil habit, be snatched from it as the brand from the burning fire, and delivered by the Lord, Who looses its prisoner.

11. How Luther Sought and Found

Martin Luther’s (1483-1546) voice through four hundred years still sounds in the ears of men, and quickens our pulses like the beat of a drum in martial music: he lives because he was a man of faith.

I would like to illustrate this by describing certain incidents of Luther’s life. Gospel light broke by slow degrees upon the reformer’s life. It was in the monastery that, in turning over the old Bible that was chained to a pillar, he came upon this passage: “The just shall live by his faith” (Hab 2:4). This heavenly sentence stuck to him; but he hardly understood all its significance. He could not, however, find peace in his religious profession and monastic

habits. Knowing no better, he persevered in so many penances and such arduous mortifications that sometimes he was found fainting through exhaustion. He brought himself to death's door. He must make a journey to Rome, for in Rome there is a fresh church for every day, and you may be sure to win the pardon of sins and all sorts of benedictions in these holy shrines. He dreamed of entering a city of holiness; but he found it to be a haunt of hypocrites and a den of iniquity. To his horror he heard men say that if there was a hell, Rome was built on top of it, for it was the nearest approach to it that could be found in this world; but still he believed in its Pope and he went on with his penances, seeking rest but finding none.

One day he was climbing upon his knees the Scala Sancta [an ancient outdoor stairway ascending a hill], which still stands in Rome. I have stood amazed at the bottom of the staircase to see poor creatures go up and down on their knees in the belief that it is the very staircase that our Lord descended when He left Pilate's house, and certain steps are said to be marked with drops of blood; these the poor souls kiss most devoutly. Well, Luther was crawling up these steps one day, when that same text which he had met with before in the monastery sounded like a clap of thunder in his ears, "The just shall live by faith" (Hab 2:4). He rose from his prostration, and went down the steps never to grovel upon them again. At that moment the Lord brought him a full deliverance from superstition, and he saw that he was to live not by priests, nor priestcraft, nor penances, nor by anything that he could do, but that he must live by his faith.

No sooner did he believe this than he began to live, in the sense of being active. Tetzl was going about all over Germany selling the forgiveness of sins for so much ready cash. No matter what your offence, as soon as your money touched the bottom of the box your sins were gone. Luther heard of this, grew indignant, and exclaimed, "I will make a hole in his drum," which assuredly he did, and in several other drums. The nailing up of his Theses on the church door was a sure way of silencing the indulgence music. Luther proclaimed pardon of sin by faith in Christ without money and without price, and the pope's indulgences were soon objects of derision. Luther lived by his faith, and therefore he who otherwise might have been quiet, denounced error as furiously as a lion roars upon his prey. The faith that was in him filled him with intense life, and he plunged into war with the enemy.

After a while they summoned him to Augsburg, and to Augsburg he went, though his friends advised him not to go. They summoned him, as a heretic, to answer for himself at the Diet of Worms (1521), and everybody urged him to stay away, for he would be sure to be burned; but he felt it necessary that the testimony should be borne, and so in a wagon he went, from village to village and town to town, preaching as he went, the poor people coming out to shake hands with the man who was standing up for Christ and the Gospel at the risk of his life. You remember how he stood before that august assembly, and though he knew, as far as human power went, that his defense would cost him his life, for he would probably be committed to the flames like John Huss, yet he stood for the Lord his God. That day in the German Diet, Luther did a work for which ten thousand times ten thousand mothers' children have blessed his name, and blessed yet more the name of the Lord his God.

To put him out of harm's way for a while a prudent friend took him prisoner, and kept him out of the strife in the castle of Wartburg. There he had a good time of it, resting, studying, translating, making music, and preparing himself for the future which was to be so eventful. He did all that a man can do who is outside of the fray; but "the just shall live by his faith," and Luther could not be buried alive in ease, he had to be getting on with his life-work.

He sent word to his friends that he would soon be with them, and then he appeared at Wittenberg. The prince meant to have kept him in retirement somewhat longer; and when the Elector feared that he could not protect him, Luther wrote: "I come under far higher protection than yours; nay, I hold that I am more likely to protect your Grace than your Grace to protect me. He who has the strongest faith is the best protector." Luther had learned to be independent of all men, for he cast himself upon his God. He had all the world against him, and yet he lived happily—if the Pope excommunicated him, he burned the bull; if the Emperor threatened him, he rejoiced because he remembered the word of the Lord: "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together...He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh" (Psa 2:2,4). When they said to him, "Where will you find shelter if the Elector does not protect you?" he answered, "Under the broad shield of God."

Luther could not be still; he had to speak, and write, and thunder; and oh, with what confidence he spoke! Doubts about God and Scripture he abhorred. Melancthon says he was not dogmatical. I rather differ from Melancthon there, and reckon Luther to be the chief of dogmatics. He called Melancthon the "soft treacher," and I wonder what we should have done if Luther had been Melancthon, and had trodden softly too. The times needed a firmly assured leader, and faith made Luther all that for years, notwithstanding his many sorrows and infirmities. He was a Titan, a giant, a man of splendid mental caliber and strong physique; and yet his main life and force lay in his faith. He suffered greatly in exercises of the mind and through diseases of body, and these might well have occasioned a display of weakness; but that weakness did not appear; for when he believed, he was as sure of what he

believed as of his own existence, and therefore he was strong. If every angel in heaven had passed before him and each one had assured him of the truth of God he would not have thanked them for their testimony, for he believed God without the witness of either angels or men: he thought the word of divine testimony more sure than anything that seraphim could say.

This man was forced to live by his faith, for he was a man of stormy soul and only faith could speak peace to him. Those stirring excitements of his brought on him afterwards fearful depressions of spirit, and then he needed faith in God. If you read a spiritual life of him you will find that it was hard work sometimes for him to keep his soul alive. Being a man of like passions with us, and full of imperfections, he was at times as despondent and despairing as the weakest among us; and the swelling grief within him threatened to burst his mighty heart. But both he and John Calvin frequently sighed for the rest of heaven, for they did not love the strife in which they lived, but would have been glad peacefully to feed the flock of God on earth and then to enter into rest. These men dwelt with God in holy boldness of believing prayer, or they could not have lived at all.

Luther's faith laid hold upon the cross of our Lord, and would not be stirred from it. He believed in the forgiveness of sins, and could not afford to doubt it. He cast anchor upon Holy Scripture, and rejected all the inventions of clerics and all the traditions of the fathers. He was assured of the truth of the Gospel, and never doubted that it would prevail, though earth and hell were leagued against it. When he came to die his old enemy assailed him fiercely, but when they asked him if he held the same faith his "yes" was positive enough. They need not have asked him, they should have been sure of that. And now today the truth proclaimed by Luther continues to be preached, and will be till our Lord himself shall come. Then the holy city will need no candle, nor the light of the sun, because the Lord himself will be the light of his people; but till then we must shine with Gospel light to our utmost.

12. Saved through Faith

The way of salvation has always been the same. No man has ever been saved by his good works. The way by which the just have lived has always been the way of faith. There has not been the slightest advance upon this truth; it is established and settled, ever the same, like the God Who uttered it. At all times, and everywhere, the Gospel is and must forever be the same. "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever" (Heb 13:8). We read of "the Gospel" as one; never of two or three Gospels. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but Christ's Word shall never pass away.

It is also noteworthy not only that this truth should be so old, and should continue so unchanged, but that it should possess such vitality. This one sentence, "The just shall live by his faith," produced the Reformation. Out of this one line, as from the opening of one of the apocalyptic seals, came forth all that sounding of Gospel trumpets, and all that singing of Gospel songs, which sounded like the noise of many waters in the world. This one seed, forgotten and hidden away in the dark medieval times, was brought out, dropped into the human heart, and made to grow by the Spirit of God so that it produced great results. The least bit of truth, thrown anywhere, will live! Certain plants are so full of vitality that if you only take a fragment of a leaf and place it on the soil, the leaf will take root and grow. It is utterly impossible that such vegetation should become extinct; and so it is with the truth of God—it is living and incorruptible, and therefore there is no destroying it. As long as one Bible remains, the religion of free grace will live; indeed, if they could burn all printed Scriptures, as long as there remained a child who remembered a single text of the Word, the truth would rise again. Even in the ashes of truth the fire is still living, and when the breath of the Lord blows upon it, the flame will burst forth gloriously.

In the Old Testament, we are told that Abraham "believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen 15:6). This is the universal plan of justification. Faith lays hold upon the righteousness of God, by accepting God's plan of justifying sinners through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and thus makes the sinner righteous. Faith accepts and appropriates for itself the whole system of divine righteousness which is unfolded in the person and work of the Lord Jesus. Faith rejoices to see Him coming into the world in our nature and in that nature obeying the Law in every jot and tittle, though not Himself under that Law until He chose to put Himself there on our behalf; faith is further pleased when it sees the Lord, Who had come under the Law, offering up Himself as a perfect atonement and making a complete vindication of divine justice by His suffering and death.

Faith lays hold upon the Person, life, and death of the Lord Jesus as its sole hope, and in the righteousness of Christ it arrays itself. It cries, "the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isa 53:5). Now, the man who believes in God's method of making men righteous through the righteousness of Jesus, and accepts Jesus and leans upon Him is a just man. He who makes the life and death of God's great propitiation his sole reliance and confidence, is justified in the sight of God, and is written down among the just by the Lord

Himself. His faith is imputed to him for righteousness because his faith grasps the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. "All that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Act 13:39). This is the testimony of the inspired Word, and who shall deny it?

But the believer is also just in another sense, which the outside world appreciates more, though it is no more valuable than the former. The man who believes in God becomes by that faith moved to everything that is right, good, and true. His faith in God rectifies his mind and makes him just. In judgment, in desire, in aspiration, in heart, he is just. His sin has been forgiven him freely and now, in the hour of temptation, he cries, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen 39:9). He believes in the blood-shedding which God has provided for the cleansing of sin, and, being washed in that blood, he cannot choose to defile himself again.

The love of Christ constrains him to seek after whatever is true, right, good, loving, and honourable in the sight of God. Having received by faith the privilege of adoption, he strives to live as a child of God. Having obtained by faith a new life, he walks in the newness of life. "Immortal principles forbid the child of God to sin." If any man lives in sin and loves it, he does not have the faith of God's elect, for true faith purifies the soul. The faith which is worked out in us by the Holy Spirit is the greatest sin-killer under heaven. By the grace of God it affects the inmost heart, changes the desires and the affections, and makes the man a new creature in Christ Jesus. If there are on earth any who can truly be called just, they are those who are made so by faith in God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Indeed, no other men are "just" except those to whom the holy God gives the title, and these live by faith. Faith trusts God, and therefore loves Him, and therefore obeys Him, and therefore grows like Him. It is the root of holiness, the spring of righteousness, the life of the just.

God is so true that to doubt Him is an injustice; and he who does the Lord such an injustice is not a just man. A just man must first be just with the greatest of all beings. It would be idle for him to be just to his fellow creatures only, if he did a willful injustice to God. In fact, he would be unworthy of the name of just. Faith is what the Lord justly deserves to receive from His creatures: it is His due that we believe in what He says, and specially in reference to the Gospel. When the great love of God in Christ Jesus is plainly expressed, it will be believed by the pure in heart. If the great love of Christ in dying for us is fully understood, it must be believed by every honest mind. To doubt the witness of God concerning His Son is to do the sorest injustice to infinite love. He who does not believe has rejected God's witness to the unspeakable gift and rejected that which deserves man's adoring gratitude, since it alone can satisfy the justice of God and give peace to the conscience of man. A truly just man must, in order to be completely just, believe in God and in all that He has revealed.

Some dream that this matter of justness only concerns the outer life, and does not touch man's belief. I say this is not so: righteousness concerns the inner parts of a man, the central region of his manhood; and truly just men desire to be made clean in the secret parts, and in the hidden parts they would know wisdom. Is it not so? We hear it continually asserted that the understanding and the belief constitute a province exempt from the jurisdiction of God. Is it indeed true that I may believe what I like without being accountable to God for my belief? No single part of our manhood is beyond the range of the divine Law. Our whole capacity as men lies under the sovereignty of Him Who created us, and we are bound as much to *believe* rightly as we are bound to *act* rightly. In fact, our actions and our thoughts are so intertwined and entangled that it is impossible to divide one from the other. To say that the rightness of the outward life suffices is to argue contrary to the whole tenor of the Word of God. I am bound as much to serve God with my mind as with my heart. I am bound as much to believe what God reveals as I am to do what God enjoins.

"The just shall live *by faith*" (Rom 1:17). This sentence savours of the strait gate which stands at the head of the way—the narrow way which leads into eternal life. At one blow this ends all claims of righteousness apart from one mode of life. The best men in the world can only live by faith; there is no other way of being just in the sight of God. We cannot live in righteousness by self. If we are going to trust ourselves, or anything that comes from ourselves, we have not known the life of God according to the teaching of Holy Writ. You must abandon all confidence in everything that you are or hope to be. You must tear off the leprous garment of legal righteousness, and part with self in any and every form. Self-reliance as to the things of religion will be found to be self-destruction. You must rest in God as He is revealed in His Son Jesus Christ, and there alone.

The just shall live by faith; but those who look to the works of the Law are under the curse and cannot live before God. The same is also true of those who endeavour to live by sense or feeling. They judge God by what they see: if He is bountiful to them in providence, He is a good God; if they are poor, they have nothing good to say of Him, for they measure Him by what they feel, taste, and see. If God works steadily to a purpose, and they can see His purpose, they commend His wisdom. But when they either cannot see the purpose, or cannot understand the

way by which the Lord is working to attain it, immediately they judge Him to be unwise. Living by sense turns out to be a senseless mode of life, bringing death to all comfort and hope.

Too many say, "I am my own guide; I shall make doctrines for myself, and I shall shift them and shape them according to my own devices." This is death to the spirit. *To be abreast of the times* is to be an enemy to God. The way of life is to believe what God has taught, especially to believe in Him Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation for sin; for that is making God to be everything and ourselves nothing. Resting on an infallible revelation and trusting in an omnipotent Redeemer, we have rest and peace but on the other unsettled principle we become wandering stars for whom is appointed the blackness of darkness forever. By faith the soul can live; in all other ways we have a name to live and are dead.

The same is equally true of *fancy*. We often meet with a fanciful religion in which people trust impulses, dreams, noises, and mystic things which they imagine they have seen: fiddle-faddle all of it! and yet they are quite wrapped up in it. I pray that you may cast out this chaffy stuff, for there is no food for the spirit in it. The life of my soul lies not in what I think, or what I fancy, or what I imagine, or what I enjoy of fine feeling, but only in that which faith apprehends to be the Word of God. We live before God by trusting a promise, depending on a Person, accepting a sacrifice, wearing a righteousness, and surrendering ourselves up to God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Implicit trust in Jesus, our Lord, is the way of life, and every other way leads to death. Let those who call this statement narrow or intolerant say what they please; it will be just as true when they have execrated it as it is now.

Much is comprehended in the saying, "The just shall live by his faith." It does not say what part of his life hangs on his believing, or what phase of his life best proves his believing: it comprehends the beginning, continuance, increase, and perfecting of spiritual life as being all by faith. The moment a man believes, he begins to live in the sight of God: he trusts his God, he accepts God's revelation of Himself, he confides, repose, leans upon his Saviour and that moment he becomes a spiritually living man, quickened with spiritual life by God the Holy Spirit. All his existence before that belief was only a form of death; when he comes to trust in God he enters upon eternal life, and is born from above.

Yes, but that is not all, nor even half of it; for if that man is to continue living before God, if he is to hold on his way in holiness, his perseverance must be the result of continued faith. The faith which saves is not one single act done and ended on a certain day: it is an act continued and persevered in throughout the entire life of a man. The just not only commences to live by his faith, but he continues to live by his faith: he does not begin in the spirit and end in the flesh, nor go so far by grace and the rest of the way by the works of the law. "The just shall live by faith," says the text in Hebrews, "but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul" (Heb 10:38-39). Faith is essential all along; every day and all day, in all things. Our natural life begins by breathing, and it must be continued by breathing: what the breath is to the body, faith is to the soul.

13. May I Believe?

You know Who Jesus is, and you believe Him to be the Son of God, the Saviour of men. You are sure that "he is also able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him" (Heb 7:25). You have no doubt about those eternal truths which surround His Godhead, His birth, His life, His death, His resurrection, and His Second Advent. The doubt is concerning yourself personally—"If I may be a partaker of this salvation." You feel quite certain that faith in Jesus Christ will save anyone—will save you if you exercise it. You have no doubt about the doctrine of justification by faith. You have learned it, and you have received it as a matter beyond all dispute, that he who believes in Him has everlasting life and you know that he who comes to Him will not be cast out, (Joh 6:37). You know the remedy and believe in its efficacy; but then comes the doubt—may I be healed by it? At the back of your belief in faith hides the gloomy thought: "May I believe? May I trust? I see the door is open: many are entering. May I? I see that there is washing from the worst of sins in the sacred fount. Many are being cleansed. May I wash and be clean?"

Without formulating a doubt so as to express it, it comes up in all sorts of ways, and robs you of all comfort, and indeed, of all hope. When a sermon is preached it is like when someone sets a table out with all manner of dainties, and you look at it but do not feel that you have any right to sit down and begin eating. This is a wretched delusion. Its result will be deadly unless you are delivered from it. Like a rapacious monster it preys upon you. When you see the brooks flowing with their sparkling streams and you are thirsty, do you think that you are not permitted to drink? If so, you are out of your mind; you talk and think like one bereft of reason. Yet many are in this state spiritually. This doubting your liberty to come to Jesus is a wretched business; it mars and spoils your reading and

your hearing and your attempts to pray; and you will never get any comfort until this question has been answered in your heart once for all, “May I?”

I defy you, if you read all the Old and New Testaments through, to put your finger upon a single verse in which God has said that you may not come and put your trust in Christ. Perhaps you will reply that you do not expect to read it in the Bible, but God may have said it somewhere where it is not recorded. Well, He says, “I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain” (Isaiah 45:19). Now, He has commanded you over and over again to seek His face, but He has never said that you shall seek His face in vain. Dismiss that thought! Again I return to what I have said: there is nothing in Scripture that refuses you permission to come and repose your soul once for all upon Christ. It is written, “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev 22:17). Does that exclude you? It is written, “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom 10:13). Does that shut you out? No, it includes you; it invites you; it encourages you. Nowhere in the Word of God is it written that you will be cast out if you come, or that Jesus Christ will not remove your burden of sin if you come and lay it at His feet.

A thousand passages of Scripture welcome you, but not one stands with a drawn sword to keep you back from the tree of life. Our heavenly Father sets His angels at the gates of His house to welcome all comers; but there are no dogs to bark at poor beggars, nor notices that trespassers must be aware. Come and be welcome. Don’t you think that the very nature of the Lord Jesus Christ should forbid your raising a doubt about your being permitted to come and touch His garment’s hem? Surely, if anyone were to paint the Lord Jesus Christ as an ascetic, repelling with lofty pride the humbler folk who had never reached His dignity of consecration; if any were to paint Him as a Pharisee driving off publicans and sinners, or as an iceberg of righteousness chilling the sinful, it would be a foul slander upon His divine character. If anyone were to say that Jesus Christ is exacting—that He will not receive to Himself the guilty just as they are, but requires a great deal of them and will only welcome to Himself those who are, like Himself, good and true and excellent—that would not be truth, but the direct opposite of it. For the accusation that “this man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them” (Luk 15:2) was thrown in His face when He lived on earth; and what the prophet said of Him was most certainly true: “A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench” (Isa 42:3).

Little children are wonderful judges of character; they know intuitively who is kind. And so are loving women. They do not go through the processes of reasoning, but they come to a conclusion very soon as to a man’s personal character. Now, the children came and clambered on our Redeemer’s knee, and the mothers brought their infants for His blessing. How can you dream that He will repel *you*? The women wept and beseeched Him, and felt pity for those who refused Him, so I am sure that He is not hard to move. Therefore I want you to feel sure of this—that there is nothing in the Saviour’s character which can for a moment lead Him to discard you and to drive you from His presence.

Those who know Him best will say that it is impossible for Him ever to refuse the poor and needy. A blind man could not cry to Him without receiving sight, nor a hungry man look to Him without being fed. He was touched with a feeling of our infirmities—the most gentle, and loving, and tender of all who ever lived upon this earth. I beseech you, therefore, to take it for granted that you may come boldly to Him without fear of a rebuff. If He has power to heal you when you touch Him, rest assured that you may touch Him. There is no question that you may believe; for Jesus is too loving to refuse you. It will give Him joy to receive you. It is not possible that He should refuse you; it is not in His nature to spurn you from His presence.

Will you think, yet again, of the fullness of Christ’s power to save, and make a little argument of it? Christ was so full of power to bless that the secret virtue even saturated His clothes. It overflowed His blessed person; it ran down to the skirts of His garments, even to that hem which every Jew wore around his dress—that fringe of blue. It went into that border so that when the woman simply touched the ravelings of His garment, virtue streamed into her (Luk 8:42-48). If the touch was a touch of faith, it did not matter where the contact was made. You often judge a man’s willingness to help by the power that he has. When a person has little to give he is bound to be economical in his giving. He must look at every penny before he gives it, if he has so few pence to spare. But when a nobleman has no limit to his estate, you feel sure that he will freely give if his heart is generous and tender. The blessed Lord is so full of healing power that He cannot stop Himself working healing miracles; and according to the goodness of His nature He is delighted to overflow, glad to communicate to those who come.

You know that if a city is short of water, the corporation sends out an order that only so much may be used, and there is a restriction imposed upon public baths and factories, because there is a scarcity of the precious fluid. But if you go along the Thames River when we have had a rainy season, you laugh at the notion of a short supply and economical rules. If a dog wants to drink from a river, nobody ever questions his right to do so. He comes down to

the water and he laps, and, what is more, he runs right into it, regardless of those who may have to drink after him. Look at the cattle, how they stand knee-deep in the stream and drink, and drink again; and nobody ever says, as he goes up the Thames, that these poor London people will run short of water, for the dogs and the cattle are drinking it up before it gets down to London. No, it never enters our head to petition the owners of these dogs and cows to restrain them; for there is so much water that there must be liberty to everyone to drink to the full.

Your question is, "May I? May I?" I answer that question by saying this: there is nothing to forbid you; there is everything in the nature of Christ to encourage you; and there is so much mercy in Him that you cannot think that He can have the slightest motive for withholding His infinite grace.

Moreover, suppose you come to Christ as this woman came, and touch the hem of His garment you will not injure Him. You ought to hesitate in gaining benefit for yourself if you would injure the person through whom you obtain that good. But you will not injure the Lord Jesus Christ. He perceived that virtue had gone out of Him, but He did not perceive it by any pain He felt: I believe that He perceived it by the pleasure which it caused Him. Something gave Him unusual joy. A faith-touch had reached Him through His clothes, and He rejoiced to respond by imparting healing virtue from Himself.

You will not defile my Lord, O sinner, if you bring Him all your sin. He will not have to die again to put away your fresh burden of transgression. He will not have to shed one drop of blood to atone for your multiplied sin: the one sacrifice on Calvary anticipated all possible guiltiness. If you will come just as you are, He will not have to leave heaven again, and be born again on earth, and live another sorrowful life in order to save you. He will not need to wear another crown of thorns, or bear another wound in His hands, feet, or side. He has done all His atoning work: do you not remember His victorious cry: "It is finished"? You cannot injure Him though all your injurious thoughts, words, and speeches be laid upon Him. You will not be robbing Him of anything, though your faith-touch conveys life to you. He has such a fullness about Him, that if all you poor sinners come at once, when you have taken away all the merit that you need there will be as much merit left as there was before. When you deal with the infinite you may divide and subtract, but you cannot diminish. If the whole race were washed in the infinite fountain of Jesus' merit, the infinite would still remain!

Others just like you have ventured to Him, and there has not been a case in which they have been refused. I thought, like you, when I was a child, that the Gospel was a very wonderful thing, and free to everybody but myself. I should not have wondered at all if my brother and sisters as well as my father and mother had been saved; but, somehow, I could not get a hold of it myself. It was a precious thing, as much out of my reach as the Queen's diamonds so I thought. To many the Gospel is like a tram-car in motion, and they cannot jump upon it. I thought surely everybody would be saved, but I should not; and yet, soon after I began to cry for mercy, I found it. My expectations of difficulty were all sweetly disappointed. I believed and found immediate rest to my soul. When I once understood, "There was life for a look at the Crucified One," I gave that look, and I found eternal life.

Nobody ever bears a different witness. I challenge the universe to produce a man who was chased from Christ's door, or forbidden to find in Him a Saviour. I beg you, therefore, to observe that since others have come this way to life and peace, God has appointed it to be the common thoroughfare of grace. Poor guilty sinners, there is a sign set up, "This way for sinners. This way for the guilty. This way for the hungry. This way for the thirsty. This way for the lost. 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (Mat 11:28)." Why, surely, you need not say, "If I may." There is no room to say, "If I may," because, first of all, you are invited to come and accept Christ as your Saviour—invited over and over again in the Word of God. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev 22:17). "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isa 55:1). Jesus Christ invites all those who labour and are heavy laden to come to Him, and He will give them rest. God is honest in His invitations. Be sure of that. If God invites you, He wants you to accept the invitation. After reading the many invitations of the Word of God to you, you may not say, "If I may." It will be a wicked questioning of the sincerity of God.

In addition to being invited, you are entreated. Many passages of Scripture go far beyond a mere invitation. God persuades and entreats you to come to Him. He seems to cry like someone who is weeping, "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye...for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Eze 33:11). Our Lord and Master, when He made the feast, and those who were asked did not come, sent out His servants to compel them to come in. He used more than a bare invitation, He put forth a divine compulsion. I would entreat, persuade, exhort all of you who have not believed in Jesus to do so now. In the name of Jesus, I beseech you to seek the Lord. I do not merely put it to you, "Will you or

will you not?" but I would lay my whole heart by the side of the request and say to you, "Come to Jesus. Come and rest your guilty souls on Him." Do you not understand the Gospel message? Do you know what it asks and what it gives? You shall receive perfect pardon in a moment if you believe in Jesus. You shall receive a life that will never die—receive it now, quick as a lightning flash, if only you trust in the Son of God. Whoever you may be, and whatever you may have done, if with your heart you will believe in Him Whom God has raised from the dead, and obey Him thereafter as your Lord and Saviour, every kind of sin and iniquity shall be forgiven you. God will blot out your iniquities like a cloud. He will make you *de novo*—fresh, anew. He will make you a new creature in Christ Jesus. Old things shall pass away and all things become new (2Co 5:17).

But there is the point—believing in Jesus; and you may look me in the face and cry, "But may I?" May you? Why, you are exhorted, invited, entreated to do so. Nor is this all. You are even commanded to do it. This is the commandment—that you believe on Jesus, Whom He has sent. This is the Gospel: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). There is a command, with a threatened punishment for disobedience. Shall anybody say, "May I?" after that? If I read, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," (Mat 22:37) do I say, "May I love God?" If I read, "Honour thy father and thy mother," (Exo 20:12) do I say, "May I honour my father and my mother?" No. A command is a permit and something more. It gives full allowance and much more. As you will be damned if you do not believe, you have therefore been given a right to believe—not only a permission, but a warrant of the most practical kind. Oh, can you not see it? Will you not cry to God: "Lord, if you will damn me if I do not believe, you have given me a full Gospel liberty to believe. Therefore I come and put my trust in Jesus." "If I may?"—I think that this questioning ought to come to an end now. Will you not give it up? May the Holy Spirit show you, poor sinner, that you may now lay your burden down at Jesus' feet, and be saved at once. You may believe. You have full permission now to confess your sin and to receive immediate pardon: see if it is not so. Cast your guilty soul on Him, and rise forgiven and renewed, henceforth to live in fervent gratitude, a miracle of love.

14. A Needless Question Answered

"If I may be permitted to touch the hem of his garment, I shall be made whole." But there arises this bitter question, "*But can I?*" I know that I may if I can; but I cannot." Now that is the question I am going to answer. The will to believe in Christ is as much a work of grace as faith itself and where the will is given and a strong desire, a measure of grace is already received, and with it the power to believe. Do you not know that the will to commit adultery is, according to Scripture, reckoned as adultery? He "hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Mat 5:28). Now, if the very thought of uncleanness and the will towards it is the thing itself, then a desire or will to believe contains within itself the major part of faith. I do not say that it is all, but I do say this—that if the power of God has made a man will to believe, the greater work has been done, and his actually believing will follow in due course.

The entire willingness to believe is nine-tenths of believing. Inasmuch as to will is present with you, the power which you do not find as yet will certainly come to you. The man is dead, and the hardest thing is to make him live. But in the case before us, the quickening is accomplished, for the man lives so far as to will: he wills to believe, he yearns to believe, he longs to believe how much has been done for him! Rising from the dead is a greater thing than the performance of an act of life. Faith in Christ is the simplest action that anybody ever performs. It is the action of a child; indeed, it is the action of a new-born babe in grace. A new-born babe never performs an action that is very complicated. We say, "Oh, it is such a babyish thing," meaning that it is so small. Now faith comes at the moment that the child is born into God's family; it occurs at the same time as the new birth. One of the first signs and tokens of being born again is faith; therefore it must be a very, very simple thing. I venture to say that faith in Christ differs in no respect from faith in anybody else, except in the Person upon Whom that faith is set. You believe in your mother: you may in the same way believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. You believe in your friend: it is the same act that you have to do toward your higher and better Friend. You believe the news that is commonly reported and printed in the daily journals: it is the same act which believes Scripture and the promise of God.

The reason why faith in the Lord Jesus is a superior act to faith in anyone else, lies in this fact—that it is a superior Person Whom you believe in and superior news that you believe; and your natural heart is more averse to believe in Jesus than to believing in any one else. The Holy Spirit must teach your faith to grasp the high things of Christ Jesus; but that grasp is by the hand of a simple, childlike faith. But it is the same faith. It is the gift of God in so far as this—that God gives you the understanding and the judgment to exercise it upon His Son, and to receive Him. The faith of a child in his father is almost always a wonderful faith, just the faith that we would ask for our Lord Jesus. Many children believe that there is no other man in the world so great and good, right and kind, and

rich and everything else, as their father is; and if anybody were to say that their father was not so wonderful, they would become quite grieved for if their father is not a king, it is a mistake that he is not! Children think like this about their parents, and that is the kind of faith we would have you exercise towards the Lord Jesus Christ, Who deserves such confidence and much more. We should give to Jesus a faith by which we do Him honour and magnify Him greatly.

Just as the child never thinks where the bread and butter is to come from tomorrow, and it never enters its little head to fret about where it will get new socks when the present ones are worn out, so you must trust in Jesus Christ for every thing you want between here and heaven—trust Him without asking questions. He can and will provide. Just give yourself up to Him entirely, as a child gives itself up to a parent's care, and feels itself to be at ease. Oh, what a simple act it is, this act of faith! I am sure that it must be a very simple act, and cannot require great wisdom, because I notice that the wise people cannot do it; the strong people cannot do it; the people who are righteous in themselves cannot reach it. Faith is a kind of act which is performed by those who are childlike in heart, whom the world calls fools and ridicules and persecutes for their folly. "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God...hath chosen the weak things of the world...And base things...and things which are despised hath God chosen" (1Co 1:26-27). There are people with no education whatever who just know their Bibles are true, and have an abundant faith: they are poor in this world, but rich in faith. Happy people! Alas, for those wise people whose wisdom prevents faith in Jesus! They have been to more than one university, and have earned all the degrees that carnal wisdom can bestow upon them, and yet they cannot believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Oh, friend, do not think that faith is some difficult and puzzling thing, for then these senior wranglers and doctors of divinity would have it. It is the simplest act that the mind can perform.

"But shall I not have to do many good works?" says somebody. You shall do as many as you like when you are saved; but in this matter of your salvation you must fling all self-righteousness away as so much devilry that will ruin and injure you, and come simply to Christ, and Christ alone and trust in Him.

"Oh," says another, "I think I see a little light. If I am enabled—if I get enough power to trust in Jesus, I shall be made whole." I will ask another question: Do you not know that *you are bound to believe in Christ*—that it is Christ's due that He be believed in? My own conviction is that a great many of you can, and that already, to a large extent, you do; only you are looking for signs and wonders which will never come. Why not exert that power a little farther? The Spirit of God has given to you a measure of faith; oh, believe more fully, more unreservedly. Why, you shiver at the very thought of doubting Christ. You felt how unjust and wrong it was; there is latent in you already a faith in Him. "He that believeth not God hath made him a liar" (1Jo 5:10). Would you make Christ a liar? Why not bring faith to the front and say, "I do believe, I will believe, that the Christ Who is the Son of the Highest, and Who died for the guilt of men, is able to save those who trust Him, and therefore I trust Him to save me. Sink or swim, I trust Him. Lost or saved, I will trust Him. Just as I am, with no other plea but that I am sure that He is able and willing to save, I cast my guilty soul on Him"? You have the power to trust Jesus when you have already yielded to the conviction that He is worthy to be trusted. You have only to push to its practical conclusion what God the Holy Spirit has already wrought in you, and you will at once find peace.

Still, if you think that there is something that prevents your having faith in Christ, though you know that if you had it you would be saved, I earnestly entreat you not to stay contentedly for a single hour without a full, complete, and saving faith in Christ for if you die as an unbeliever, you are lost, and lost forever. Your only safety lies in believing in the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart, and obeying His commandments. ❧

Available in print as a booklet from Chapel Library.

AROUND THE WICKET GATE

Preface

Millions of men are in the outlying regions, far off from God and peace; for these we pray, and to these we give warning. But just now we have to do with a smaller company, who are not far from the kingdom, but have come right up to the wicket

gate¹⁸ which stands at the head of the way of life. One would think that they would hasten to enter, for a free and open invitation is placed over the entrance, the porter waits to welcome them, and there is but this one way to eternal life. He that is most loaded seems the most likely to pass in and begin the heavenward journey; but what ails the other men?

This is what I want to find out. Poor fellows! they have come a long way already to get where they are; and the King's highway, which they seek, is right before them: why do they not take to the Pilgrim Road at once? Alas! they have a great many reasons; and foolish as those reasons are, it needs a very wise man to answer them all. I cannot pretend to do so. Only the Lord Himself can remove the folly which is bound up in their hearts, and lead them to take the great decisive step. Yet the Lord works by means; and I have prepared this little book in the earnest hope that He may work by it to the blessed end of leading seekers to an immediate, simple trust in the Lord Jesus.

He who does not take the step of faith, and so enter upon the road to heaven, will perish. It will be an awful thing to die just outside the gate of life. Almost saved, but altogether lost! This is the most terrible of positions. A man just outside Noah's ark would have been drowned; a manslayer close to the wall of the city of refuge, but yet outside of it, would be slain; and the man who is within a yard of Christ, and yet has not trusted Him, will be lost. Therefore am I in terrible earnest to get my hesitating friends over the threshold. Come in! Come in! is my pressing entreaty. "Wherefore standest thou without?" is my solemn enquiry. May the Holy Spirit render my pleadings effectual with many who shall glance at these pages! May He cause His own Almighty power to create faith in the soul at once!

My reader, if God blesses this book to you, do the writer this favour—either lend your own copy to one who is lingering at the gate, or buy another and give it away; for his great desire is that this little volume should be of service to many thousands of souls. To God this book is commended; for without His grace nothing will come of all that is written.

—C. H. Spurgeon

¹⁸ **wicket gate** – the entrance to the way of salvation as depicted in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 1678. Much of the imagery Spurgeon used is taken from Bunyan's allegory.

1. Awakening

Great numbers of persons have no concern about eternal things. They care more about their cats and dogs than about their souls. It is a great mercy to be made to think about ourselves, and how we stand towards God and the eternal world. This is full often a sign that salvation is coming to us. By nature we do not like the anxiety which spiritual concern causes us, and we try, like sluggards, to sleep again. This is great foolishness; for it is at our peril that we trifle when death is so near, and judgment is so sure. If the Lord has chosen us to eternal life, he will not let us return to our slumber. If we are sensible, we shall pray that our anxiety about our souls may never come to an end till we are really and truly saved. Let us say from our hearts,

“He that suffered in my stead,

Shall my Physician be;

I will not be comforted

Till Jesus comfort me.”

It would be an awful thing to go dreaming down to hell, and there to lift up our eyes with a great gulf fixed between us and heaven. It will be equally terrible to be aroused to escape from the wrath to come, and then to shake off the warning influence, and go back to our insensibility. I notice that those who overcome their convictions and continue in their sins are not so easily moved the next time: every awakening which is thrown away leaves the soul more drowsy than before, and less likely to be again stirred to holy feeling. Therefore our heart should be greatly troubled at the thought of getting rid of its trouble in any other than the right way. One who had the gout was cured of it by a quack medicine, which drove the disease within, and the patient died. To be cured of distress of mind by a false hope, would be a terrible business: the remedy would be worse than the disease. Better far that our tenderness of conscience should cause us long years of anguish, than that we should lose it, and perish in the hardness of our hearts.

Yet awakening is not a thing to rest in, or to desire to have lengthened out month after month. If I start up in a fright, and find my house on fire, I do not sit down at the edge of the bed, and say to myself, “I hope I am truly awakened! Indeed, I am deeply grateful that I am not left to sleep on!” No, I want to escape from threatened death, and so I hasten to the door or to the window, that I may get out, and may not perish where I am. It would be a questionable boon to be aroused, and yet not to escape from the danger. Remember, awakening is not salvation. A man may know that he is lost, and yet he may never be saved. He may be made thoughtful, and yet he may die in his sins. If you find out that you are a bankrupt, the consideration of your debts will not pay them. A man may examine his wounds all the year around, and they will be none the nearer being healed because he feels their smart, and notes their number. It is one trick of the devil to tempt a man to be satisfied with a sense of sin; and another trick of the same deceiver to insinuate that the sinner may not be content to trust Christ, unless he can bring a certain measure of despair to add to the Saviour’s finished work. Our awakenings are not to help the Saviour, but to help us to the Saviour. To imagine that my feeling of sin is to assist in the removal of the sin is absurd. It is as though I said that water could not cleanse my face unless I had looked longer in the glass, and had counted the smuts upon my forehead. A sense of need of salvation by grace is a very healthful sign; but one needs wisdom to use it aright, and not to make an idol of it.

Some seem as if they had fallen in love with their doubts, and fears, and distresses. You cannot get them away from their terrors—they seem wedded to them. It is said that the worst trouble with horses when their stables are on fire, is that you cannot get them to come out of their stalls. If they would but follow your lead, they might escape the flames; but they seem to be paralyzed with fear. So the fear of the fire prevents their escaping the fire. Reader, will your very fear of the wrath to come prevent your escaping from it? We hope not.

One who had been long in prison was not willing to come out. The door was open; but he pleaded even with tears to be allowed to stay where he had been so long. Fond of prison! Wedded to the iron bolts and the prison fare! Surely the prisoner must have been a little touched in the head! Are you willing to remain an awakened one, and nothing more? Are you not eager to be at once forgiven? If you would tarry in anguish and dread, surely you, too, must be a little out of your mind! If peace is to be had, have it at once! Why tarry in the darkness of the pit, wherein your feet sink in the miry clay? There is light to be had; light marvellous and heavenly; why lie in the gloom and die in anguish? You do not know how near salvation is to you. If you did, you would surely stretch out your hand and take it, for there it is; and it is to be had for the taking.

Do not think that feelings of despair would fit you for mercy. When the pilgrim, on his way to the Wicket Gate, tumbled into the Slough of Despond, do you think that, when the foul mire of that slough stuck to his garments, it

was a recommendation to him, to get him easier admission at the head of the way? It is not so. The pilgrim did not think so by any means; neither may you. It is not what you feel that will save you, but what Jesus felt. Even if there were some healing value in feelings, they would have to be good ones; and the feeling which makes us doubt the power of Christ to save, and prevents our finding salvation in him, is by no means a good one, but a cruel wrong to the love of Jesus.

Our friend has come to see us, and has travelled through our crowded London by rail, or tram, or omnibus. On a sudden he turns pale. We ask him what is the matter, and he answers, "I have lost my pocket-book, and it contained all the money I have in the world." He goes over the amount to a penny, and describes the cheques, bills, notes, and coins. We tell him that it must be a great consolation to him to be so accurately acquainted with the extent of his loss. He does not seem to see the worth of our consolation. We assure him that he ought to be grateful that he has so clear a sense of his loss; for many persons might have lost their pocket-books and have been quite unable to compute their losses. Our friend is not, however, cheered in the least. "No," says he, "to know my loss does not help me to recover it. Tell me where I can find my property, and you have done me real service; but merely to know my loss is no comfort whatever." Even so, to believe that you have sinned, and that your soul is forfeited to the justice of God, is a very proper thing; but it will not save. Salvation is not by our knowing our own ruin, but by fully grasping the deliverance provided in Christ Jesus. A person who refuses to look to the Lord Jesus, but persists in dwelling upon his sin and ruin, reminds us of a boy who dropped a shilling down an open grating of a London sewer, and lingered there for hours, finding comfort in saying, "It rolled in just there! Just between those two iron bars I saw it go right down." Poor soul! Long might he remember the details of his loss before he would in this way get back a single penny into his pocket, wherewith to buy himself a piece of bread. You see the drift of the parable; profit by it.

2. Jesus Only

We cannot too often or too plainly tell the seeking soul that his only hope for salvation lies in the Lord Jesus Christ. It lies in Him completely, only, and alone. To save both from the guilt and the power of sin, Jesus is all-sufficient. His name is called Jesus, because "He shall save his people from their sins" (Mat 1:21). "The Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins" (Mat 9:6). He is exalted on high "to give repentance...and forgiveness of sins" (Act 5:31). It pleased God from of old to devise a method of salvation which should be all contained in His only-begotten Son. The Lord Jesus, for the working out of this salvation, became man, and being found in fashion as a man, became obedient to death, even the death of the cross. If another way of deliverance had been possible, the cup of bitterness would have passed from Him. It stands to reason that the darling of heaven would not have died to save us if we could have been rescued at less expense. Infinite grace provided the great sacrifice; infinite love submitted to death for our sakes. How can we dream that there can be another way than the way which God has provided at such cost, and set forth in Holy Scripture so simply and so pressingly? Surely it is true that "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Act 4:12).

To suppose that the Lord Jesus has only half saved men, and that there is needed some work or feeling of their own to finish His work, is wicked. What is there of ours that could be added to His blood and righteousness? "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa 64:6). Can these be patched on to the costly fabric of His divine righteousness? Rags and fine white linen! Our dross and His pure gold! It is an insult to the Saviour to dream of such a thing. We have sinned enough, without adding this to all our other offences.

Even if we had any righteousness in which we could boast; if our fig leaves were broader than usual, and were not so utterly fading, it would be wisdom to put them away, and accept that righteousness which must be far more pleasing to God than anything of our own. The Lord must see more that is acceptable in His Son than in the best of us. The best of us! The words seem satirical, though they were not so intended. What best is there about any of us? "There is none that doeth good; no, not one" (Rom 3:12). I who write these lines, would most freely confess that I have not a thread of goodness of my own. I could not make up so much as a rag, or a piece of a rag. I am utterly destitute. But if I had the fairest suit of good works which even pride can imagine, I would tear it up that I might put on nothing but the garments of salvation, which are freely given by the Lord Jesus, out of the heavenly wardrobe of His own merits.

It is most glorifying to our Lord Jesus Christ that we should hope for every good thing from Him alone. This is to treat Him as He deserves to be treated; for as He is God, and beside Him there is none else, we are bound to look unto Him and be saved.

This is to treat Him as He loves to be treated, for He bids all those who labour and are heavy laden to come to Him, and He will give them rest. To imagine that He cannot save to the uttermost is to limit the Holy One of Israel, and put a slur upon His power; or else to slander the loving heart of the Friend of sinners, and cast a doubt upon His love. In either case, we should commit a cruel and wanton sin against the tenderest points of His honour, which are His ability and willingness to save all that come unto God by Him.

The child, in danger of the fire, just clings to the fireman, and trusts to him alone. She raises no question about the strength of his limbs to carry her, or the zeal of his heart to rescue her; but she clings. The heat is terrible, the smoke is blinding, but she clings; and her deliverer quickly bears her to safety. In the same childlike confidence cling to Jesus, who can and will bear you out of danger from the flames of sin.

The nature of the Lord Jesus should inspire us with the fullest confidence. As He is God, He is almighty to save; as He is man, He is filled with all fulness to bless; as He is God and man in one Majestic Person, He meets man in His creatureship and God in His holiness. The ladder is long enough to reach from Jacob prostrate on the earth, to Jehovah reigning in heaven. To bring another ladder would be to suppose that He failed to bridge the distance; and this would be grievously to dishonour Him. If even to add to His words is to draw a curse upon ourselves, what must it be to pretend to add to Himself? Remember that He, Himself, is the Way; and to suppose that we must, in some manner, add to the divine road, is to be arrogant enough to think of adding to Him. Away with such a notion! Loathe it as you would blasphemy; for in essence it is the worst of blasphemy against the Lord of love.

To come to Jesus with a price in our hand, would be insufferable pride, even if we had any price that we could bring. What does He need of us? What could we bring if He did need it? Would He sell the priceless blessings of His redemption? That which He wrought out in His heart's blood, would He barter it with us for our tears, and vows, or for ceremonial observances, and feelings, and works? He is not reduced to make a market of Himself: He will give freely, as beseems His royal love; but He that offereth a price to Him knows not with whom he is dealing, nor how grievously he vexes His free Spirit. Empty-handed sinners may have what they will. All that they can possibly need is in Jesus, and He gives it for the asking; but we must believe that He is all in all, and we must not dare to breathe a word about completing what He has finished, or fitting ourselves for what He gives to us as undeserving sinners.

The reason why we may hope for forgiveness of sin, and life eternal, by faith in the Lord Jesus, is that God has so appointed. He has pledged Himself in the gospel to save all who truly trust in the Lord Jesus, and He will never run back from His promise. He is so well pleased with His only-begotten Son, that He takes pleasure in all who lay hold upon Him as their one and only hope. The great God Himself has taken hold on him who has taken hold on His Son. He works salvation for all who look for that salvation to the once-slain Redeemer. For the honour of His Son, He will not suffer the man who trusts in Him to be ashamed. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (Joh 3:36); for the ever-living God has taken him unto Himself, and has given to him to be a partaker of His life. If Jesus only be your trust, you need not fear but what you shall effectually be saved, both now and in the day of His appearing.

When a man confides, there is a point of union between him and God, and that union guarantees blessing. Faith saves us because it makes us cling to Christ Jesus, and He is one with God, and thus brings us into connection with God. I am told that, years ago, above the Falls of Niagara, a boat was upset, and two men were being carried down by the current, when persons on the shore managed to float a rope out to them, which rope was seized by them both.

One of them held fast to it, and was safely drawn to the bank; but the other, seeing a great log come floating by, unwisely let go the rope, and clung to the great piece of timber, for it was the bigger thing of the two, and apparently better to cling to. Alas! the timber, with the man on it, went right over the vast abyss, because there was no union between the wood and the shore. The size of the log was no benefit to him who grasped it; it needed a connection with the shore to produce safety. So, when a man trusts to his works, or to his prayers, or almsgivings, or to sacraments, or to anything of that sort, he will not be saved, because there is no junction between him and God through Christ Jesus; but faith, though it may seem to be like a slender cord, is in the hand of the great God on the shore side; infinite power pulls in the connecting line, and thus draws the man from destruction. Oh, the blessedness of faith, because it unites us to God by the Saviour, whom He has appointed, even Jesus Christ! O reader, is there not common sense in this matter? Think it over, and may there soon be a band of union between you and God, through your faith in Christ Jesus!

3. Personal Faith in Jesus

There is a wretched tendency among men to leave Christ Himself out of the gospel. They might as well leave flour out of bread. Men hear the way of salvation explained, and consent to it as being Scriptural, and in every way such as suits their case; but they forget that a plan is of no service unless it is carried out; and that in the matter of salvation their own personal faith in the Lord Jesus is essential. A road to York will not take me there, I must travel along it for myself. All the sound doctrine that ever was believed will never save a man unless he puts his trust in the Lord Jesus for himself.

Mr. Macdonald asked the inhabitants of the island of St. Kilda how a man must be saved. An old man replied, "We shall be saved if we repent, and forsake our sins, and turn to God." "Yes," said a middle-aged female, "and with a true heart, too." "Ay," rejoined a third, "and with prayer"; and, added a fourth, "It must be the prayer of the heart." "And we must be diligent, too," said a fifth, "in keeping the commandments." Thus, each having contributed his mite, feeling that a very decent creed had been made up, they all looked and listened for the preacher's approbation; but they had aroused his deepest pity: he had to begin at the beginning, and preach Christ to them. The carnal mind always maps out for itself a way in which self can work and become great; but the Lord's way is quite the reverse. The Lord Jesus puts it very compactly in Mark 16:16: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Believing and being baptized are no matters of merit to be gloried in; they are so simple that boasting is excluded, and free grace bears the palm. This way of salvation is chosen that it might be seen to be of grace alone. It may be that the reader is unsaved: what is the reason? Do you think the way of salvation, as laid down in the text we have quoted, to be dubious? Do you fear that you would not be saved if you followed it? How can that be, when God has pledged His own word for its certainty? How can that fail which God prescribes, and concerning which He gives a promise? Do you think it very easy? Why, then, do you not attend to it? Its ease leaves those without excuse who neglect it. If you would have done some great thing, be not so foolish as to neglect the little thing. To believe is to trust, or lean upon Christ Jesus; in other words, to give up self-reliance, and to rely upon the Lord Jesus. To be baptized is to submit to the ordinance which our Lord fulfilled at Jordan, to which the converted ones submitted at Pentecost, to which the jailer yielded obedience on the very night of his conversion. It is the outward confession which should always go with inward faith. The outward sign saves not; but it sets forth to us our death, burial, and resurrection with Jesus, and, like the Lord's Supper, it is not to be neglected.

The great point is to believe in Jesus, and confess your faith. Do you believe in Jesus? Then, dear friend, dismiss your fears; you shall be saved. Are you still an unbeliever? Then remember, there is but one door, and if you will not enter by it, you must perish in your sins. The door is there; but unless you enter by it, what is the use of it to you? It is of necessity that you obey the command of the gospel. Nothing can save you if you do not hear the voice of Jesus, and do His bidding indeed and of a truth. Thinking and resolving will not answer the purpose; you must come to real business; for only as you actually believe will you truly live unto God.

I heard of a friend who deeply desired to be the means of the conversion of a young man, and one said to him, "You may go to him, and talk to him, but you will get him no further; for he is exceedingly well acquainted with the plan of salvation." It was eminently so; and therefore, when our friend began to speak with the young man, he received for an answer, "I am much obliged to you, but I do not know that you can tell me much, for I have long known, and admired the plan of salvation by the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ." Alas! he was resting in the plan, but he had not believed in the Person. The plan of salvation is most blessed, but it can avail us nothing unless we personally believe in the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. What is the comfort of a plan of a house if you do not enter the house itself? What is the good of a plan of clothing if you have not a rag to cover you? Have you never heard of the Arab chief at Cairo, who was very ill, and went to the missionary, and the missionary said he could give him a prescription? He did so; and a week after he found the Arab none the better. "Did you take my prescription?" he asked. "Yes, I ate every morsel of the paper." He dreamed that he was going to be cured by devouring the physician's writing, which I may call the plan of the medicine. He should have had the prescription made up, and then it might have wrought him good, if he had taken the draught: it could do him no good to swallow the recipe.

So is it with salvation: it is not the plan of salvation which can save, it is the carrying out of that plan by the Lord Jesus in His death on our behalf, and our acceptance of the same. Under the Jewish law, the offerer brought a bullock, and laid his hands upon it: it was no dream, or theory, or plan. In the victim for sacrifice he found something substantial, which he could handle and touch: even so do we lean upon the real and true work of Jesus, the most substantial thing under heaven. We come to the Lord Jesus by faith, and say, "God has provided an atonement here, and I accept it. I believe in the fact accomplished on the cross; I am confident that sin was put away by Christ, and I rest on Him." If you would be saved, you must get beyond the acceptance of plans and doctrines to a resting in the divine person and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Dear reader, will you have Christ now?

Jesus invites all those who labour and are heavy laden to come to Him, and He will give them rest. He does not promise this to their merely dreaming about Him. They must come; and they must come to Him, and not merely to the Church, to baptism, or to the orthodox faith, or to anything short of His divine person. When the brazen serpent was lifted up in the wilderness, the people were not to look to Moses, nor to the Tabernacle, nor to the pillar of cloud, but to the brazen serpent itself (Num 21). Looking was not enough unless they looked to the right object: and the right object was not enough unless they looked. It was not enough for them to know about the serpent of brass; they must each one look to it for himself. When a man is ill, he may have a good knowledge of medicine—and yet he may die if he does not actually take the healing draught. We must receive Jesus; for “to as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.” Lay the emphasis on two words: we must receive HIM, and we must RECEIVE Him. We must open wide the door, and take Christ Jesus in; for “Christ in you” is “the hope of glory” (Col 1:27). Christ must be no myth, no dream, no phantom to us, but a real man, and truly God; and our reception of Him must be no forced and feigned acceptance, but the hearty and happy assent and consent of the soul that He shall be the all in all of our salvation. Will we not at once come to Him, and make Him our sole trust?

The dove is hunted by the hawk, and finds no security from its restless enemy. It has learned that there is shelter for it in the cleft of the rock, and it hastens there with gladsome wing. Once wholly sheltered within its refuge, it fears no bird of prey. But if it did not hide itself in the rock, it would be seized upon by its adversary. The rock would be of no use to the dove, if the dove did not enter its cleft. The whole body must be hidden in the rock. What if ten thousand other birds found a fortress there, yet that fact would not save the one dove which is now pursued by the hawk! It must put its whole self into the shelter, and bury itself within its refuge, or its life will be forfeited to the destroyer.

What a picture of faith is this! It is entering into Jesus, hiding in His wounds.

“Rock of Ages, cleft for me,

Let me hide myself in Thee.”

The dove is out of sight: the rock alone is seen. So does the guilty soul dart into the riven side of Jesus by faith, and is buried in Him out of sight of avenging justice. But there must be this personal application to Jesus for shelter; and this it is that so many put off from day to day, till it is to be feared that they will “die in their sins.” What an awful word is that! It is what our Lord said to the unbelieving Jews; and He says the same to us at this hour: “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.” It makes one’s heart quiver to think that even one who shall read these lines may yet be of the miserable company who will thus perish. The Lord prevent it of His great grace!

I saw, the other day, a remarkable picture, which I shall use as an illustration of the way of salvation by faith in Jesus. An offender had committed a crime for which he must die, but it was in the olden time, when churches were considered to be sanctuaries in which criminals might hide themselves, and so escape from death. See the transgressor! He rushes towards the church, the guards pursue him with their drawn swords, athirst for his blood! They follow him even to the church door. He rushes up the steps, and just as they are about to overtake him, and hew him in pieces on the threshold of the church, out comes the Bishop, and holding up the cross, he cries, “Back, back! Stain not the precincts of God’s house with blood! Stand back!” The fierce soldiers at once respect the emblem, and retire, while the poor fugitive hides himself behind the robes of the Bishop. It is even so with Christ. The guilty sinner flies straight away to Jesus; and though Justice pursues him, Christ lifts up His wounded hands, and cries to Justice, “Stand back! I shelter this sinner; in the secret place of my tabernacle do I hide him; I will not suffer him to perish, for he puts his trust in Me.” Sinner, fly to Christ!

But you answer, “I am too vile.” The viler you are, the more will you honour Him by believing that He is able to protect even you. “But I am so great a sinner.” Then the more honour shall be given to Him if you have faith to confide in Him, great sinner though you are. If you have a little sickness, and you tell your physician—“Sir, I am quite confident in your skill to heal,” there is no great compliment in your declaration. Anybody can cure a finger-ache, or a trifling sickness. But if you are sore sick with a complication of diseases which grievously torment you, and you say—“Sir, I seek no better physician; I will ask no other advice but yours; I trust myself joyfully with you,” what an honour have you conferred on him, that you can trust your life in his hands while it is in extreme and immediate danger! Do the like with Christ; put your soul into His care: do it deliberately, and without a doubt. Dare to quit all other hopes: venture all on Jesus; I say “venture” though there is nothing really venturesome in it, for He is abundantly able to save. Cast yourself simply on Jesus; let nothing but faith be in your soul towards Jesus; believe Him, and trust in Him, and you shall never be made ashamed of your confidence. “He that believeth on him shall not be confounded” (1Pe 2:6).

4. Faith Very Simple

To many, faith seems a hard thing. The truth is, it is only hard because it is easy. Naaman thought it hard that he should have to wash in Jordan; but if it had been some great thing, he would have done it right cheerfully (2Ki 5). People think that salvation must be the result of some act or feeling, very mysterious, and very difficult; but God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways. In order that the feeblest and the most ignorant may be saved, He has made the way of salvation as easy as the A, B, C. There is nothing about it to puzzle anyone; only, as everybody expects to be puzzled by it, many are quite bewildered when they find it to be so exceedingly simple.

The fact is, we do not believe that God means what He is saying; we act as if it could not be true.

I have heard of a Sunday-school teacher who performed an experiment which I do not think I shall ever try with children, for it might turn out to be a very expensive one. Indeed, I feel sure that the result in my case would be very different from what I now describe. This teacher had been trying to illustrate what faith was, and, as he could not get it into the minds of his boys, he took his watch, and he said, "Now, I will give you this watch, John. Will you have it?" John fell thinking what the teacher could mean, and did not seize the treasure, but made no answer. The teacher said to the next boy, "Henry, here is the watch. Will you have it?" The boy, with a very proper modesty, replied, "No, thank you, sir". The teacher tried several of the boys with the same result; till at last a youngster, who was not so wise or so thoughtful as the others, but rather more believing, said in the most natural way, "Thank you, sir," and put the watch into his pocket. Then the other boys woke up to a startling fact: their companion had received a watch which they had refused. One of the boys quickly asked of the teacher, "Is he to keep it?" "Of course he is," said the teacher; "I offered it to him, and he accepted it. I would not give a thing and take a thing: that would be very foolish. I put the watch before you, and said that I gave it to you, but none of you would have it." "Oh!" said the boy, "if I had known you meant it, I would have had it."

Of course he would. He thought it was a piece of acting, and nothing more. All the other boys were in a dreadful state of mind to think that they had lost the watch. Each one cried, "Teacher, I did not know you meant it, but I thought..." No one took the gift; but every one thought. Each one had his theory, except the simple-minded boy who believed what he was told, and got the watch. Now I wish that I could always be such a simple child as literally to believe what the Lord says, and take what He puts before me, resting quite content that He is not playing with me, and that I cannot be wrong in accepting what He sets before me in the gospel. Happy should we be if we would trust, and raise no questions of any sort. But, alas! we will get thinking and doubting. When the Lord uplifts His dear Son before a sinner, that sinner should take Him without hesitation. If you take Him, you have Him; and none can take Him from you. Out with your hand, man, and take Him at once!

When enquirers accept the Bible as literally true, and see that Jesus is really given to all who trust Him, all the difficulty about understanding the way of salvation vanishes like the morning's frost at the rising of the sun.

Two enquiring ones came to me in my vestry. They had been hearing the gospel from me for only a short season, but they had been deeply impressed by it. They expressed their regret that they were about to remove far away, but they added their gratitude that they had heard me at all. I was cheered by their kind thanks, but felt anxious that a more effectual work should be wrought in them, and therefore I asked them, "Have you in very deed believed in the Lord Jesus Christ? Are you saved?" One of them replied, "I have been trying hard to believe." This statement I have often heard, but I will never let it go by me unchallenged. "No," I said, "that will not do. Did you ever tell your father that you tried to believe him?" After I had dwelt a while upon the matter, they admitted that such language would have been an insult to their father. I then set the gospel very plainly before them in as simple language as I could, and begged them to believe Jesus, who is more worthy of faith than the best of fathers. One of them replied, "I cannot realize it: I cannot realize that I am saved." Then I went on to say, "God bears testimony to His Son, that whosoever trusts in His Son is saved. Will you make him a liar now, or will you believe His Word?" While I thus spoke, one of them started as if astonished, and she startled us all as she cried, "O sir, I see it all; I am saved! Oh, do bless Jesus for me; He has shown me the way, and He has saved me! I see it all." The esteemed sister who had brought these young friends to me knelt down with them while, with all our hearts, we blessed and magnified the Lord for a soul brought into light. One of the two sisters, however, could not see the gospel as the other had done, though I feel sure she will do so before long. Did it not seem strange that, both hearing the same words, one should come out into clear light, and the other should remain in the gloom?

The change which comes over the heart when the understanding grasps the gospel is often reflected in the face, and shines there like the light of heaven. Such newly enlightened souls often exclaim, "Why, sir, it is so plain; how is it I have not seen it before this? I understand all I have read in the Bible now, though I could not make it out before. It has all come in a minute, and now I see what I could never understand before." The fact is, the truth was

always plain, but they were looking for signs and wonders, and therefore did not see what was nigh them. Old men often look for their spectacles when they are on their foreheads; and it is commonly observed that we fail to see that which is straight before us. Christ Jesus is before our faces, and we have only to look to Him, and live; but we make all manner of bewilderment of it, and so manufacture a maze out of that which is plain as a pikestaff.

The little incident about the two sisters reminds me of another. A much-esteemed friend came to me one Sabbath morning after service, to shake hands with me, “for,” said she, “I was fifty years old on the same day as yourself. I am like you in that one thing, sir; but I am the very reverse of you in better things.” I remarked, “Then you must be a very good woman; for in many things I wish I also could be the reverse of what I am.” “No, no,” she said, “I did not mean anything of that sort: I am not right at all.” “What!” I cried, “are you not a believer in the Lord Jesus?” “Well,” she said, with much emotion, “I, I will try to be.” I laid hold of her hand, and said, “My dear soul, you are not going to tell me that you will try to believe my Lord Jesus! I cannot have such talk from you. It means blank unbelief. What has HE done that you should talk of Him in that way? Would you tell me that you would try to believe me? I know you would not treat me so rudely. You think me a true man, and so you believe me at once; and surely you cannot do less with my Lord Jesus.” Then with tears she exclaimed, “Oh, sir, do pray for me!” To this I replied, “I do not feel that I can do anything of the kind. What can I ask the Lord Jesus to do for one who will not trust Him? I see nothing to pray about. If you will believe Him, you shall be saved; and if you will not believe Him, I cannot ask Him to invent a new way to gratify your unbelief.” Then she said again, “I will try to believe”—but I told her solemnly I would have none of her trying; for the message from the Lord did not mention “trying,” but said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Act 16:31). I pressed upon her the great truth, that “He that believeth on him hath everlasting life”; and its terrible reverse—“he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God” (Joh 3:18). I urged her to full faith in the once crucified but now ascended Lord, and the Holy Spirit there and then enabled her to trust. She most tenderly said, “Oh, sir, I have been looking to my feelings, and this has been my mistake! Now I trust my soul with Jesus, and I am saved.” She found immediate peace through believing. There is no other way.

God has been pleased to make the necessities of life very simple matters. We must eat; and even a blind man can find the way to his mouth. We must drink; and even the tiniest babe knows how to do this without instruction. We have a fountain in the grounds of the Stockwell Orphanage, and when it is running in the hot weather, the boys go to it naturally. We have no class for fountain-drill. Many poor boys have come to the Orphanage, but never one who was so ignorant that he did not know how to drink. Now faith is, in spiritual things, what eating and drinking are in temporal things. By the mouth of faith we take the blessings of grace into our spiritual nature, and they are ours. O you who would believe, but think you cannot, do you not see that, as one can drink without strength, and as one can eat without strength, and gets strength by eating, so we may receive Jesus without effort, and by accepting Him we receive power for all such further effort as we may be called to put forth?

Faith is so simple a matter that, whenever I try to explain it, I am very fearful lest I should becloud its simplicity. When Thomas Scott had printed his notes upon *The Pilgrim's Progress*,¹⁹ he asked one of his parishioners whether she understood the book. “Oh yes, sir,” said she, “I understand Mr. Bunyan well enough, and I am hoping that one day, by divine grace, I may understand your explanations.” Should I not feel mortified if my reader should know what faith is, and then get confused by my explanation? I will, however, make one trial, and pray the Lord to make it clear.

I am told that on a certain highland road there was a disputed right of way. The owner wished to preserve his supremacy, and at the same time he did not wish to inconvenience the public: hence an arrangement which occasioned the following incident. Seeing a sweet country girl standing at the gate, a tourist went up to her, and offered her a shilling to permit him to pass. “No, no,” said the child, “I must not take anything from you; but you are to say, ‘Please allow me to pass,’ and then you may come through and welcome.” The permission was to be asked for; but it could be had for the asking. Just so, eternal life is free; and it can be had, yea, it shall be at once had, by trusting in the Word of Him who cannot lie. Trust Christ, and by that trust you grasp salvation and eternal life. Do not philosophize. Do not sit down, and bother your poor brain. Just believe Jesus as you would believe your father. Trust Him as you trust your money with a banker, or your health with a doctor.

Faith will not long seem a difficulty to you; nor ought it to be so, for it is simple.

Faith is trusting, trusting wholly upon the person, work, merit, and power of the Son of God. Some think this trusting is a romantic business, but indeed it is the simplest thing that can possibly be. To some of us, truths which were once hard to believe are now matters of fact which we should find it hard to doubt. If one of our great grandfa-

¹⁹ *The Pilgrim's Progress* – second best-selling book of all time after the Bible, published in 1678, written by John Bunyan (1628-1688). Thomas Scott wrote explanatory notes for an 1801 edition.

thers were to rise from the dead, and come into the present state of things, what a deal of trusting he would have to do! He would say tomorrow morning, "Where are the flint and steel? I want a light;" and we should give him a little box with tiny pieces of wood in it, and tell him to strike one of them on the box. He would have to trust a good deal before he would believe that fire would thus be produced. We should next say to him, "Now that you have a light, turn that tap, and light the gas." He sees nothing. How can light come through an invisible vapour? And yet it does. "Come with us, grandfather. Sit in that chair. Look at that box in front of you. You shall have your likeness directly." "No, child," he would say, "it is ridiculous. The sun take my portrait? I cannot believe it." "Yes, and you shall ride fifty miles in an hour without horses." He will not believe it till we get him into the train. "My dear sir, you shall speak to your son in New York, and he shall answer you in a few minutes." Should we not astonish the old gentleman? Would he not want all his faith? Yet these things are believed by us without effort, because experience has made us familiar with them. Faith is greatly needed by you who are strangers to spiritual things; you seem lost while we are talking about them. But oh, how simple it is to us who have the new life, and have communion with spiritual realities! We have a Father to whom we speak, and He hears us, and a blessed Saviour who hears our heart's longings, and helps us in our struggles against sin. It is all plain to him that understandeth. May it now be plain to you!

5. Fearing to Believe

It is an odd product of our unhealthy nature—the fear to believe. Yet have I met with it often: so often that I wish I may never see it again. It looks like humility, and tries to pass itself off as the very soul of modesty, and yet it is an infamously proud thing: in fact, it is presumption playing the hypocrite. If men were afraid to disbelieve, there would be good sense in the fear; but to be afraid to trust their God is at best an absurdity, and in very deed it is a deceitful way of refusing to the Lord the honour that is due to His faithfulness and truth.

How unprofitable is the diligence which busies itself in finding out reasons why faith in our case should not be saving! We have God's word for it, that whosoever believeth in Jesus shall not perish, and we search for arguments why we should perish if we did believe. If any one gave me an estate, I certainly should not commence raising questions as to the title. What can be the use of inventing reasons why I should not hold my own house, or possess any other piece of property which is enjoyed by me? If the Lord is satisfied to save me through the merits of His dear Son, assuredly I may be satisfied to be so saved. If I take God at His word, the responsibility of fulfilling His promise does not lie with me, but with God, who made the promise.

But you fear that you may not be one of those for whom the promise is intended. Do not be alarmed by that idle suspicion. No soul ever came to Jesus wrongly. No one can come at all unless the Father draw him; and Jesus has said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." No soul ever lays hold on Christ in a way of robbery; he that hath Him hath Him of right divine; for the Lord's giving of Himself for us, and to us, is so free, that every soul that takes Him has a grace-given right to do so. If you lay hold on Jesus by the hem of His garment, without leave, and behind Him, yet virtue will flow from Him to you as surely as if He had called you out by name, and bidden you trust Him. Dismiss all fear when you trust the Saviour. Take Him and welcome, He that believeth in Jesus is one of God's elect.

Did you suggest that it would be a horrible thing if you were to trust in Jesus and yet perish? It would be so. But as you must perish if you do not trust, the risk at the worst is not very great.

"I can but perish if I go;

I am resolved to try;

For if I stay away,

I know I must for ever die."

Suppose you stand in the Slough of Despond for ever; what will be the good of that? Surely it would be better to die struggling along the King's highway towards the Celestial City, than sinking deeper and deeper in the mire and filth of dark distrustful thoughts! You have nothing to lose, for you have lost everything already; therefore make a dash for it, and dare to believe in the mercy of God to you, even to you.

But one moans, "What if I come to Christ, and He refuses me?" My answer is, "Try Him." Cast yourself on the Lord Jesus, and see if He refuses you. You will be the first against whom He has shut the door of hope. Friend, don't cross that bridge till you come to it! When Jesus casts you out, it will be time enough to despair; but that time will never come. "This man receiveth sinners" (Luk 15:2); He has not so much as begun to cast them out (Joh 6:37).

Have you never heard of the man who lost his way one night, and came to the edge of a precipice, as he thought. and in his own apprehension fell over the cliff? He clutched at an old tree, and there hung, clinging to his frail support with all his might. He felt persuaded that, should he quit his hold, he would be dashed in pieces on some awful rocks that waited for him down below. There he hung, with the sweat upon his brow, and anguish in every limb. He passed into a desperate state of fever and faintness, and at last his hands could hold up his body no longer. He relaxed his grasp! He dropped from his support! He fell—about a foot or so, and was received upon a soft mossy bank, whereon he lay, altogether unhurt, and perfectly safe till morning. Thus, in the darkness of their ignorance, many think that sure destruction awaits them, if they confess their sin, quit all hope in self, and resign themselves into the hands of God. They are afraid to quit the hope to which they ignorantly cling. It is an idle fear. Give up your hold upon everything but Christ, and drop. Drop from all trust in your works, or prayers, or feelings. Drop at once! Drop now! Soft and safe shall be the bank that receives you. Jesus Christ, in His love, in the efficacy of His precious blood, in His perfect righteousness, will give you immediate rest and peace. Cease from self-confidence. Fall into the arms of Jesus. This is the major part of faith—giving up every other hold, and simply falling upon Christ. There is no reason for fear: only ignorance causes your dread of that which will be your eternal safety. The death of carnal hope is the life of faith, and the life of faith is life everlasting. Let self die, that Christ may live in you.

But the mischief is that, to the one act of faith in Jesus, we cannot bring men. They will adopt any expedient sooner than have done with self. They fight shy of believing, and fear faith as if it were a monster. O foolish tremblers, who has bewitched you? You fear that which would be the death of all your fear, and the beginning of your joy. Why will you perish through perversely preferring other ways to God's own appointed plan of salvation?

Alas! there are many, many souls that say, "We are bidden to trust in Jesus, but instead of that we will attend the means of grace regularly." Attend public worship by all means, but not as a substitute for faith, or it will become a vain confidence. The command is, "Believe and live"; attend to that, whatever else you do. "Well, I shall take to reading good books; perhaps I shall get good that way." Read the good books by all means, but that is not the gospel: the gospel is, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Act 16:31). Suppose a physician has a patient under his care, and he says to him, "You are to take a bath in the morning; it will be of very great service to your disease." But the man takes a cup of tea in the morning instead of the bath, and he says, "That will do as well, I have no doubt." What does his physician say when he enquires—"Did you follow my rule?" "No, I did not." "Then you do not expect, of course, that there will be any good result from my visits, since you take no notice of my directions."

So we, practically, say to Jesus Christ, when we are under searching of soul, "Lord, Thou badest me trust Thee, but I would sooner do something else! Lord, I want to have horrible convictions; I want to be shaken over hell's mouth; I want to be alarmed and distressed!" Yes, you want anything but what Christ prescribes for you, which is that you should simply trust Him. Whether you feel or do not feel, cast yourself on Him, that He may save you, and He alone. "But you do not mean to say that you speak against praying, and reading good books, and so on?" Not one single word do I speak against any of those things, any more than, if I were the physician I quoted, I should speak against the man's drinking a cup of tea. Let him drink his tea; but not if he drinks it instead of taking the bath which is prescribed for him. So let the man pray: the more the better. Let the man search the Scriptures; but, remember, that if these things are put in the place of simple faith in Christ, the soul will be ruined. Beware lest it be said of any of you by our Lord, ye "search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; but ye will not come unto me that ye might have life" (Joh 5:39).

Come by faith to Jesus, for without Him you perish for ever. Did you ever notice how a fir-tree will get a hold among rocks which seem to afford it no soil? It sends a rootlet into any little crack which opens; it clutches even the bare rock as with a huge bird's claw; it holds fast, and binds itself to earth with a hundred anchorages. We have often seen trees thus firmly rooted upon detached masses of bare rock. Now, dear heart, let this be a picture of yourself. Grip the Rock of Ages. With the rootlet of little-faith hold to Him. Let that tiny feeler grow; and, meanwhile, send out another to take a new grasp of the same Rock. Lay hold on Jesus, and keep hold on Jesus. Grow up into Him. Twist the roots of your nature, the fibres of your heart, about Him. He is as free to you as the rocks are to the fir-tree: be you as firmly lashed to Him as the pine is to the mountain's side.

6. Difficulty in the Way of Believing

It may be that the reader feels a difficulty in believing. Let him consider. We cannot believe by an immediate act. The state of mind which we describe as believing is a result, following upon certain former states of mind. We come to faith by degrees. There may be such a thing as faith at first sight; but usually we reach faith by stages: we

become interested, we consider, we hear evidence, we are convinced, and so led to believe. If, then, I wish to believe, but for some reason or other find that I cannot attain to faith, what shall I do? Shall I stand like a cow staring at a new gate; or shall I, like an intelligent being, use the proper means? If I wish to believe anything, what shall I do? We will answer according to the rules of common sense.

If I were told that the Sultan of Zanzibar was a good man, and it happened to be a matter of interest to me, I do not suppose I should feel any difficulty in believing it. But if for some reason I had a doubt about it, and yet wished to believe the news, how should I act? Should I not hunt up all the information within my reach about his Majesty, and try, by study of the newspapers and other documents, to arrive at the truth? Better still, if he happened to be in this country, and would see me, and I could also converse with members of his court, and citizens of his country, I should be greatly helped to arrive at a decision by using these sources of information. Evidence weighed and knowledge obtained lead up to faith. It is true that faith in Jesus is the gift of God: but yet He usually bestows it in accordance with the laws of mind, and hence we are told that “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17). If you want to believe in Jesus, hear about Him, read about Him, think about Him, know about Him, and so you will find faith springing up in your heart, like the wheat which comes up through the moisture and the heat operating upon the seed which has been sown. If I wished to have faith in a certain physician, I should ask for testimonials of his cures, I should wish to see the diplomas which certified to his professional knowledge, and I should also like to hear what he has to say upon certain complicated cases. In fact, I should take means to know, in order that I might believe.

Be much in hearing concerning Jesus. Souls by hundreds come to faith in Jesus under a ministry which sets Him forth clearly and constantly. Few remain unbelieving under a preacher whose great subject is Christ crucified. Hear no minister of any other sort. There are such. I have heard of one who found in his pulpit Bible a paper bearing this text, “Sir, we would see Jesus.” Go to the place of worship to see Jesus; and if you cannot even hear the mention of His name, take yourself off to another place where He is more thought of, and is therefore more likely to be present.

Be much in reading about the Lord Jesus. The books of Scripture are the lilies among which He feedeth. The Bible is the window through which we may look and see our Lord. Read over the story of His sufferings and death with devout attention, and before long the Lord will cause faith secretly to enter your soul. The Cross of Christ not only rewards faith, but begets faith. Many a believer can say—

“When I view Thee, wounded, grieving,

Breathless, on the cursed tree,

Soon I feel my heart believing

Thou has suffered thus for me.”

If hearing and reading suffice not, then deliberately set your mind to work to overhaul the matter, and have it out. Either believe, or know the reason why you do not believe. See the matter through to the utmost of your ability, and pray God to help you to make a thorough investigation, and to come to an honest decision one way or the other. Consider who Jesus was, and whether the constitution of His Person does not entitle Him to confidence. Consider what He did, and whether this also must not be good ground for trust. Consider Him as dying, rising from the dead, ascending, and ever living to intercede for transgressors; and see whether this does not entitle Him to be relied on by you. Then cry to Him, and see if He does not hear you. When Usher wished to know whether Rutherford²⁰ was indeed as holy a man as he was said to be, he went to his house as a beggar, and gained a lodging, and heard the man of God pouring out his heart before the Lord in the night. If you would know Jesus, get as near to Him as you can by studying His character, and appealing to His love.

At one time I might have needed evidence to make me believe in the Lord Jesus; but now I know Him so well, by proving Him, that I should need a very great deal of evidence to make me doubt Him. It is now more natural to me to trust than to disbelieve: this is the new nature triumphing; it was not so at the first. The novelty of faith is, in the beginning, a source of weakness; but act after act of trusting turns faith into a habit. Experience brings to faith strong confirmation.

I am not perplexed with doubt, because the truth which I believe has wrought a miracle on me. By its means I have received and still retain a new life, to which I was once a stranger: and this is confirmation of the strongest sort. I am like the good man and his wife who had kept a lighthouse for years. A visitor, who came to see the lighthouse, looking out from the window over the waste of waters, asked the good woman, “Are you not afraid at night,

²⁰ **Samuel Rutherford** (1600-1661) – respected Scottish Puritan pastor, whose letters were collected and published by Andrew Bonar. [Selected letters available from Chapel Library in a booklet entitled, *Letters of Samuel Rutherford*.]

when the storm is out, and the big waves dash right over the lantern? Do you not fear that the lighthouse, and all that is in it, will be carried away? I am sure I should be afraid to trust myself in a slender tower in the midst of the great billows." The woman remarked that the idea never occurred to her now. She had lived there so long that she felt as safe on the lone rock as ever she did when she lived on the mainland. As for her husband, when asked if he did not feel anxious when the wind blew a hurricane, he answered, "Yes, I feel anxious to keep the lamps well trimmed, and the light burning, lest any vessel should be wrecked." As to anxiety about the safety of the lighthouse, or his own personal security in it, he had outlived all that. Even so it is with the full-grown believer. He can humbly say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." From henceforth let no man trouble me with doubts and questionings; I bear in my soul the proofs of the Spirit's truth and power, and I will have none of your artful reasonings. The gospel to me is truth: I am content to perish if it be not true. I risk my soul's eternal fate upon the truth of the gospel, and I know that there is no risk in it. My one concern is to keep the lights burning, that I may thereby benefit others. Only let the Lord give me oil enough to feed my lamp, so that I may cast a ray across the dark and treacherous sea of life, and I am well content.

Now, troubled seeker, if it be so, that your minister, and many others in whom you confide, have found perfect peace and rest in the gospel, why should not you? Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened; do not His words do good to them that walk uprightly (Mic 2:7)? Will not you also try their saving virtue?

Most true is the gospel, for God is its Author. Believe it. Most able is the Saviour, for He is the Son of God. Trust Him. Most powerful is His precious blood. Look to it for pardon. Most loving is His gracious heart. Run to it at once.

Thus would I urge the reader to seek faith; but if he be unwilling, what more can I do? I have brought the horse to the water, but I cannot make him drink. This, however, be it remembered—unbelief is wilful when evidence is put in a man's way, and he refuses carefully to examine it. He that does not desire to know, and accept the truth, has himself to thank if he dies with a lie in his right hand. It is true that "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved": it is equally true that "he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mar 16:16).

7. A Helpful Survey

To help the seeker to a true faith in Jesus, I would remind him of the work of the Lord Jesus in the room and place and stead of sinners. "When we were yet without strength, in due time *Christ died for the ungodly*" (Rom 5:6). "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (1Pe 2:24). "The LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa 53:6). "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1Pe 3:18).

Upon one declaration of Scripture let the reader fix his eye. "*With his stripes we are healed*" (Isa 53:5). God here treats sin as a disease, and He sets before us the costly remedy which He has provided.

I ask you very solemnly to accompany me in your meditations, for a few minutes, while I bring before you the stripes of the Lord Jesus. The Lord resolved to restore us, and therefore He sent His only-begotten Son, "very God of very God," that He might descend into this world to take upon Himself our nature, in order to our redemption. He lived as a man among men; and, in due time, after thirty years or more of obedience, the time came when He should do us the greatest service of all, namely, stand in our stead, and bear "the chastisement of our peace" (Isa 53:5). He went to Gethsemane, and there, at the first taste of our bitter cup, He sweat great drops of blood (Luk 22:44). He went to Pilate's hall, and Herod's judgment-seat, and there drank draughts of pain and scorn in our room and place. Last of all, they took Him to the cross, and nailed Him there to die—to die in our stead. The word "stripes" is used to set forth His sufferings, both of body and of soul. The whole of Christ was made a sacrifice for us: His whole manhood suffered. As to His body, it shared with His mind in a grief that never can be described. In the beginning of His passion, when He emphatically suffered instead of us, He was in an agony, and from His bodily frame a bloody sweat distilled so copiously as to fall to the ground. It is very rarely that a man sweats blood. There have been one or two instances of it, and they have been followed by almost immediate death; but our Saviour lived—lived after an agony which, to anyone else, would have proved fatal. Ere He could cleanse His face from this dreadful crimson, they hurried Him to the high priest's hall. In the dead of night they bound Him, and led Him away. Anon they took Him to Pilate and to Herod. These scourged Him, and their soldiers spat in His face, and buffeted Him, and put on His head a crown of thorns. Scourging is one of the most awful tortures that can be inflicted by malice. It was formerly the disgrace of the British army that the "cat" was used upon the soldier: a brutal infliction of torture. But to the Roman, cruelty was so natural that he made his common punishments worse than brutal. The Roman scourge is said to have been made of the sinews of oxen, twisted into knots, and into these knots

were inserted slivers of bone, and huckle-bones of sheep; so that every time the scourge fell upon the bare back, the plowers made deep furrows (Psa 129:3).

Our Saviour was called upon to endure the fierce pain of the Roman scourge, and this not as the *finis* of His punishment, but as a preface to crucifixion. To this His persecutors added buffeting, and plucking of the hair: they spared Him no form of pain. In all His faintness, through bleeding and fasting, they made Him carry His cross until another was forced, by the forethought of their cruelty, to bear it, lest their victim should die on the road. They stripped Him, and threw Him down, and nailed Him to the wood. They pierced His hands and His feet. They lifted up the tree, with Him upon it, and then dashed it down into its place in the ground, so that all His limbs were dislocated, according to the lament of the twenty-second psalm, "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint." He hung in the burning sun till the fever dissolved His strength, and He said, "My heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death" (Psa 22:14). There He hung, a spectacle to God and men. The weight of His body was first sustained by His feet, till the nails tore through the tender nerves: and then the painful load began to drag upon His hands, and rend those sensitive parts of His frame. How small a wound in the hand has brought on lockjaw! How awful must have been the torment caused by that dragging iron tearing through the delicate parts of the hands and feet! Now were all manner of bodily pains centred in His tortured frame. All the while His enemies stood around, pointing at Him in scorn, thrusting out their tongues in mockery, jesting at His prayers, and gloating over His sufferings. He cried, "I thirst," and then they gave Him vinegar mingled with gall. After a while He said, "It is finished" (Joh 19:30). He had endured the utmost of appointed grief, and had made full vindication to divine justice: then, and not till then, He gave up the ghost. Holy men of old have enlarged most lovingly upon the bodily sufferings of our Lord, and I have no hesitation in doing the same, trusting that trembling sinners may see salvation in these painful "stripes" of the Redeemer.

To describe the outward sufferings of our Lord is not easy: I acknowledge that I have failed. But His soul-sufferings, which were the soul of His sufferings, who can even conceive, much less express, what they were? At the very first I told you that He sweat great drops of blood. That was His heart driving out its life-floods to the surface through the terrible depression of spirit which was upon Him. He said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Mat 26:38). The betrayal by Judas, and the desertion of the twelve, grieved our Lord; but the weight of our sin was the real pressure on His heart. Our guilt was the olive-press which forced from Him the moisture of His life. No language can ever tell His agony in prospect of His passion; how little then can we conceive the passion itself? When nailed to the cross, He endured what no martyr ever suffered; for martyrs, when they have died, have been so sustained of God that they have rejoiced amid their pain; but our Redeemer was forsaken of His Father, until He cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Psa 22:1; Mat 27:46). That was the bitterest cry of all, the utmost depth of His unfathomable grief. Yet was it needful that He should be deserted, because God must turn His back on sin, and consequently upon Him who was made sin for us. The soul of the great Substitute suffered a horror of misery instead of that horror of hell into which sinners would have been plunged had He not taken their sin upon Himself, and been made a curse for them. It is written, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal 3:13); but who knows what that curse means?

The remedy for your sins and mine is found in the substitutionary sufferings of the Lord Jesus, and in these only. These "stripes" of the Lord Jesus Christ were on our behalf. Do you enquire, "Is there anything for us to do, to remove the guilt of sin?" I answer: There is nothing whatever for you to do. By the stripes of Jesus we are healed. All those stripes He has endured, and left not one of them for us to bear.

"But must we not believe on Him?" Ay, certainly. If I say of a certain ointment that it heals, I do not deny that you need a bandage with which to apply it to the wound. Faith is the linen which binds the plaster of Christ's reconciliation to the sore of our sin. The linen does not heal; that is the work of the ointment. So faith does not heal: that is the work of the atonement of Christ.

"But we must repent," cries another. Assuredly we must, and shall, for repentance is the first sign of healing; but the stripes of Jesus heal us, and not our repentance. These stripes, when applied to the heart, work repentance in us: we hate sin because it made Jesus suffer.

When you intelligently trust in Jesus as having suffered for you, then you discover the fact that God will never punish you for the same offence for which Jesus died. His justice will not permit Him to see the debt paid, first, by the Surety, and then again by the debtor. Justice cannot twice demand a recompense: if my bleeding Surety has borne my guilt, then I cannot bear it. Accepting Christ Jesus as suffering for me, I have accepted a complete discharge from judicial liability. I have been condemned in Christ, and there is, therefore, now no condemnation to me any more. This is the ground-work of the security of the sinner who believes in Jesus: he lives because Jesus died in

his room, and place, and stead; and he is acceptable before God because Jesus is accepted. The person for whom Jesus is an accepted Substitute must go free; none can touch him; he is clear. O my hearer, wilt thou have Jesus Christ to be thy Substitute? If so, thou art free. "He that believeth on him is not condemned" (Joh 3:18). Thus "with his stripes we are healed" (Isa 53:5).

8. A Real Hindrance

Although it is by no means a difficult thing in itself to believe Him who cannot lie, and to trust in One whom we know to be able to save, yet something may intervene which may render even this a hard thing to my reader. That hindrance may be a secret, and yet it may be none the less real. A door may be closed, not by a great stone which all can see, but by an invisible bolt which shoots into a holdfast quite out of sight. A man may have good eyes, and yet may not be able to see an object, because another substance comes in the way. You could not even see the sun if a handkerchief, or a mere piece of rag, were tied over your face. Oh, the bandages which men persist in binding over their own eyes!

A sweet sin, harboured in the heart, will prevent a soul from laying hold upon Christ by faith. The Lord Jesus has come to save us from sinning; and if we are resolved to go on sinning, Christ and our souls will never agree. If a man takes poison, and a doctor is called in to save his life, he may have a sure antidote ready; but if the patient persists in keeping the poison-bottle at his lips, and will continue to swallow the deadly drops, how can the doctor save him? Salvation consists largely in parting the sinner from his sin, and the very nature of salvation would have to be changed before we could speak of a man's being saved when he is loving sin, and wilfully living in it. A man cannot be made white, and yet continue black; he cannot be healed, and yet remain sick; neither can anyone be saved, and be still a lover of evil.

A drunkard will be saved by believing in Christ—that is to say, he will be saved from being a drunkard; but if he determines still to make himself intoxicated, he is not saved from it, and he has not truly believed in Jesus. A liar can by faith be saved from falsehood, but then he leaves off lying, and is careful to speak the truth. Anyone can see with half an eye that he cannot be saved from being a liar, and yet go on in his old style of deceit and untruthfulness. A person who is at enmity with another will be saved from that feeling of enmity by believing in the Lord Jesus; but if he vows that he will still cherish the feeling of hate, it is clear that he is not saved from it, and equally clear that he has not believed in the Lord Jesus unto salvation. The great matter is to be delivered from the love of sin: this is the sure effect of trust in the Saviour; but if this effect is so far from being desired that it is even refused, all talk of trusting in the Saviour for salvation is an idle tale. A man goes to the shipping-office, and asks if he can be taken to America. He is assured that a ship is just ready, and that he has only to go on board, and he will soon reach New York. "But," says he, "I want to stop at home in England, and mind my shop all the time I am crossing the Atlantic." The agent thinks he is talking to a madman, and tells him to go about his business, and not waste his time by playing the fool. To pretend to trust Christ to save you from sin while you are still determined to continue in it, is making a mock of Christ. I pray my reader not to be guilty of such profanity. Let him not dream that the holy Jesus will be the patron of iniquity.

Consider a tree which has ivy growing all over it strangling it, sucking out its life, and killing it. Can that tree be saved? The gardener thinks it can be. He is willing to do his best. But before he begins to use his axe and his knife, he is told that he must not cut away the ivy. "Ah! then," he says, "it is impossible. It is the ivy which is killing the tree, and if you want the tree saved, you cannot save the ivy. If you trust me to preserve the tree, you must let me get the deadly climber away from it." Is not that common sense? Certainly it is. You do not trust the tree to the gardener unless you trust him to cut away that which is deadly to it. If the sinner will keep his sin, he must die in it; if he is willing to be rescued from his sin, the Lord Jesus is able to do it, and will do it if he commits his case to His care.

What, then, is your darling sin? Is it any gross wrongdoing? Then very shame should make you cease from it. Is it love of the world, or fear of men, or longing for evil gains? Surely, none of these things should reconcile you to living in enmity with God, and beneath His frown. Is it a human love, which is eating like a canker into the heart? Can any creature rival the Lord Jesus? Is it not idolatry to allow any earthly thing to compare for one instant with the Lord God? "Well," saith one, "for me to give up the particular sin by which I am held captive, would be to my serious injury in business, would ruin my prospects, and lessen my usefulness in many ways." If it be so, you have your case met by the words of the Lord Jesus, who bids you to pluck out your eye, and cut off your hand or foot, and cast it from you, rather than be cast into hell. It is better to enter into life with one eye, with the poorest prospects, than to keep all your hopes, and be out of Christ. Better be a lame believer than a leaping sinner. Better be in the rear rank for life in the army of Christ than lead the van and be a chief officer under the command of Satan. If

you win Christ, it will little matter what you lose. No doubt many have had to suffer that which has maimed and lamed them for this life; but if they have entered thereby into eternal life, they have been great gainers.

It comes to this, my friend, as it did with John Bunyan; a voice now speaks to you, and says—WILT THOU KEEP THY SIN AND GO TO HELL? OR LEAVE THY SIN AND GO TO HEAVEN?

The point should be decided before you quit the spot. In the name of God, I ask you, Which shall it be—Christ and salvation, or the favourite sin and damnation? There is no middle course. Waiting or refusing to decide will practically be a sure decision for the evil one. He that stands questioning whether he will be honest or not, is already out of the straight line: he that does not know whether he wishes to be cleansed from sin gives evidence of a foul heart.

If you are anxious to give up every evil way, our Lord Jesus will enable you to do so at once. His grace has already changed the direction of your desires: in fact, your heart is renewed. Therefore, rest on Him to strengthen you to battle with temptations as they arise, and to fulfil the Lord's commands from day to day. The Lord Jesus is great at making the lame man to leap like a hart, and in enabling those who are sick of the palsy to take up their bed and walk. He will make you able to conquer the evil habit. He will even cast the devil out of you. Yes, if you had seven devils, He could drive them out at once; there is no limit to His power to cleanse and sanctify. Now that you are willing to be made whole, the great difficulty is removed. He that has set the will right can arrange all your other powers, and make them move to His praise. You would not have earnestly desired to quit all sin if He had not secretly inclined you in that direction. If you now trust Him, it will be clear that He has begun a good work in you, and we feel assured that He will carry it on.

9. On Raising Questions

In these days, a simple, childlike faith is very rare; but the usual thing is to believe nothing, and question everything. Doubts are as plentiful as blackberries, and all hands and lips are stained with them. To me it seems very strange that men should hunt up difficulties as to their own salvation. If I were doomed to die, and I had a hint of mercy, I am sure I should not set my wits to work to find out reasons why I should not be pardoned. I could leave my enemies to do that: I should be on the look-out in a very different direction. If I were drowning, I should sooner catch at a straw than push a life-belt away from me. To reason against one's own life is a sort of constructive suicide of which only a drunken man would be guilty. To argue against your only hope is like a foolish man sitting on a bough, and chopping it away so as to let himself down. Who but an idiot would do that? Yet many appear to be special pleaders for their own ruin. They hunt the Bible through for threatening texts; and when they have done with that, they turn to reason, and philosophy, and scepticism, in order to shut the door in their own faces. Surely this is poor employment for a sensible man.

Many nowadays who cannot quite get away from religious thought, are able to stave off the inconvenient pressure of conscience by quibbling over the great truths of revelation. Great mysteries are in the Book of God of necessity; for how can the infinite God so speak that all His thoughts can be grasped by finite man? But it is the height of folly to get discussing these deep things, and to leave plain, soul-saving truths in abeyance. It reminds one of the two philosophers who debated about food, and went away empty from the table, while the common countryman in the corner asked no question, but used his knife and fork with great diligence, and went on his way rejoicing. Thousands are now happy in the Lord through receiving the gospel like little children; while others, who can always see difficulties, or invent them, are as far off as ever from any comfortable hope of salvation. I know many very decent people who seem to have resolved never to come to Christ till they can understand how the doctrine of election is consistent with the free invitations of the gospel. I might just as well determine never to eat a morsel of bread till it has been explained to me how it is that God keeps me alive, and yet I must eat to live. The fact is, that we, most of us, know quite enough already, and the real want with us is not light in the head, but truth in the heart; not help over difficulties, but grace to make us hate sin and seek reconciliation.

Here let me add a warning against tampering with the Word of God. No habit can be more ruinous to the soul. It is cool, contemptuous impertinence to sit down and correct your Maker, and it tends to make the heart harder than the nether millstone. We remember one who used a penknife on his Bible, and it was not long before he had given up all his former beliefs. The spirit of reverence is healthy, but the impertinence of criticizing the inspired Word is destructive of all proper feeling towards God.

If ever a man does feel his need of a Saviour after treating Scripture with a proud, critical spirit, he is very apt to find his conscience standing in the way, and hindering him from comfort by reminding him of ill-treatment of the sacred Word. It comes hard to him to draw consolation out of passages of the Bible which he has treated cavalierly, or even set aside altogether, as unworthy of consideration. In his distress the sacred texts seem to laugh at his ca-

lamity. When the time of need comes, the wells which he stopped with stones yield no water for his thirst. Beware, when you despise a Scripture, lest you cast away the only friend that can help you in the hour of agony.

A certain German duke was accustomed to call upon his servant to read a chapter of the Bible to him every morning. When anything did not square with his judgment he would sternly cry, "Hans, strike that out." At length Hans was a long time before he began to read. He fumbled over the Book, till his master called out, "Hans, why do you not read?" Then Hans answered, "Sir, there is hardly anything left. It is all struck out!" One day his master's objections had run one way, and another day they had taken another turn, and another set of passages had been blotted, till nothing was left to instruct or comfort him. Let us not, by carping criticism, destroy our own mercies. We may yet need those promises which appear needless; and those portions of Holy Writ which have been most assailed by sceptics may yet prove essential to our very life: wherefore let us guard the priceless treasure of the Bible, and determine never to resign a single line of it.

What have we to do with recondite²¹ questions while our souls are in peril? The way to escape from sin is plain enough. The wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein. God has not mocked us with a salvation which we cannot understand. BELIEVE AND LIVE is a command which a babe may comprehend and obey.

"Doubt no more, but now believe;

Question not, but just receive.

Artful doubts and reasonings be

Nailed with Jesus to the tree."

Instead of cavilling²² at Scripture, the man who is led of the Spirit of God will close in with the Lord Jesus at once. Seeing that thousands of decent, common-sense people—people, too, of the best character—are trusting their all with Jesus, he will do the same, and have done with further delays. Then has he begun a life worth living, and he may have done with further fear. He may at once advance to that higher and better way of living, which grows out of love to Jesus, the Saviour. Why should not the reader do so at once? Oh that he would!

A Newark, New Jersey, butcher received a letter from his old home in Germany, notifying that he had, by the death of a relative, fallen heir to a considerable amount of money. He was cutting up a pig at the time. After reading the letter, he hastily tore off his dirty apron, and did not stop to see the pork cut up into sausages, but left the shop to make preparations for going home to Germany. Do you blame him, or would you have had him stop in Newark with his block and his cleaver?

See here the operation of faith. The butcher believed what was told him, and acted on it at once. Sensible fellow, too!

God has sent His messages to man, telling him the good news of salvation. When a man believes the good news to be true, he accepts the blessing announced to him, and hastens to lay hold upon it. If he truly believes, he will at once take Christ, with all He has to bestow, turn from his present evil ways, and set out for the Heavenly City, where the full blessing is to be enjoyed. He cannot be holy too soon, or too early quit the ways of sin. If a man could really see what sin is, he would flee from it as from a deadly serpent, and rejoice to be freed from it by Christ Jesus.

10. Without Faith, No Salvation!

Some think it hard that there should be nothing for them but ruin if they will not believe in Jesus Christ; but if you will think for a minute you will see that it is just and reasonable. I suppose there is no way for a man to keep his strength up except by eating. If you were to say, "I will not eat again, I despise such animalism," you might go to Madeira, or travel in all lands (supposing you lived long enough!), but you would most certainly find that no climate and no exercise would avail to keep you alive if you refused food. Would you then complain, "It is a hard thing that I should die because I do not believe in eating"? It is not an unjust thing that if you are so foolish as not to eat, you must die. It is precisely so with believing. "Believe, and thou art saved." If thou wilt not believe, it is no hard thing that thou shouldst be lost. It would be strange indeed if it were not to be the case.

A man who is thirsty stands before a fountain. "No," he says, "I will never touch a drop of moisture as long as I live. Cannot I get my thirst quenched in my own way?" We tell him, no; he must drink or die. He says, "I will never drink; but it is a hard thing that I must therefore die. It is a bigoted, cruel thing to tell me so." He is wrong. His thirst is the inevitable result of neglecting a law of nature. You, too, must believe or die; why refuse to obey the

²¹ **recondite** – not easily understood, abstruse, hidden.

²² **cavilling** – arguing against.

command? Drink, man, drink! Take Christ and live. There is the way of salvation, and to enter you must trust Christ; but there is nothing hard in the fact that you must perish if you will not trust the Saviour. Here is a man out at sea; he has a chart, and that chart, if well studied, will, with the help of the compass, guide him to his journey's end. The pole-star gleams out amidst the cloud-rifts, and that, too, will help him. "No," says he, "I will have nothing to do with your stars; I do not believe in the North Pole. I shall not attend to that little thing inside the box; one needle is as good as another needle. I have no faith in your chart, and I will have nothing to do with it. The art of navigation is only a lot of nonsense, got up by people on purpose to make money, and I will not be gulled by it." The man never reaches port, and he says it is a very hard thing—a very hard thing. I do not think so. Some of you say, "I am not going to read the Scriptures; I am not going to listen to your talk about Jesus Christ: I do not believe in such things." Then Jesus says, "He that believeth not shall be damned" (Mat 16:16). "That's very hard," say you. But it is not so. It is not more hard than the fact that if you reject the compass and the pole-star you will not reach your port. There is no help for it; it must be so.

You say you will have nothing to do with Jesus and His blood, and you pooh-pooh all religion. You will find it hard to laugh these matters down when you come to die, when the clammy sweat must be wiped from your brow, and your heart beats against your ribs as if it wanted to leap out and fly away from God. O soul! you will find then, that those Sundays, and those services, and this old Book, are something more and better than you thought they were, and you will wonder that you were so simple as to neglect any true help to salvation. Above all, what woe it will be to have neglected Christ, that Pole-star²³ which alone can guide the mariner to the haven of rest!

Where do you live?

You live, perhaps, on the other side of the river, and you have to cross a bridge before you can get home. You have been so silly as to nurse the notion that you do not believe in bridges, nor in boats, nor in the existence of such a thing as water. You say, "I am not going over any of your bridges, and I shall not get into any of your boats. I do not believe that there is a river, or that there is any such stuff as water." You are going home, and soon you come to the old bridge; but you will not cross it. Yonder is a boat; but you are determined that you will not get into it. There is the river, and you resolve that you will not cross it in the usual way; and yet you think it is very hard that you cannot get home. Surely something has destroyed your reasoning powers, for you would not think it so hard if you were in your senses. If a man will not do the thing that is necessary to a certain end, how can he expect to gain that end? You have taken poison, and the physician brings an antidote, and says, "Take it quickly, or you will die; but if you take it quickly, I will guarantee that the poison will be neutralized." But you say, "No, doctor, I do not believe in antidotes. Let everything take its course; let every tub stand on its own bottom; I will have nothing to do with your remedy. Besides, I do not believe that there is any remedy for the poison I have taken; and, what is more, I don't care whether there is or not."

Well, sir, you will die; and when the coroner's inquest is held on your body, the verdict will be, "Served him right!" So will it be with you if, having heard the gospel of Jesus Christ, you say, "I am too much of an advanced man to have anything to do with that old-fashioned notion of substitution. I shall not attend to the preacher's talk about sacrifice and blood-shedding." Then, when you perish, the verdict given by your conscience, which will sit upon the King's quest at last, will run thus, "Suicide: he destroyed his own soul." So says the old Book—"O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself!" (Hos 13:9). Reader, I implore thee, do not so.

11. To Those Who Have Believed

Friends, if now you have begun to trust the Lord, trust Him out and out. Let your faith be the most real and practical thing in your whole life. Don't trust the Lord in mere sentiment about a few great spiritual things; but trust Him for everything, for ever, both for time and eternity, for body and for soul. See how the Lord hangeth the world upon nothing but His own word! It has neither prop nor pillar. Yon great arch of heaven stands without a buttress or a wooden centre. The Lord can and will bear all the strain that faith can ever put upon Him. The greatest troubles are easy to His power, and the darkest mysteries are clear to His wisdom. Trust God up to the hilt. Lean, and lean hard; yes, lean all your weight, and every other weight upon the Mighty God of Jacob.

The future you can safely leave with the Lord, who ever liveth and never changeth. The past is now in your Saviour's hand, and you shall never be condemned for it, whatever it may have been, for the Lord has cast your iniquities into the midst of the sea. Believe at this moment in your present privileges. YOU ARE SAVED. If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus, you have passed from death unto life, and YOU ARE SAVED. In the old slave days a lady brought her black servant on board an English ship, and she laughingly said to the Captain, "I suppose if I and Aunt Chloe

²³ **Pole-star** – the North Star, used by navigators to identify North and keep direction.

were to go to England she would be free?" "Madam," said the Captain, "she is now free. The moment she came on board a British vessel she was free!" When the negro woman knew this, she did not leave the ship—not she. It was not the hope of liberty that made her bold, but the fact of liberty. So you are not now merely hoping for eternal life, but "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (Joh 3:36). Accept this as a fact revealed in the sacred Word, and begin to rejoice accordingly. Do not reason about it, or call it in question; believe it, and leap for joy.

I want my reader, upon believing in the Lord Jesus, to believe for eternal salvation. Do not be content with the notion that you can receive a new birth which will die out, a heavenly life which will expire, a pardon which will be recalled. The Lord Jesus gives to His sheep eternal life, and do not be at rest until you have it. Now, if it be eternal, how can it die out? Be saved out and out, for eternity. There is "a living and incorruptible seed, which liveth and abideth for ever"; do not be put off with a temporary change, a sort of grace which will only bloom to fade. You are now starting on the railway of grace—take a ticket all the way through. I have no commission to preach to you salvation for a time: the gospel I am bidden to set before you is, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." He shall be saved from sin, from going back to sin, from turning aside to the broad road. May the Holy Spirit lead you to believe for nothing less than that. "Do you mean," says one, "that I am to believe if I once trust Christ I shall be saved whatever sin I may choose to commit?" I have never said anything of the kind. I have described true salvation as a thorough change of heart of so radical a kind that it will alter your tastes and desires; and I say that if you have such a change wrought in you by the Holy Spirit, it will be permanent; for the Lord's work is not like the cheap work of the present day, which soon goes to pieces. Trust the Lord to keep you, however long you may live, and however much you may be tempted; and "according to your faith, so be it unto you" (Mat 9:29). Believe in Jesus for everlasting life.

Oh, that you may also trust the Lord for all the sufferings of this present time! In the world you will have tribulation; learn by faith to know that all things work together for good, and then submit yourself to the Lord's will. Look at the sheep when it is being shorn. If it lies quite still, the shears will not hurt it; if it struggles, or even shrinks, it may be pricked. Submit yourselves under the hand of God, and affliction will lose its sharpness. Self-will and repining cause us a hundred times more grief than our afflictions themselves. So believe your Lord as to be certain that His will must be far better than yours, and therefore you not only submit to it, but even rejoice in it.

Trust the Lord Jesus in the matter of sanctification. Certain friends appear to think that the Lord Jesus cannot sanctify them wholly, spirit, soul, and body. Hence they willingly give way to such and such sins under the notion that there is no help for it, but that they must pay tribute to the devil as long as they live in that particular form. Do not basely bow your neck in bondage to any sin, but strike hard for liberty. Be it anger, or unbelief, or sloth, or any other form of iniquity, we are able, by divine grace, to drive out the Canaanite, and, what is more, we must drive him out. No virtue is impossible to him that believeth in Jesus, and no sin need have victory over him. Indeed, it is written, "Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom 6:14). Believe for high degrees of joy in the Lord, and likeness to Jesus, and advance to take full possession of these precious things; for as thou believest, so shall it be unto thee. "All things are possible to him that believeth"; and he who is the chief of sinners may yet be not a whit behind the greatest of saints.

Often realize the joy of heaven. This is grand faith; and yet it is no more than we ought to have. Within a very short time the man who believes in the Lord Jesus shall be with Him where He is. This head will wear a crown; these eyes shall see the King in His beauty; these ears shall hear His own dear voice; this soul shall be in glory; and this poor body shall be raised from the dead and joined in incorruption to the perfected soul! Glory, glory, glory! And so near, so sure. Let us at once rehearse the music and anticipate the bliss!

But cries one, "We are not there yet!" No; but faith fills us with delight in the blessed prospect, and meanwhile it sustains us on the road. Reader, I long that you may be a firm believer in the Lord alone. I want you to get wholly upon the rock, and not keep a foot on the sand. In this mortal life, trust God for all things; and trust Him alone. This is the way to live. I know it by experience. God's bare arm is quite enough to lean upon.

I will give you a bit of the experience of an old labouring man I once knew. He feared God above many, and was very deeply taught of the Spirit. He was great at hedging and ditching; but greater at simple trust. Here is how he described faith: "It was a bitter winter, and I had no work, and no bread in the house. The children were crying. The snow was deep, and my way was dark. My old master told me I might have a bit of wood when I wanted it; so I thought a bit of fire would warm the poor children, and I went out with my chopper to get some fuel. I was standing near a deep ditch full of snow, which had drifted into it many feet deep—in fact, I did not know how deep. While aiming a blow at a bit of wood my bill-hook slipped out of my hand, and went right down into the snow, where I could not hope to find it. Standing there with no food, no fire, and the chopper gone, something seemed to say to me, 'Will Richardson, can you trust God now?' and my very soul said, 'That I can.'

This is true faith—the faith which trusts the Lord when the bill-hook is gone: the faith which believes God when all outward appearances give Him the lie; the faith which is happy with God alone when all friends turn their backs upon you. Dear reader, may you and I have this precious faith, this real faith, this God-honouring faith! The Lord’s truth deserves it; His love claims it, His faithfulness constrains it. Happy is He who has it! He is the man whom the Lord loves, and the world shall be made to know it before all is finished.

After all, the very best faith is an everyday faith: the faith which deals with bread and water, coats and stockings, children and cattle, house-rent and weather. The superfine confectionery religion which is only available on Sundays, and in drawing-room meetings and Bible readings, will never take a soul to heaven till life becomes one long Conference, and there are seven Sabbaths in a week. Faith is doing her very best when for many years she plods on, month by month, trusting the Lord about the sick husband, the failing daughter, the declining business, the unconverted friend, and suchlike things.

Faith also helps us to use the world as not abusing it. It is good at hard work, and at daily duty. It is not an angelic thing for skies and stars, but a human grace, at home in kitchens and workshops. It is a sort of maid-of-all-work, and is at home at every kind of labour, and in every rank of life. It is a grace for every day, all the year round. Holy confidence in God is never out of work. Faith’s ware is so valued at the heavenly court that she always has one fine piece of work or another on the wheel or in the furnace. Men dream that heroes are only to be made on special occasions, once or twice in a century; but in truth the finest heroes are home-spun, and are more often hidden in obscurity than platformed by public observation. Trust in the living God is the bullion out of which heroism is coined. Perseverance in well-doing is one of the fields in which faith grows not flowers, but the wheat of her harvest. Plodding on in hard work, bringing up a family on a few shillings a week, bearing constant pain with patience, and so forth—these are the feats of valour through which God is glorified by the rank and file of His believing people.

Reader, you and I will be of one mind in this: we will not pine to be great, but we will be eager to be good. For this we will rely upon the Lord our God, whose we are, and whom we serve. We will ask to be made holy throughout every day of the week. We will pray to our God as much about our daily business as about our soul’s salvation. We will trust Him concerning our farm, and our turnips, and our cows, as well as concerning our spiritual privileges and our hope of heaven. The Lord Jehovah is our household God; Jesus is our brother born for adversity; and the Holy Spirit is our Comforter in every hour of trial. We have not an unapproachable God: He hears, He pities, He helps. Let us trust Him without a break, without a doubt, without a hesitation. The life of faith is life within God’s wicket gate. If we have hitherto stood trembling outside in the wide world of unbelief, may the Holy Spirit enable us now to take the great decisive step, and say, once for all, “Lord, I believe: help thou mine unbelief!” (Mar 9:24).



Available in print as a booklet from Chapel Library.

PRAYER

THE PRAYER OF JABEZ

“Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed!”

1 Chronicles 4:10

Introduction

Sowing in Tears, Reaping in Joy

We know very little about Jabez, except that he was more honorable than his brethren, and that he was called Jabez because his mother bare him with *sorrow*. It will sometimes happen that where there is the most sorrow in the antecedents, there will be the most pleasure in the sequel. As the furious storm gives place to the clear sunshine, so the night of weeping precedes the morning of joy (Psa 30:5). Sorrow the harbinger; gladness the prince it ushers in. Cowper says:

*“The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the place where sorrow is unknown.”*

To a great extent we find that we must sow in tears before we can reap in joy. Many of our works for Christ have cost us tears. Difficulties and disappointments have wrung our soul with anguish. Yet those projects that have cost us more than ordinary sorrow, have often turned out to be the most honorable of our undertakings. While our grief called the offspring of desire “Benoni” (the son of my sorrow), our faith has been afterwards able to give it a name of delight, “Benjamin” (the son of my right hand) (Gen 35:18). You may expect a blessing in serving God if you are enabled to persevere under many discouragements. The ship is often long coming home because detained on the road by excess of cargo; expect her freight to be the better when she reaches the port.

A Man of Prayer

More honorable than his brethren was the child whom his mother bore with sorrow. As for this Jabez, whose aim was so well pointed, his fame so far sounded, his name so lastingly embalmed—he was *a man of prayer*. The honor he enjoyed would not have been worth having if it had not been vigorously contested and equitably won. His *devotion* was the key to his *promotion*. Those are the best honors that come from God: the award of grace with the acknowledgment of service.

When Jacob was surnamed Israel, he received his principedom after a memorable night of prayer (Gen 32:25). Surely it was far more honorable to him than if it had been bestowed upon him as a flattering distinction by some earthly emperor. The best honor is that which a man gains in communion with the Most High. Jabez, we are told, was more honorable than his brethren, and his prayer is forthwith recorded as if to intimate that he was also more prayerful than his brethren.

The Prayer Itself

We are told of what petitions his prayer consisted. All through it was very significant and instructive. We have only time to take one clause of it—indeed, that one clause may be said to comprehend the rest: “*Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed!*” I commend it as a prayer for yourselves, dear brethren and sisters, one which will be available at all seasons—a prayer to begin Christian life with, a prayer to end it with, a prayer that would never be unseasonable in your joys or in your sorrows.

“Indeed” – true vs. false blessings

“Oh that thou wouldest bless me *indeed!*” The very pith of the prayer seems to lie in that word, “indeed.” There are many varieties of blessing. Some are blessings only *in name*: they gratify our wishes for a moment, but permanently disappoint our expectations. They charm the eye, but pall on the taste. Others are mere *temporary* blessings: they perish with the using. Though for awhile they regale the senses, they cannot satisfy the higher cravings of the soul. But, “Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed!”

“Thou” – what are true blessings

“Oh that *thou*,” the God of Israel, the covenant God, “would bless me indeed!” I know whom God blesseth shall be blessed. The thing good in itself is bestowed with the good-will of the Giver, and shall be productive of so much good fortune to the recipient that it may well be esteemed as a blessing “indeed,” for there is nothing comparable to it.

Let the grace of God prompt it; let the choice of God appoint it; let the bounty of God confer it; and then the endowment shall be something godlike indeed. It shall be something worthy of the lips that pronounce the benediction, and verily to be craved by every one who seeks honor that is substantial and enduring.

“Oh that *thou* wouldest bless me indeed!” Think it over, and you will see that there is a depth of meaning in the expression.

“Bless” – God’s vs. men’s blessings

We may set this in contrast with *human blessings*: “Oh that thou wouldest *bless* me indeed!” It is very delightful to be blessed by our parents, and those venerable friends whose benedictions come from their hearts and are

backed up by their prayers. Many a poor man has had no other legacy to leave his children except his blessing, but the blessing of an honest, holy, Christian father is a rich treasure to his son. One might well feel it were a thing to be deplored through life, if he had lost a parent's blessing. We like to have it. The blessing of our spiritual parents is consolatory. Though we believe in no priestcraft, we like to live in the affections of those who were the means of bringing us to Christ, and from whose lips we were instructed in the things of God.

And how very precious is the blessing of the poor! I do not wonder that Job treasured that up as a sweet thing. "When the ear heard me, then it blessed me" (Job 29:11). If you have relieved the widow and the fatherless, and their thanks are returned to you in benediction, it is no mean reward.

But, dear friends, after all, all that parents, relatives, saints, and grateful persons can do in the way of blessing, falls very far short of what we desire to have.

Oh Lord, we would have the blessings of our fellow-creatures, the blessings that come from their hearts; but, "Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed!" for Thou canst bless with authority. Their blessings may be but words, but Thine are effectual. They may often wish what they cannot do, and desire to give what they have not at their own disposal, but Thy will is omnipotent. Thou didst create the world with but a word. Oh that such omnipotence would now bespeak me Thy blessing! Other blessings may bring us some tiny cheer, but in Thy favor is life. Other blessings are mere specks in comparison with Thy blessing, for Thy blessing is the title to "an inheritance incorruptible" (1Pe 1:4) and unfading, to "a kingdom which cannot be moved" (Heb 12:28).

Well therefore might David pray in another place, "With thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed for ever" (2Sa 7:29).

1. God's Blessings vs. Men's Blessings

Perhaps in this place, Jabez may have put the *blessing of God* in contrast with the *blessings of men*. Men will bless you when you do well for yourself. They will praise the man who is successful in business. Nothing succeeds like success. Nothing has so much the approval of the general public as a man's prosperity. Alas! they do not weigh men's actions in the balances of the sanctuary, but in quite other scales.

You will find those about you who will commend you if you are *prosperous*; or, like Job's comforters, condemn you if you suffer adversity. Perhaps there may be some feature about your blessings that may please them, because they feel they deserve them. They commend you for your *patriotism*: you have been a patriot. They commend you for your *generosity*: you know you have been self-sacrificing. This is well; but, after all, what is there in the verdict of man?

At a trial, the verdict of the policeman who stands in the court, or of the spectators who sit in the court-house, amounts to just nothing. The man who is being tried feels that the only thing that is of importance at all will be the verdict of the jury and the sentence of the judge. So it will little avail us, whatever we may do, how others commend or censure. Their blessings are not of any great value.

But, "Oh that thou wouldest bless me," that Thou wouldest say, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Mat 25:23). Commend Thou the feeble service that through Thy grace my heart has rendered. That will be to bless me indeed.

Flattery

Men are sometimes blessed in a very fulsome sense by *flattery*. There are always those who, like the fox in the fable, hope to gain the cheese by praising the crow. They never saw such plumage, and no voice could be so sweet as yours. The whole of their mind is set, not on you, but on *what they are to gain by you*. The race of flatterers is never extinct, though the flattered usually flatter themselves, it is so. They may conceive that men flatter others, but all is so palpable and transparent when heaped upon themselves, that they accept it with a great deal of self-complacency, as being perhaps a little exaggerated, but after all exceedingly near the truth!

We are not very apt to take a large discount off the praises that others offer us; yet, were we wise, we should press to our bosom those who *censure* us; and we should always keep at arm's length those who praise us. Why? for those who censure us to our face cannot possibly be making a market of us; but with regard to those who extol us, rising early and using loud sentences of praise, we may suspect (and we shall very seldom be unjust in the suspicion), that there is some other motive in the praise which they render to us than that which appears on the surface.

Young man, art thou placed in a position where God honors thee? Beware of flatterers. Or hast thou come into a large estate? Hast thou abundance? There are always flies where there is honey. Beware of flattery. Young woman, art thou fair to look upon? There will be those about thee that will have their designs, perhaps their evil designs, in lauding thy beauty. Beware of flatterers. Turn thou aside from all these who have honey on their tongue, because

of the poison of asps that is under it. Bethink thee of Solomon's caution, "meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips" (Pro 20:19).

Cry to God, "Deliver Thou me from all this vain adulation, which nauseates my soul." So shalt thou pray to Him the more fervently "Oh that *thou* wouldest bless me indeed!" Let me have Thy benediction, which never says more than it means, which never gives less than it promises.

If you take then the prayer of Jabez as being put in contrast with the benedictions that come from men, you see much force in it.

2. God's Blessings vs. Temporal Blessings

But we may put it in another light, and compare the blessing Jabez craved with those blessings that are *temporal and transient*. There are many bounties given to us mercifully by God for which we are bound to be very grateful, but we must not set too much store by them. We may accept them with gratitude, but we must not make them our idols. When we have them we have great need to cry, "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and make these inferior blessings real blessings"; and if we have them not, we should with greater vehemence cry, "Oh that we may be rich in faith, and if not blessed with these external favors, may we be blessed *spiritually*, and then we shall be blessed indeed."

Wealth

Let us review some of these mercies, and just say a word or two about them. One of the first cravings of men's hearts is *wealth*. So universal the desire to gain it that we might almost say it is a natural instinct. How many have thought if they once possessed it, they should be blessed indeed! But there are ten thousand proofs that happiness consists not in the abundance which a man possesseth. So many instances are well known to you all, that I need not quote any to show that riches are not a blessing indeed. They are rather apparently than really so.

Hence, it has been well said that when we see how much a man *has* we envy him; but could we see how little he *enjoys* we should pity him. Some that have had the most easy circumstances have had the most uneasy minds. Those who have acquired all they could wish, had their wishes been at all sane, have been led by the possession of what they had to be discontented because they had not more.

*"Thus the base miser starves amidst his store,
Broods o'er his gold, and griping still at more,
Sits sadly pining, and believes he's poor."*

Nothing is more clear, to any one who chooses to observe it, than that riches are not the chief good at whose advent sorrow flies, and in whose presence joy perennial springs. Full often wealth deceives the owner. Dainties are spread on his table, but his appetite fails; minstrels wait his bidding, but his ears are deaf to all the strains of music; holidays he may have as many as he pleases, but for him recreation has lost all its charms. Or, he is young, fortune has come to him by inheritance, and he makes pleasure his pursuit, till sport becomes more irksome than work, and dissipation worse than drudgery.

Ye know how riches make themselves wings; like the bird that roosted on the tree, they fly away. In sickness and despondency these ample means that once seemed to whisper, "Soul, take thine ease" (Luk 12:19), prove themselves to be poor comforters. In death they even tend to make the pang of separation more acute, because there is the more to leave, the more to lose.

We may well say, if we have wealth, "My God, put me not off with these husks; let me never make a god of the silver and the gold, the goods and the chattels, the estates and investments, which in Thy providence Thou hast given me. I beseech Thee, 'bless me *indeed*.' As for these worldly possessions, they will be my bane unless I have Thy grace with them."

And if you have not wealth, and perhaps the most of you will never have it, you may well say, "My Father, Thou hast denied me this outward and seeming good, now enrich me with Thy love. Give me the gold of Thy favor, 'bless me indeed.' Then, allot to others whatever Thou wilt; Thou shalt divide my portion; my soul shall wait Thy daily will. Do Thou bless me indeed, and I shall be content."

Fame

Another transient blessing which our poor humanity fondly covets and eagerly pursues is *fame*. In this respect we would fain be more honorable than our brethren, and outstrip all our competitors. It seems natural to us all to wish to make a name and gain some note in the circle we move in, and we wish to make that circle wider if we can.

But here, as of riches, it is indisputable that the greatest fame does not bring with it any equal measure of gratification. Men, in seeking after notoriety or honor, have a degree of pleasure in the search, which they do not always possess when they have gained their object. Some of the most famous men have also been the most wretched of the human race.

If thou hast honor and fame, accept it; but let this prayer go up, “My God, bless Thou me indeed, for what profit were it, if my name were in a thousand mouths, if Thou shouldst spew it out of Thy mouth? What matter, though my name were written on marble, if it were not written in the Lamb’s *Book of Life*? These blessings are only apparently blessings, windy blessings, blessings that mock me. Give me Thy blessing; then the honor which comes of Thee will make me blessed indeed.”

If you happen to have lived in obscurity, and have never entered the lists for honors among your fellow-men, be content to run well your own course and fulfill truly your own vocation. To lack fame is not the most grievous of ills; it is worse to have it like the snow, that whitens the ground in the morning, and disappears in the heat of the day. What matters it to a dead man that men are talking of him? Get thou the blessing indeed.

Health

There is another temporal blessing which wise men desire, and legitimately may wish for rather than the other two: the blessing of *health*. Can we ever prize it sufficiently? To trifle with such a boon is the madness of folly. The highest praise that can be passed on health would not be extravagant. He that has a healthy body is infinitely more blessed than he who is sickly, whatever his estate may be.

Yet if I have health, my bones well set, and my muscles well strung; if I scarcely know an ache or pain, but can rise in the morning, and with elastic go forth to labor, and cast myself upon my couch at night, and sleep the sleep of the happy—yet, oh let me not glory in my strength! In a moment it may fail me. A few short weeks may reduce the strong man to a skeleton. Consumption may set in; the cheek may pale with the shadow of death. Let not the strong man glory in his strength. The Lord “delighteth not in the strength of the horse: He taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man” (Psa 147:10). And let us not make our boast concerning these things. Say, thou that art in good health, “My God, bless me indeed. Give me the healthy soul. Heal me of my *spiritual* diseases. Jehovah Rophi²⁴ come, and purge out the leprosy that is in my heart by nature: make me healthy in the heavenly sense, that I may not be put aside among the unclean, but allowed to stand amongst the congregation of Thy saints. Bless my bodily health to me that I may use it rightly, spending the strength I have in Thy service and to Thy glory; otherwise, though blessed with health, I may not be blessed indeed.”

Some of you, dear friends, do not possess the great treasure of health. Wearisome days and nights are appointed you. Your bones are become an almanac in which you note the changes of the weather. There is much about you that is fitted to excite pity. But I pray that you may have the blessing indeed, and I know what that is.

I can heartily sympathize with a sister that said to me the other day, “I had such nearness to God when I was sick, such full assurance, and such joy in the Lord. I regret to say I have lost it now. I could almost wish to be ill again, if thereby I might have a renewal of communion with God.” I have oftentimes looked gratefully back to my sick chamber. I am certain that I never did grow in grace one half so much anywhere as I have upon the bed of pain. It ought not to be so. Our joyous mercies ought to be great fertilizers to our spirit; but not infrequently our griefs are more salutary than our joys. The pruning knife is best for some of us.

Well, after all, whatever you have to suffer, of weakness, of debility, of pain and anguish, may it be so attended with the divine presence, that this light affliction may work out for you a “far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2Co 4:17), and so you may be blessed indeed.

Home

I will only dwell upon one more temporal mercy, which is very precious—I mean the blessing of *home*. I do not think any one can ever prize it too highly, or speak too well of it. What a blessing it is to have the fireside, and the dear relationships that gather round the word “home”—wife, children, father, brother, sister! Why, there are no songs in any language that are more full of music than those dedicated to “Mother.” We hear a great deal about the German “Fatherland”—we like the sound. But the word “Father” is the whole of it. The “land” is nothing; the “Father” is key to the music.

There are many of us, I hope, blessed with a great many of these relationships. Do not let us be content to solace our souls with ties that must ere long be sundered. Let us ask that over and above them may come the blessing indeed. “I thank Thee, my God, for my earthly father; but oh, be Thou my Father, then am I blessed indeed. I thank

²⁴ Hebrew name for God, meaning “The Lord Who Heals” (Exo 15:26).

Thee, my God, for a mother's love; but comfort Thou my soul as one whom a mother comforteth, then am I blessed indeed. I thank Thee, Savior, for the marriage bond; but be Thou the bridegroom of my soul. I thank Thee for the tie of brotherhood; but be Thou my brother born for adversity, bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh. The home Thou hast given me I prize, and thank Thee for it; but I would dwell in the house of the Lord forever, and be a child that never wanders, wherever my feet may travel, from my Father's house with its many mansions.

You can thus be blessed indeed. If not domiciled under the paternal care of the Almighty, even the blessing of home, with all its sweet familiar comforts, does not reach to the benediction which Jabez desired for himself.

But do I speak to any here that are separated from kith and kin? I know some of you have left behind you in the bivouac of life, graves where parts of your heart are buried, and that which remains is bleeding with just so many wounds. Ah, well! the Lord bless you indeed! Widow, Thy Maker is Thy Husband. Fatherless one, He hath said, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (Joh 14:18). Oh, to find all your relationships made up in Him, then you will be blessed indeed!

I have perhaps taken too long a time in mentioning these temporary blessings, so let me set the text in another light. I trust we have had human blessings and temporary blessings, to fill our hearts with gladness, but not to foul our hearts with worldliness, or to distract our attention from the things that belong to our everlasting welfare.

3. God's Blessings vs. Imaginary Blessings

Let us proceed, thirdly, to speak of *imaginary blessings*. There are such in the world; from them may God deliver us. "Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed!"

Imaginary blessings to the unsaved

Self-righteousness. Take the Pharisee. He stood in the Lord's house, and he thought he had the Lord's blessing; it made him very bold, and he spoke with unctuous self-complacency, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are" (Luk 18:11), and so on. He had the blessing, and well indeed he supposed himself to have merited it. He had fasted twice in the week, paid tithes of all that he possessed—even to the odd farthing on the mint, and the extra half-penny on the cumin he had used. He felt he had done everything. His was the blessing of a quiet or a quiescent conscience; good, easy man. He was a pattern to the parish. It was a pity everybody did not live as he did; if they had, they would not have needed any police. Pilate might have dismissed his guards and Herod his soldiers. He was just one of the most excellent persons that ever breathed. He adored the city of which he was a burgess!

Ay, but he was *not* blessed indeed. This was all his own overweening conceit. He was a mere wind-bag, nothing more. And the blessing which he fancied had fallen upon him, had in fact *never come*. The poor publican whom he thought accursed, went to his home justified rather than he. The blessing had not fallen on the man who thought he had it.

Oh, let every one of us here feel the sting of this rebuke, and pray, "Great God, save us from imputing to ourselves a righteousness that we do not possess. Save us from wrapping ourselves up in our own rags, and fancying we have put on the wedding garments. Bless me indeed. Let me have the true righteousness. Let me have the true worthiness that Thou canst accept, even that which is of *faith in Jesus Christ*."

False assurance. Another form of this imaginary blessing is found in persons who would scorn to be thought self-righteous. Their delusion, however, is near akin. I hear them singing,

*"I do believe, I will believe
That Jesus died for me,
And on his cross he shed his blood,
From sin to set me free."*

You believe it, you say. Well, but how do you know? Upon what authority do you make so sure? Who told you? "Oh, I believe it." Yes, but we must mind what we believe. Have you any clear evidence of a special interest in the blood of Jesus? Can you give any spiritual reasons for believing that Christ has set you free from sin? I am afraid that some have got a hope that has not got any ground, like an anchor without any fluke—nothing to grasp, nothing to lay hold upon. They say they are saved, and they stick to it that they are, and think it wicked to doubt it; but yet they have no reason to warrant their confidence.

When the sons of Kohath prepared the ark, and touched it with their hands, they did rightly (Num 4:4-6, 15); but when Uzzah touched it he died (2Sa 6:6-7). There are those who are ready to be fully assured; there are others to whom it will be death to talk of it. There is a great difference between presumption and full assurance. Full assurance is reasonable; it is based on solid ground. Presumption takes for granted, and with brazen face pronounces that to be its own to which it has no right whatever.

Beware, I pray thee, of presuming that thou art saved. If with thy heart thou dost trust in Jesus, then art thou saved; but if thou merely *sayest*, “I trust in Jesus,” it doth not save thee. If thy *heart be renewed*, if thou shalt hate the things that thou didst once love, and love the things that thou didst once hate; if thou hast really repented; if there be a thorough change of mind in thee; if thou be born again—then hast thou reason to rejoice. But, if there be no vital change, no inward godliness; if there be no love to God, no prayer, no work of the Holy Spirit—then thy saying, “I am saved,” is but thine own assertion. It may delude, but it will not deliver thee.

Our prayer ought to be, “Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, with *real* faith, with real salvation, with the trust in Jesus that is the essential of faith; not with the conceit that begets credulity.”

God preserve us from imaginary blessings!

I have met with persons who said, “I believe I am saved, because I dreamt it.” Or, “Because I had a text of Scripture that applied to my own case. Such and such a good man said so and so in his sermon.” Or, “Because I took to weeping and was excited, and felt as I never felt before.” Ah! but nothing will stand the trial but this, “Dost thou abjure all confidence in everything but the finished work of Jesus, and dost thou come to Christ to be reconciled in Him to God?” If thou dost not, thy dreams, and visions, and fancies, are but dreams, and visions, and fancies, and will not serve thy turn when most thou needest them. Pray the Lord to bless thee indeed, for of that sterling verity in all thy walk and talk there is a great scarcity.

Imaginary blessings to the saved

Too much, I am afraid, even those who are saved—saved for time and eternity—need this caution, and have good cause to pray this prayer, that they may learn to make a distinction between some things which they *think* to be spiritual blessings, and others which are true blessings indeed. Let me show you what I mean.

Answered Prayer

Is it certainly a blessing to get an *answer to your prayer* after your own mind? I always like to qualify my most earnest prayer with, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Mat 26:39). Not only ought I to do it, but I would like to do it, because otherwise I might ask for something which it would be dangerous for me to receive. God might give it me in anger, and I might find little sweetness in the grant, but much soreness in the grief it caused me. You remember how Israel of old asked for flesh, and God gave them quails; but while the meat was yet in their mouths the wrath of God came upon them. Ask for the meat, if you like, but always put in this: “Lord, if this is not a real blessing, do not give it me.” “Bless me *indeed*.”

I hardly like to repeat the old story of the good woman whose son was ill—a little child near death’s door—and she begged the minister, a Puritan, to pray for its life. He did pray very earnestly, but he put in, “If it be thy will, save this child.” The woman said, “I cannot bear that: I must have you pray that the child shall live. Do not put in any ifs or buts.” “Woman,” said the minister, “it may be you will live to rue the day that ever you wished to set your will up against God’s will.” Twenty years afterwards, she was carried away in a fainting fit from under Tyburn gallows-tree, where that son was put to death as a felon. Although she had lived to see her child grow up to be a man, it would have been infinitely better for her had the child died, and infinitely wiser had she left it to God’s will. Do not be quite so sure that what you think an answer to prayer is any proof of divine love. It may leave much room for thee to seek unto the Lord, saying, “Oh that thou wouldest blessed me indeed!”

Exhilaration of spirit

So sometimes great exhilaration of spirit, liveliness of heart, even though it be religious joy, may not always be a blessing. We delight in it, and oh, sometimes when we have had gatherings for prayer here, the fire has burned, and our souls have glowed! We felt at the time how we could sing,

“My willing soul would stay
In such a frame as this,
And sit and sing herself away
To everlasting bliss.”

So far as that was a blessing we are thankful for it; but I should not like to set such seasons up, as if my enjoyments were the main token of God’s favor; or as if they were the chief signs of His blessing.

Perhaps it would be a greater blessing to me to be *broken in spirit*, and laid low before the Lord at the present time. When you ask for the highest joy, and pray to be on the mountain with Christ, remember it may be as much a blessing, yea, a blessing indeed, to be brought into the Valley of Humiliation, to be laid very low, and constrained to cry out in anguish, “Lord, save, or I perish!”²⁵

²⁵ Quoted from *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, by John Bunyan, when Christian descended into the valley to face Apollyon.

*“If today He deigns to bless us
With a sense of pardon’d sin,
He tomorrow may distress us,
Make us feel the plague within,
All to make us
Sick of self, and fond of Him.”*

These variable experiences of ours may be blessings indeed to us, when, had we been always rejoicing, we might have been like Moab, settled on our lees, and not emptied from vessel to vessel. It fares ill with those who have no changes; they fear not God.

Calmness

Have we not, dear friends, sometimes envied those persons that are always *calm* and unruffled, and are never perturbed in mind? Well, there are Christians whose evenness of temper deserves to be emulated. And as for that calm repose, that unwavering assurance which comes from the Spirit of God, it is a very delightful attainment. But I am not sure that we ought to envy anybody’s lot because it is more tranquil, or less exposed to storm and tempest, than our own.

There is a danger of saying, “Peace, peace,” where there is no peace (Jer 6:14), and there is a calmness that arises from callousness. Dupes there are who deceive their own souls. “They have no doubts,” they say, but it is because they have little *heart searching*. They have no anxieties, because they have not much enterprise or many pursuits to stir them up. Or it may be they have no pains, because they have no life. Better go to heaven, halt and maimed, than go marching on in confidence down to hell. “Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed!”

My God, I will envy no one of his gifts or his graces, much less of his inward mood or his outward circumstances, if only Thou wilt “bless me indeed.” I would not be comforted unless Thou comfortest me, nor have any peace but Christ my Peace, nor any rest but the rest that cometh from the sweet savor of the sacrifice of Christ. Christ shall be all in all, and none shall be anything to me save Himself.

Oh that we might always feel that we are *not to judge* as to the manner of the blessing, but must leave it with God to give us what we would have, not the imaginary blessing, the superficial and apparent blessing, but the blessing indeed!

Our work and service

Equally too with regard to our work and service, I think our prayer should always be, “Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed!” It is lamentable to see the work of some good men, though it is not ours to judge them, how very pretentious and how very unreal it is. It is really shocking to think how some men pretend to build up a church in the course of two or three evenings. They will report, in the corner of the newspapers, that there were forty-three persons convinced of sin, and forty-six justified, and sometimes thirty-eight sanctified; I do not know what besides of wonderful statistics they give as to all that is accomplished.

I have observed congregations that have been speedily gathered together, and great additions have been made to the church all of a sudden. And what has become of them? Where are those churches at the present moment? The dreariest deserts in Christendom are those places that were fertilized by the patent manures of certain “revivalists.” The whole church seemed to have spent its strength in one rush and effort after something, and it ended in nothing at all. They built their wooden house, and piled up the hay, and made a stubble spire that seemed to reach the heavens—and there fell one spark and all went away in smoke. And he that came to labor next time—the successor of the great builder—had to get the ashes swept away before he could do any good. The prayer of every one that serves God should be, “Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed.” Plod on, plod on. If I only build one piece of masonry in my life, and nothing more, if it be gold, silver, or precious stones, it is a good deal for a man to do. Of such precious stuff as that, to build even one little corner that will not show, is a worthy service. It will not be much talked of, but *it will last*. There is the point: it will last!

“Establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it” (Psa 90:17). If we are not builders in an established church, it is of little use to try at all. What God establishes will stand, but what men build without His establishment will certainly come to nought. “Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed !” Sunday-school teacher, be this your prayer. Tract distributor, local preacher, whatever you may be, dear brother or sister, whatever your form of service, do ask the Lord that you may not be one of those plaster builders using sham materials that only require a certain amount of frost and weather to make it crumble to pieces. Be it yours if you cannot build a cathedral, to build at least one part of the marvelous temple that God is piling for eternity, which will outlast the stars.

4. God's True Spiritual Blessings

I have one thing more to mention before I bring this sermon to a close. *The blessings of God's grace* are true blessings indeed, which in right earnest we ought to seek after. By these marks shall ye know them.

Blessings indeed, are such blessings *as come from the pierced hand*; blessings that come from Calvary's bloody tree, streaming from the Savior's wounded side: thy pardon, thine acceptance, thy spiritual life, thy oneness to Christ, and all that comes of it—these are blessings indeed.

Any blessing that comes as *the result of the Spirit's work* in thy soul is a blessing indeed; though it humble thee, though it strip thee, though it kill thee, it is a blessing indeed. Though the harrow go over and over thy soul, and the deep plough cut into thy very heart; though thou be maimed and wounded, and left for dead, yet if the Spirit of God do it, it is a blessing indeed. If He convinceth thee “of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment” (Joh 16:8), even though thou hast not hitherto been brought to Christ, it is a blessing indeed. Anything that He does, accept it; do not be dubious of it, but pray that He may continue His blessed operations in thy soul.

Whatsoever leads thee to God is in like manner a blessing indeed. Riches may not do it. There may be a golden wall between thee and God. Health will not do it; even the strength and marrow of thy bones may keep thee at a distance from thy God. But anything that draws thee nearer to Him is a blessing indeed. What though it be a cross that raiseth thee, yet if it raise thee to God it shall be a blessing indeed.

Anything that reaches into eternity, with a preparation for the world to come; anything that we can carry across the river, the holy joy that is to blossom in those fields beyond the swelling flood; the pure cloudless love of the brotherhood which is to be the atmosphere of truth for ever—is a blessing indeed. Anything of this kind that has the eternal broad arrow on it, the immutable mark, is a blessing indeed.

And *anything which helps me to glorify God* is a blessing indeed. If I be sick, and that helps me to praise Him, it is a blessing indeed. If I be poor, and I can serve Him better in poverty than in wealth, it is a blessing indeed. If I be in contempt, I will rejoice in that day and leap for joy, if it be for Christ's sake—it is a blessing indeed. Yea, my faith shakes off the disguise, snatches the vizard from the fair forehead of the blessing, and “counts it all joy” (Jam 1:2) to fall into divers trials for the sake of Jesus and the recompense of reward that He has promised. “Oh that we may be blessed indeed!”

Practical Application

Now, I send you away with these three words. “**Search**”—see whether the blessings are blessings indeed, and be not satisfied unless you know that they are of God, tokens of His grace, and earnest of His saving purpose.

“**Weigh**”—that shall be the next word. Whatever thou hast, weigh it in the scale, and ascertain if it be a blessing indeed, conferring such grace upon you as causes you to abound in love, and to abound in every good word and work.

And lastly, “**Pray**.” So pray that this prayer may mingle with all thy prayers, that whatsoever God grants, or whatever He withholds, thou mayest be blessed indeed. Is it a *joy-time* with thee? Oh that Christ may mellow thy joy, and prevent the intoxication of earthly blessedness from leading thee aside from close walking with Him! In the *night of sorrow*, pray that He will bless thee indeed, lest the wormwood also intoxicate thee and make thee drunk, lest thy afflictions should make thee think hardly of Him. Pray for the blessing, which having, thou art rich to all the intents of bliss, or which lacking, thou art poor and destitute, though plenty fill thy store. “If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence” (Exo 33:15).

But, “*Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed!*” ❧

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TRUE PRAYER; TRUE POWER!

“Therefore I say unto you, what things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive and ye shall have them.”

—Mark 11:24

THIS verse has something to do with the faith of miracles; but I think it hath far more reference to the miracle of faith. We shall at any rate, this morning, consider it in that light. I believe that this text is the inheritance not only of the apostles, but of all those who walk in the faith of the apostles, believing in the promises of the Lord Jesus Christ. The advice that Christ gave to the twelve and to His immediate followers, is repeated to us in God’s Word this morning. May we have grace constantly to obey it.

“What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.” How many persons there are who complain that they do not enjoy prayer. They do not neglect it, for they dare not; but they would neglect it if they dared, so far are they from finding any pleasure therein. And have we not to lament that sometimes the chariot-wheels are taken off, and we drive right heavily when we are in supplication? We spend the time allotted, but we rise from our knees unrefreshed, like a man who has lain upon his bed but has not slept so as to really recover his strength. When the time comes round again conscience drives us to our knees, but there is no sweet fellowship with God. There is no telling out of our wants to Him in the firm conviction that He will supply them. After having gone again through a certain round of customary utterances, we rise from our knees perhaps more troubled in conscience and more distressed in mind than we were before.

There are many Christians, I think, who have to complain of this—that they pray not so much because it is a blessed thing to be allowed to draw near to God, as because they must pray, because it is their duty, because they feel that if they did not, they would lose one of the sure evidences of their being Christians. Brethren, I do not condemn you; but at the same time, if I may be the means of lifting you up this morning from so low a state of grace into a higher and more healthy atmosphere, my soul shall be exceeding glad. If I can show you a more excellent way; if from this time forth you may come to look at prayer as your element, as one of the most delightful exercises of your life; if you shall come to esteem it more than your necessary food, and to value it as one of heaven’s best luxuries—surely I shall have answered a great end, and you shall have to thank God for a great blessing.

Give me then your attention while I beg you, first, to look at the text; secondly to look about you; and then, to look above you.

I. Look at the Text.

First, look at the text. If you look at it carefully, I think you will perceive the essential qualities that are necessary to any great success and prevalence in prayer. According to our Saviour’s description of prayer, there should always be some definite objects for which we should plead. He speaks of things: “*what things soever ye desire.*” It seems then that He did not put it that God’s children would go to Him to pray when they have nothing to pray for.

Another essential qualification of prayer is earnest desire; for the Master supposes here that when we pray we have desires. Indeed it is not prayer; it may be something like prayer, the outward form or the bare skeleton, but it is not the living thing, the all-prevailing, almighty thing called prayer, unless there be a fulness and overflowing of desires.

Observe, too, that faith is an essential quality of successful prayer: “*believe that ye receive them.*” Ye cannot pray so as to be heard in heaven and answered to your soul’s satisfaction, unless you believe that God really hears and will answer you.

One other qualification appears here upon the very surface, namely, that a realizing expectation should always go with a firm faith—“*believe that ye receive them.*” Not merely believe that “ye shall” but believe that “ye do” receive them—count them as if they were received, reckon them as if you had them already, and act as if you had them. Act as if you were *sure* you should have them: “*believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.*” Let us review these four qualities, one by one.

Definite objects

To make prayer of any value there should be definite objects for which to plead. My brethren, we often ramble in our prayers after this, that, and the other, and we get nothing—because in each we do not really desire anything.

We chatter about many subjects, but the soul does not concentrate itself upon any one object. Do you not sometimes fall on your knees without thinking beforehand what you mean to ask God for? You do so as a matter of habit, without any motion of your heart. You are like a man who should go to a shop and not know what articles he would procure. He may perhaps make a happy purchase when he is there, but certainly it is not a wise plan to adopt. And so the Christian in prayer may afterwards attain to a real desire and get his end, but how much better would he speed if having prepared his soul by consideration and self-examination, he came to God for an object at which he was about to aim with a real request. Did we ask an audience at Her Majesty's court, we should be expected to reply to the question, "What do you wish to see her for?" We should not be expected to go into the presence of Royalty and then to think of some petition after we came there.

Even so with the child of God. He should be able to answer the great question, "What is thy petition and what is thy request, and it shall be done unto thee?" Imagine an archer shooting with his bow, and not knowing where the mark is! Would he be likely to have success? Conceive a ship on a voyage of discovery, putting to sea without the captain having any idea of what he was looking for! Would you expect that he would come back heavily laden either with the discoveries of science, or with treasures of gold? In everything else you have a plan. You do not go to work without knowing that there is something that you designed to make; how is it that you go to God without knowing what you design to have? If you had some object you would never find prayer to be dull and heavy work—I am persuaded that you would *long* for it. You would say, "I have something that I want. Oh that I could draw near my God, and ask Him for it; I have a need, I want to have it satisfied, and I long till I can get alone, that I may pour out my heart before Him, and ask Him for this great thing after which my soul so earnestly pants."

You will find it more helpful to your prayers if you have some objects at which you aim, and I think also if you have some persons whom you will mention. Do not merely plead with God for sinners in general, but always mention some in particular. If you are a Sunday-school teacher, don't simply ask that your class may be blessed, but pray for your children definitely by name before the Most High. And if there be a mercy in your household that you crave, don't go in a round-about way, but be simple and direct in your pleadings with God. When you pray to Him, tell Him what you want. If you have not money enough, if you are in poverty, if you are in straits, state the case. Use no mock-modesty with God. Come at once to the point; speak honestly with Him. He needs no beautiful periphrasis such as men will constantly use when they don't like to say right out what they mean.

If you want either a temporal or spiritual mercy, say so. Don't ransack the Bible to find out words in which to express it. Express your wants in the words that naturally suggest themselves to you. They will be the best words, depend upon it. Abraham's words were the best for Abraham, and yours will be the best for you. You need not study all the texts in Scripture, to pray just as Jacob and Elias did, using their expressions. If you do, you will not imitate them. You may imitate them literally and servilely, but you lack the soul that suggested and animated their words. Pray in your own words. Speak plainly to God; ask at once for what you want. Name persons, name things, and make a straight aim at the object of your supplications, and I am sure you will soon find that the weariness and dullness of which you often complain in your intercessions, will no more fall upon you; or at least not so habitually as it has heretofore done.

"But," saith one, "I do not feel that I have any special objects for which to pray." Ah! my dear brother, I know not who you are, or where you live, to be without special objects for prayer, for I find that every day brings either its need or its trouble, and that I have every day something to tell to my God. But if we had not a trouble, my dear brethren, if we had attained to such a height in grace that we had nothing to ask for, do we love Christ so much that we have no need to pray that we may love Him more? Have we so much faith that we have ceased to cry, "Lord, increase it?" You will always, I am sure, by a little self-examination, soon discover that there is some legitimate object for which you may knock at Mercy's door and cry, "Give me, Lord, the desire of my heart."

And if you have not any desire, you have but to ask the first tried Christian that you meet, and he will tell you of one. "Oh," he will reply to you, "If you have nothing to ask for yourself, pray for me. Ask that a sick wife may be recovered. Pray that the Lord would lift up the light of His countenance upon a desponding heart; ask that the Lord would send help to some minister who has been labouring in vain, and spending his strength for nought." When you have done for yourself, plead for others; and if you cannot meet with one who can suggest a theme, look on this huge Sodom, this city like another Gomorrah lying before you; carry it constantly in your prayers before God and cry, "Oh that London may live before thee, that its sin may be stayed, that its righteousness may be exalted, that the God of the earth may get unto Himself much people out of this city."

Earnest Desire

Equally necessary is it with the definite object for prayer that there should be an earnest desire for its attainment. "Cold prayers," says an old divine, "ask for a denial." When we ask the Lord coolly, fervently, we do, as it

were, stop His hand and restrain Him from giving us the very blessing we pretend that we are seeking. When you have your object in your eye, your soul must become so possessed with the value of that object, with your own excessive need for it, with the danger that you will be in unless that object should be granted, that you will be compelled to plead for it as a man pleadeth for his life.

There was a beautiful illustration of true prayer addressed to man in the conduct of two noble ladies, whose husbands were condemned to die and were about to be executed, when they came before King George and supplicated for their pardon. The king rudely and cruelly repulsed them. George the First! It was like his very nature. And when they pleaded yet again, and again, and again, they could not be gotten to rise from their knees; they had actually to be dragged out of court, for they would not retire until the king had smiled upon them, and told them that their husbands should live. Alas! they failed, but they were noble women for their perseverance in thus pleading for their husbands' lives.

That is the way for us to pray to God. We must have such a desire for the thing we want, that we will not rise until we have it—but in submission to His divine will, nevertheless. Feeling that the thing we ask for cannot be wrong, and that He Himself hath promised it, we have resolved it must be given, and if not given, we will plead the promise, again, and again, till heaven's gates shall shake before our pleas shall cease.

No wonder that God has not blessed us much of late, because we are not fervent in prayer as we should be. Oh, those cold-hearted prayers that die upon the lips—those frozen supplications. They do not move men's hearts, how should they move God's heart? They do not come from our own souls, they do not well up from the deep secret springs of our inmost heart, and therefore they cannot rise up to Him who only hears the cry of the soul, before whom hypocrisy can weave no veil, or formality practice any disguise. We must be earnest, otherwise we have no right to hope that the Lord will hear our prayer.

And surely, my brethren, it were enough to restrain all lightness and constrain an unceasing earnestness, did we apprehend the greatness of the Being before whom we plead. Shall I come into Thy presence, O my God, and mock thee with cold-hearted words? Do the angels veil their faces before Thee, and shall I be content to prattle through a form with no soul and no heart?

Ah, my brethren! we little know how many of our prayers are an abomination unto the Lord. It would be an abomination to you and to me to hear men ask us in the streets, as if they did not want what they asked for. But have we not done the same to God? Has not that which is heaven's greatest boon to man, become to us a dry dead duty? It was said of John Bradford that he had a peculiar art in prayer, and when asked for his secret, he said, "When I know what I want I always stop on that prayer until I feel that I have pleaded it with God, and until God and I have had dealings with each other upon it. I never go on to another petition till I have gone through the first."

Alas! for some men who begin "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name"; and before they have realized the adoring thought, "hallowed be thy name," they have begun to repeat the next words, "Thy kingdom come"—then perhaps something strikes their mind, "Do I really wish His kingdom to come? If it were to come now where should I be?" And while they are thinking of that, their voice is going on with, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"—so they jumble up their prayers and run the sentences together. Oh! stop at each one till you have really prayed it. Do not try to put two arrows on the string at once; they will both miss. He that would load his gun with two charges cannot expect to be successful. Discharge one shot first, and then load again. Plead once with God and prevail, and then plead again. Get the first mercy, and then go again for the second. Do not be satisfied with running the colours of your prayers into one another, till there is no picture to look at but just a huge daub, a smear of colours badly laid on.

Look at the Lord's Prayer itself (Mat 6:9-13). What clear sharp outlines there are in it. There are certain definite mercies, and they do not run into one another. There it stands, and as you look at the whole it is a magnificent picture; not confusion, but beautiful order. Be it so with your prayers. Stay on one till you have prevailed with that, and then go on to the next. With definite objects and with fervent desires mixed together, there is the dawning of hope that ye shall prevail with God.

Firm Faith

But again: these two things would not avail if they were not mixed with a still more essential and divine quality, namely, a firm faith in God. Brethren, do you believe in prayer? I know you pray because you are God's people; but do you believe in the power of prayer? There are a great many Christians that do not. They think it is a good thing, and they believe that sometimes it does wonders; but they do not think that prayer, real prayer, is always successful. They think that its effect depends upon many other things, but that it has not any essential quality or power in itself. Now, my own soul's conviction is, that prayer is the grandest power in the entire universe; that it has a more omnipotent force than electricity, attraction, gravitation, or any other of those secret forces that men have

called by names but that they do not understand. Prayer hath as palpable, as true, as sure, as invariable an influence over the entire universe, as any of the laws of matter.

When a man really prays, it is not a question whether God will hear him or not; He must hear him—not because there is any compulsion in the prayer, but there is a sweet and blessed compulsion in the promise. God has promised to hear prayer, and He will perform His promise. As He is the most high and true God, He cannot deny himself. Oh! to think of this: that you a puny man may stand here and speak to God, and through God may move all the worlds!

Yet when your prayer is heard, creation will not be disturbed; though the grandest ends be answered, providence will not be disarranged for a single moment. Not a leaf will fall earlier from the tree, not a star will stay in its course, nor one drop of water trickle more slowly from its fount—all will go on the same, and yet your prayer will have effected everything.

It will speak to the decrees and purposes of God, as they are being daily fulfilled; and they will all shout to your prayer, and cry, “Thou art our brother; we are decrees, and thou a prayer; but thou art thyself a decree, as old, as sure, as ancient as we are.” Our prayers are God’s decrees in another shape. The prayers of God’s people are but God’s promises breathed out of living hearts, and those promises are the decrees, only put into another form and fashion. Do not say, “How can my prayers affect the decrees?” They cannot, except in so much that your prayers are decrees, and that as they come out, every prayer that is inspired of the Holy Ghost unto your soul is as omnipotent and as eternal as that decree which said, “Let there be light, and there was light” (Gen 1:3); or as that decree which chose His people, and ordained their redemption by the precious blood of Christ (Eph 1:4-7).

Thou has power in prayer, and thou standest today among the most potent ministers in the universe that God has made. Thou has power over angels; they will fly at thy will. Thou hast power over fire, and water, and the elements of earth. Thou hast power to make thy voice heard beyond the stars; where the thunders die out in silence, thy voice shall wake the echoes of eternity. The ear of God Himself shall listen, and the hand of God Himself shall yield to thy will. He bids thee cry, “Thy will be done,” and thy will shall be done. When thou canst plead His promise, then thy will is His will.

Seems it not my dear friends, an awful thing to have such a power in one’s hands as to be able to pray? You have heard sometimes of men who pretended to have a weird and mystic might, by which they could call up spirits from the vast deep, by which they could make showers of rain, or stop the sun. It was all a figment of the fancy, but were it true, the Christian is a greater magician still. If he has but faith in God, there is nothing impossible to him. He shall be delivered out of the deepest waters; he shall be rescued out of the sorest troubles. In famine he shall be fed; in pestilence he shall go unscathed; amidst calamity he shall walk firm and strong; in war he shall be ever shielded; and in the day of battle he shall lift up his head, if he can but believe the promise, and hold it up before God’s eyes and plead it with the spell of unfaltering reliance. There is nothing, I repeat it, there is no force so tremendous, no energy so marvellous, as the energy with which God has endowed every man, who like Jacob can wrestle, like Israel can prevail with Him in prayer (Gen 32:24-29).

But we must have faith in this; we must believe prayer to be what it is, or else it is not what it should be. Unless I believe my prayer to be effectual it will not be, for on my faith will it to a great extent depend. God may give me the mercy even when I have not faith; that will be His own sovereign grace, but He has not promised to do it. But when I have faith and can plead the promise with earnest desire, it is no longer a probability as to whether I shall get the blessing, or whether my will shall be done. Unless the Eternal will swerve from His Word, unless the oath that He has given shall be revoked, and He Himself shall cease to be what He is, “We know that we have the petitions that we desired of him” (1Jo 5:15).

Realizing Expectation

And now to mount one step higher, together with definite objects, fervent desires, and strong faith in the efficacy of prayer there should be—and oh may divine grace make it so with us!—there should be mingled a realising expectation. We should be able to count over the mercies before we have got them, believing that they are on the road.

Reading the other day in a sweet little book—which I would commend to the attention of you all, written by an American author who seems to know the power of prayer thoroughly, and to whom I am indebted for many good things, a little book called *The Still Hour*—I met with a reference to a passage in the book of Daniel (10:10-13), where, as he says, the whole machinery of prayer seems to be laid bare. Daniel is on his knees in prayer, and Michael the archangel comes to him. He talks with him and tells him that as soon as ever Daniel began to set his heart to understand, and to chasten himself before God, his words were heard, and the Lord had dispatched the angel.

Then he tells him in the most business-like manner in the world, “I should have been here before, but the Prince of Persia withstood me; nevertheless the prince of thy nation helped me, and I am come to comfort and instruct thee.”

See now. God breathes the desire into our hearts; and as soon as the desire is there, before we call he begins to answer (Isa 65:24). Before the words have got half way up to heaven, while they are yet trembling on the lip—knowing the words we mean to speak—He begins to answer them, sends the angel; the angel comes and brings down the needed blessing. Why the thing is a revelation if you could see it with your eyes.

Some people think that spiritual things are dreams, and that we are talking fancies. Nay, I do believe there is as much reality in a Christian’s prayer as in a lightning flash; and the utility and excellency of the prayer of a Christian may be just as sensibly known as the power of the lightning flash when it rends the tree, breaks off its branches, and splits it to the very root. Prayer is not a fancy of fiction; it is a real, actual thing, coercing the universe, binding the laws of God themselves in fetters, and constraining the High and Holy One to listen to the will of His poor but favoured creature-man.

But we want always to believe this. We need a realizing assurance in prayer. To count over the mercies before they are come! To be sure that they are coming! To act as if we had got them! When you have asked for your daily bread, no more to be disturbed with care, but to believe that God has heard you and will give it to you. When you have taken the case of your sick child before God, to believe that the child will recover, or if it should not, that it will be a greater blessing to you and more glory to God, and so to leave it to Him. To be able to say, “I know He has heard me now; I will stand on my watch-tower; I will look for my God and hear what He will say to my soul” (Hab 2:1).

Were you ever disappointed yet, Christian, when you prayed in faith and expected the answer? I bear my own testimony here this morning, that I have never yet trusted Him and found Him fail me. I have trusted man and have been deceived, but my God has never once denied the request I have made to Him, when I have backed up the request with belief in His willingness to hear, and in the assurance of His promise.

But I hear some one say, “May we pray for temporals?” Ay, that you may. In everything make known your wants to God (Phi 4:6). It is not merely for spiritual, but for everyday concerns. Take your smallest trials before him. He is a God that heareth prayer; He is your household God as well as the God of the sanctuary. Be ever taking all that you have before God. As one good man who is about to be united with this Church told me of his departed wife, “Oh,” said he, “she was a woman that I could never get to do anything till she had made a matter of prayer of it. Be it what it might, she used to say, ‘I must make it a matter of prayer.’” Oh for more of this sweet habit of spreading everything before the Lord, just as Hezekiah did Rabshekah’s letter (2Ki 19:4), and there leaving it, saying, “Thy will be done, I resign it to thee!”

Men say Mr. Müller of Bristol is enthusiastic, because he will gather seven hundred children and believe that God will provide for them, though there is nothing in the purse—he is only doing what ought to be the commonplace action of every Christian man. He is acting upon a rule at which the worldling always must scoff because he does not understand it; a system that must always appear to weak judgment of sense; not upon common sense, but upon something higher than common sense: upon uncommon faith. Oh that we had that uncommon faith to take God at His word! He cannot and He will not permit the man that trusteth Him to be ashamed or confounded. I have thus now, as best I could, set forth before you what I conceive to be four essentials of prevailing prayer. “Whatsoever things ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them and ye shall have them.”

II. Look about You.

Having thus asked you to look *at* the text, I want you now to look *about* you. Look about you at our meetings for prayer, and look about you at your private intercessions, and judge them both by the tenour of this text.

Prayer Meetings

First, look about you at the meetings for prayer; I cannot speak very pointedly in this matter, because I do honestly believe that the prayer-meetings that are usually held among us, have far less of the faults which I am about to indicate, than any others I have ever attended. But, still they have some of the faults, and I hope that what we shall say will be taken personally home by every brother who is in the habit of engaging publicly in supplication at prayer-meetings.

Is it not a fact, that as soon as you enter the meeting, you feel, the case of many praying men (to speak hardly perhaps, but I think honestly) lies in having a good memory to recollect a great many texts that always have been quoted since the days of our grandfather’s grandfather, and to be able to repeat them in good regular order. The gift lies also in some churches, especially in village churches, in having strong lungs, so as to be able to hold out, with-

out taking breath for five and twenty minutes when you are brief, and three quarters of an hour when you are rather drawn out. The gift lies also in being able not to ask for anything in particular, but in passing through a range of everything, making the prayer, not an arrow with a point, but rather like a nondescript machine, that has no point whatever, and yet is meant to be all point, which is aimed at everything and consequently strikes nothing. Those brethren are often the most frequently asked to pray who have those peculiar, and perhaps, excellent gifts, although I certainly must say that I cannot obey the apostle's injunction in coveting very earnestly such gifts as these.

Now, if instead thereof, some man is asked to pray, who has never prayed before in public; suppose he rises and says, "Oh Lord, I feel myself such a sinner that I can scarcely speak to thee, Lord, help me to pray! O Lord, save my poor soul! O that thou wouldst save my old companions! Lord, bless our minister! be pleased to give us a revival. O Lord, I can say no more; hear me for Jesus' sake! Amen." Well, then, you feel somehow, as if you had begun to pray yourself. You feel an interest in that man, partly from fear lest he should stop, and also because you are sure that what he did say, he meant. And if another should get up after that, and pray in the same spirit, you go out and say, "This is real prayer." I would sooner have three minutes prayer like that, than thirty minutes of the other sort, because the one is praying, and the other is preaching.

Allow me to quote what an old preacher said upon the subject of prayer, and give it to you as a little word of advice. "Remember, the Lord will not hear thee because of the arithmetic of thy prayers; He does not count their numbers. He will not hear thee because of the rhetoric of thy prayers; He does not care for the eloquent language in which they are conveyed. He will not listen to thee because of the geometry of thy prayers; He does not compute them by their length or by their breadth. He will not regard thee because of the music of thy prayers; He doth not care for sweet voices nor for harmonious periods. Neither will He look at thee because of the logic of thy prayers—because they are well arranged, and excellently comparted. But He *will* hear thee, and He will measure the amount of the blessing He will give thee, according to the *divinity* of thy prayers. If thou canst plead the person of Christ, and if the Holy Ghost inspire thee with zeal and earnestness, the blessings that thou shalt ask shall surely come unto thee."

Brethren, I would like to burn the whole stock of old prayers that we have been using this fifty years. That "oil that goes from vessel to vessel," that "horse that rushes into the battle," that misquoted mangled text, "where two or three" are met together, thou wilt be in the midst of them, and that to bless them (Mat 18:20)—and all those other quotations that we have been manufacturing, and dislocating, and copying from man to man. I would we came to speak to God, just out of our own hearts.

It would be a grand thing for our prayer meetings, they would be better attended, and I am sure they would be more fruitful, if every man would shake off that habit of formality, and talk to God as a child talks to his father. Ask Him for what we want, and then sit down and have done. I say this with all Christian earnestness. Often, because I have not chosen to pray in any conventional form, people have said, "That man is not reverent!" My dear sir, you are not a judge of my reverence. To my own Master I stand or fall. I do not think that Job quoted anybody. I do not think that Jacob quoted the old saint in heaven, his father Abraham. I do not find Jesus Christ quoted Scripture in prayer. They did not pray in other people's words, but they prayed in their own.

God does not want you to go gathering up those excellent but very musty spices of the old sanctuary. He wants the new oil just distilled from the fresh olive of your own soul. He wants spices and frankincense, not of the old chests where they have been lying until they have lost their savour; but He wants fresh incense, and fresh myrrh, brought from the ophir²⁶ of your own soul's experience. Look well to it that you really pray. Do not learn the language of prayer, but seek the spirit of prayer, and God Almighty bless you, and make you more mighty in your supplications.

Personal Prayer

I have said, "Look about you." I want you to continue the work, and look about at your own closets. Oh! Brethren and sisters, there is no place that some of us need to be so much ashamed to look at as our closet door. I cannot say the hinges are rusty; they do open and shut at their appointed seasons. I cannot say that the door is locked and cobwebbed; we do not neglect prayer itself.

But those walls, those beams out of the wall, what a tale might they tell! "Oh!" the wall might cry out, "I have heard thee when thou hast been in so vast a hurry that thou couldst scarcely spend two minutes with thy God. And I have heard thee, too, when thou wast neither asleep nor awake, and when thou didst not know what thou wast saying." Then one beam might cry out, "I have heard thee come and spend ten minutes and not ask for anything; at least thy heart did not ask. The lips moved, but the heart did not ask. The lips moved, but the heart was silent." How

²⁶ **ophir** – a country from which fine gold was imported to Judah (2Ch 8:18); thus, that which is very good.

might another beam cry out, “Oh! I have heard thee groan out thy soul, but I have seen thee go away distrustful, not believing thy prayer was heard; quoting the promise, but not thinking God would fulfil it.” Surely the four walls of the closet might come together and fall down upon us in their anger, because we have so often insulted God with our unbelief and with our hurry, and with all manner of sins.

We have insulted Him even at His mercy seat, on the spot where His condescension is most fully manifested. Is it not so with you? Must we not each confess it in our turn? See to it then, Christian brethren, that an amendment be made, and God make you more mighty and more successful in your prayers than heretofore.

III. Look Above!

But not to detain you, the last point is [to] look upward, look *above*. Look above Christian brethren and sisters, and let us weep. Oh God, Thou hast given us a mighty weapon, and we have permitted it to rust. Thou hast given us that which is mighty as Thyself, and we have let that power lie dormant. Would it not be a vile crime if a man had an eye given him that he would not open, or a hand that he would not lift up, or a foot that grew stiff because he would not use it. And what must we say of ourselves when God has given us power in prayer, and yet that power lies still. Oh, if the universe was as still as we are, where should we be?

Oh God, thou givest light to the sun and he shines with it. Thou givest light even to the stars and they twinkle. To the winds thou givest force and they blow. And to the air thou givest life and it moves, and men breathe thereof. But to Thy people, Thou hast given a gift that is better than force, and life, and light, and yet they permit it to lie still—forgetful almost that they wield the power, seldom exercising it, though it would be blessed to countless myriads. Weep, Christian man.

Constantine, the Emperor of Rome, saw that on the coins of the other emperors, their images were in an erect posture—triumphing. Instead thereof he ordered that his image should be struck kneeling, for said he, “That is the way in which I have triumphed.” We shall never triumph till our image is struck kneeling. The reason why we have been defeated, and why our banners trail in the dust, is because we have not prayed.

Go!—go ye back to your God, with sorrow, confess before Him, ye children of Ephraim, that ye were armed, and carried bows, but turned your backs in the day of battle. Go to your God and tell Him that if souls are not saved, it is not because He has not power to save, but because you have never travailed as it were in birth for perishing sinners. Your bowels have not sounded like a harp for Kirharesh (Isa 16:11), neither has your spirit been moved because of the defences of the tribe of Reuben.

Wake up, wake up, ye people of Israel; be astonished, ye careless ones; ye who have neglected prayer; ye sinners that are in Zion’s own self, and that have been at ease. Wake up yourselves; wrestle and strive with your God, and then the blessing shall come—the early and the latter rain of His mercy, and the earth shall bring forth plentifully, and all the nations shall call Him blessed (Deu 11:14). Look up then, and weep.

Once more look up and rejoice. Though you have sinned against Him, He loves you still. Ye have not prayed unto Him nor sought His face, but behold He cries to you still, “Seek ye my face”—and He saith not “Seek ye me in vain” (Psa 27:8; Isa 45:19). Ye may not have gone to the fountain, but it flows as freely as before. Ye have not drawn near to God, but He waiteth to be gracious still, and is ready to hear all your petitions. Behold, He says unto you, “Ask of me of things to come concerning my sons [and daughters]...command ye me” (Isa 45:11). What a blessed thing it is that the Master in heaven is always ready to hear!

Augustine²⁷ has a very beautiful thought upon the parable of the man who knocked at his friend’s door at midnight, saying, “Friend, give me three loaves.” His paraphrase of it runs something like this,

I knock at mercy’s door, and it is the dead of night. “Will not some of the servants of the house come and answer me?” No; I knock, but they are asleep. Oh! ye apostles of God—ye glorified martyrs—ye are asleep; ye rest in your beds; ye cannot hear my prayer. But will not the children answer? Are there not children who are ready to come and open the door to their brother? No; they are asleep. My brethren that have departed—with whom I took sweet counsel, and who were the companions of my heart—ye cannot answer me for ye rest in Jesus; your works do follow you, but you cannot work for me. But while the servants are asleep, and while the children cannot answer, the Master is awake—awake at midnight too. It may be midnight with my soul, but He hears me, and when I am saying “Give me three loaves,” He comes to the door and giveth me as much as I need.

Christian, look up then and rejoice. There is always an open ear if you have an open mouth. There is always a ready hand if you have a ready heart. You have but to cry and the Lord hears; nay, before you call He will answer,

²⁷ **Augustine** (AD 354-430) – Bishop of Hippo, early church theologian known by many as the father of orthodox theology; born in Tagaste, North Africa.

and while you are speaking He will hear. Oh! be not backward then in prayer. Go to Him when you reach your home; nay, on the very way lift up your hearts silently; and whatever your petition or request may be, ask it in Jesus' name, and it shall be done unto you!

Yet, again, look up dear Christian brethren, and amend your prayers from this time forth. Look on prayer no longer as a romantic fiction or as an arduous duty; look at it as a real power, as a real pleasure. When philosophers discover some latent power, they seem to have a delight to put it in action. I believe there have been many great engineers, who have designed and constructed some of the most wonderful of human works, not because they would be remunerative, but simply from a love of showing their own power to accomplish wonders. To show the world what skill could do and what man could accomplish, they have tempted companies into speculations that could never remunerate apparently, so far as I could see, in order that they might have an opportunity of displaying their genius.

O Christian men, and shall a great Engineer attempt great works and display His power, and will you who have a mightier power than ever was wielded by any man apart from His God—will you let that be still? Nay think of some great object, strain the sinews of your supplications for it. Let every vein of your heart be full to the brim with the rich blood of desire, and struggle, and wrestle, and tug and strive with God for it, using the promises and pleading the attributes, and see if God does not give you your heart's desire.

I challenge you this day to exceed in prayer my Master's bounty. I throw down the gauntlet to you. Believe Him to be more than He is; open your mouth so wide that He cannot fill it; go to Him now for more faith than the promise warrants; venture it, risk it, outdo the Eternal if it be possible; attempt it! Or, as I would rather put it thus, take your petitions and wants and see if He does not honor you. Try whether if you believe Him He doth not fulfill the promise and richly bless you with the anointing oil of His Spirit by which you will be strong in prayer.

I cannot refrain from adding just these few syllables as you go away. I know there are some of you that never prayed in your lives. You have said a form of prayer, perhaps, many years, but have never *prayed* once. Ah! poor soul, you must be born again, and until you are born again you cannot pray as I have been directing the Christian to pray. But let me say this much to you. Does your heart long after salvation? Has the Spirit whispered, "Come to Jesus, sinner; He will hear you?" Believe that whisper, for He *will* hear you. The prayer of the awakened sinner is acceptable to God. He heareth the broken in heart, and healeth them too. Take your groanings and your sighs to God, and He will answer you.

"Ah," but says one, "I have nothing to plead." Well, but plead as David did, "Pardon mine iniquity, for it is great" (Psa 25:11). You have that plea—say, "For His dear sake who shed His blood," and you shall prevail, sinner.

But do not go to God, and ask for mercy with thy sin in thy hand. What would you think of the rebel who appeared before the face of his sovereign, and asked for pardon with the dagger sticking in his belt, and with the declaration of his rebellion on his breast? Would he deserve to be pardoned? He could not deserve it in any case, and surely he would deserve double his doom for having thus mocked his master while he pretended to be seeking mercy. If a wife had forsaken her husband, do you think she would have the impudence, with brazen forehead, to come back and ask pardon for leaning on the arm of her paramour? No, she could not have such impudence, and yet it is so with you—perhaps asking for mercy and going on in sin; praying to be reconciled to God, and yet harbouring and indulging your lust.

Awake! awake! and call upon thy God, thou sleeper. The boat is nearing the rock, perhaps tomorrow it may strike and be shivered, and thou be cast into the unfathomable depths of everlasting woe. Call on thy God, I say, and when thou callest upon Him, cast away thy sin or He cannot hear thee. If thou lift up thy unholy hands with a lie in thy right hand, a prayer is worthless on thy lip. Oh, come unto Him, say unto Him, "Take away all iniquity, receive us graciously, love us freely," and He will hear you, and you shall yet pray as prevailing princes, and one day shall stand as more than conquerors before the starry throne of Him who ever reigns, God over all, blessed for evermore. ✎

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SANCTIFICATION

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

“Have ye not read?...have ye not read?...if ye had known what this meaneth.”

—Matthew 12:3-7

THE scribes and Pharisees were great readers of the Law. They studied the sacred books continually, poring over each word and letter. They made notes of very little importance, but still very curious notes—as to which was the middle verse of the entire Old Testament, which verse was half-way to the middle, and how many times such a word occurred, and even how many times a letter occurred, and the size of the letter, and its peculiar position. They have left us a mass of wonderful notes upon the mere words of Holy Scripture. They might have done the same thing upon another book for that matter, and the information would have been about as important as the facts that they have so industriously collected concerning the letter of the Old Testament.

They were, however, intense readers of the Law. They picked a quarrel with the Saviour upon a matter touching this Law, for they carried it at their fingers’ ends, and were ready to use it as a bird of prey does its talons to tear and rend. Our Lord’s disciples had plucked some ears of corn, and rubbed them between their hands. According to Pharisaic interpretation, to rub an ear of corn is a kind of threshing, and, as it is very wrong to thresh on the Sabbath day, therefore it must be very wrong to rub out an ear or two of wheat when you are hungry on the Sabbath morning. That was their argument, and they came to the Saviour with it, and with their version of the Sabbath Law.

The Saviour generally carried the war into the enemy’s camp, and He did so on this occasion. He met them on their own ground, and He said to them, “Have ye not read?”—a cutting question to the scribes and Pharisees though there is nothing apparently sharp about it. It was a very fair and proper question to put to them. But only think of putting it to them. “Have ye not read?” “Read!” they could have said, “Why, we have read the book through very many times. We are always reading it. No passage escapes our critical eyes.” Yet our Lord proceeds to put the question a second time. “Have ye not read?”—as if they had not read after all, though they were the greatest readers of the Law then living. He insinuates that they have not read at all; and then He gives them incidentally the reason why He had asked them whether they had read. He says, “If ye had known what this meaneth,” as much as to say, “Ye have not read, because ye have not understood.” Your eyes have gone over the words, and you have counted the letters, and you have marked the position of each verse and word, and you have said learned things about all the books—and yet you are not even readers of the sacred volume, for you have not acquired the true art of reading. You do not understand, and therefore you do not truly read it. You are mere skimmers and glancers at the Word; you have not read it, for you do not understand it.

1. There Must Be an Understanding of the Scriptures.

That is the subject of our present discourse, or, at least, the first point of it, that in order to the true reading of the Scriptures, *there must be an understanding of them*. I scarcely need to preface these remarks by saying that we must read the Scriptures. You know how necessary it is that we should be fed upon the truth of holy Scripture. Need I suggest the question as to whether you do read your Bibles or not? I am afraid that this is a magazine reading age—a newspaper reading age, a periodical reading age—but not so much a Bible reading age as it ought to be.

In the old Puritanic times men used to have a scant supply of other literature, but they found a library enough in the one Book, the Bible. And how they did read the Bible! How little of Scripture there is in modern sermons compared with the sermons of those masters of theology, the Puritanic divines! Almost every sentence of theirs seems

to cast side lights upon a text of Scripture; not only the one they are preaching about, but many others as well are set in a new light as the discourse proceeds. They introduce blended lights from other passages that are parallel or semi-parallel thereunto, and thus they educate their readers to compare spiritual things with spiritual.

I would to God that we ministers kept more closely to the grand old Book. We should be instructive preachers if we did so, even if we were ignorant of “modern thought,” and were not “abreast of the times.” I warrant you we should be leagues ahead of our times if we kept closely to the Word of God. As for you, my brothers and sisters who have not to preach, the best food for you is the Word of God itself. Sermons and books are well enough, but streams that run for a long distance above ground gradually gather for themselves somewhat of the soil through which they flow, and they lose the cool freshness with which they started from the spring head. Truth is sweetest where it breaks from the smitten Rock, for at its first gush it has lost none of its heavenliness and vitality. It is always best to drink at the well and not from the tank. You shall find that reading the Word of God for yourselves, reading it rather than notes upon it, is the surest way of growing in grace. Drink of the unadulterated milk of the Word of God, and not of the skim milk, or the milk and water of man’s word.

But, now, beloved, our point is that much apparent Bible reading is not Bible reading at all. The verses pass under the eye, and the sentences glide over the mind, but there is no true reading. An old preacher used to say, the Word has mighty free course among many nowadays, for it goes in at one of their ears and out at the other. So it seems to be with some readers: they can read a very great deal because they do not read anything. The eye glances but the mind never rests. The soul does not light upon the truth and stay there. It flits over the landscape as a bird might do, but it builds no nest therein, and finds no rest for the sole of its foot. Such reading is not *reading*. Understanding the meaning is the essence of true reading. Reading has a kernel to it, and the mere shell is little worth. In prayer there is such a thing as praying in prayer—a praying that is the bowels of the prayer. So in praise there is a praising in song, an inward fire of intense devotion which is the life of the hallelujah. It is so in fasting: there is a fasting that is not fasting, and there is an inward fasting, a fasting of the soul, that is the soul of fasting.

It is even so with the reading of the Scriptures. There is an interior reading, a kernel reading—a true and living reading of the Word. This is the soul of reading; and, if it be not there, the reading is a mechanical exercise and profits nothing. Now, beloved, unless we understand what we read we have not read it; the heart of the reading is absent. We commonly condemn the Romanists for keeping the daily service in the Latin tongue; yet it might as well be in the Latin language as in any other tongue if it be not understood by the people. Some comfort themselves with the idea that they have done a good action when they have read a chapter, into the meaning of which they have not entered at all; but does not nature herself reject this as a mere superstition? If you had turned the book upside down, and spent the same time in looking at the characters in that direction, you would have gained as much good from it as you will in reading it in the regular way without understanding it.

If you had a New Testament in Greek, it would be very Greek to some of you, but it would do you as much good to look at that as it does to look at the English New Testament—unless you read with an understanding heart. It is not the letter that saves the soul; the letter killeth in many senses, and never can it give life. If you harp on the letter alone, you may be tempted to use it as a weapon against the truth, as the Pharisees did of old; and your knowledge of the letter may breed pride in you to your destruction. It is the spirit, the real inner meaning, that is sucked into the soul, by which we are blessed and sanctified. We become saturated with the Word of God, like Gideon’s fleece, which was wet with the dew of heaven (Jdg 6:37-38); and this can only come to pass by our receiving it into our minds and hearts, accepting it as God’s truth, and so far understanding it as to delight in it. We must understand it, then, or else we have not read it aright.

Certainly, the benefit of reading must come to the soul by the way of the understanding. When the high priest went into the holy place, he always lit the golden candlestick *before* he kindled the incense upon the brazen altar, as if to show that the mind must have illumination before the affections can properly rise towards their divine object. There must be knowledge of God before there can be love to God. There must be a knowledge of divine things, as they are revealed, before there can be an enjoyment of them. We must try to make out, as far as our finite mind can grasp it, what God means by this and what He means by that; otherwise we may kiss the book and have no love to its contents, we may reverence the letter and yet really have no devotion towards the Lord who speaks to us in these words. Beloved, you will never get comfort to your soul out of what you do not understand, nor find guidance for your life out of what you do not comprehend; nor can any practical bearing upon your character come out of that which is not understood by you.

Now, if we are thus to understand what we read or otherwise we read in vain, this shows us that when we come to the study of Holy Scripture we should try to have our mind well awake to it. We are not always fit, it seems to me, to read the Bible. At times it were well for us to stop before we open the volume. “Put off thy shoe from thy

foot, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground” (Exo 3:5). You have just come in from careful thought and anxiety about your worldly business, and you cannot immediately take that book and enter into its heavenly mysteries. As you ask a blessing over your meat before you fall to, so it would be a good rule for you to ask a blessing on the Word before you partake of its heavenly food. Pray the Lord to strengthen your eyes before you dare to look into the eternal light of Scripture. As the priests washed their feet at the laver before they went to their holy work, so it were well to wash the soul’s eyes with which you look upon God’s Word, to wash even the fingers, if I may so speak—the mental fingers with which you will turn from page to page—that with a holy book you may deal after a holy fashion.

Say to your soul, “Come, soul, wake up: thou art not now about to read the newspaper; thou art not now perusing the pages of a human poet to be dazzled by his flashing poetry; thou art coming very near to God, who sits in the Word like a crowned monarch in his halls. Wake up, my glory; wake up, all that is within me. Though just now I may not be praising and glorifying God, I am about to consider that which should lead me so to do, and therefore it is an act of devotion. So be on the stir, my soul; be on the stir, and bow not sleepily before the awful throne of the Eternal.” Scripture reading is our spiritual meal time. Sound the gong and call in every faculty to the Lord’s own table to feast upon the precious meat that is now to be partaken of; or, rather, ring the church-bell as for worship, for the studying of the Holy Scripture ought to be as solemn a deed as when we lift the psalm upon the Sabbath day in the courts of the Lord’s house.

If these things be so, you will see at once, dear friends, that, if you are to understand what you read, you will need to *meditate* upon it. Some passages of Scripture lie clear before us, blessed shallows in which the lambs may wade; but there are deeps in which our mind might rather drown herself than swim with pleasure, if she came there without caution. There are texts of Scripture that are made and constructed on purpose to make us think. By this means, among others, our heavenly Father would educate us for heaven, by making us think our way into divine mysteries. Hence He puts the Word in a somewhat involved form to compel us to meditate upon it before we reach the sweetness of it. He might, you know, have explained it to us so that we might catch the thought in a minute, but He does not please to do so in every case. Many of the veils that are cast over Scripture are not meant to hide the meaning from the diligent, but to compel the mind to be active—for oftentimes the diligence of the heart in seeking to know the divine mind does the heart more good than the knowledge itself. Meditation and careful thought exercise us and strengthen the soul for the reception of the yet more lofty truths.

I have heard that the mothers in the Balearic Isles, in the old times, who wanted to bring their boys up to be good slingers, would put their dinners up above them where they could not get at them until they threw a stone and fetched them down. Our Lord wishes us to be good slingers, and He puts up some precious truth in a lofty place where we cannot get it down except by slinging at it—at last we hit the mark and find food for our souls. Then have we the double benefit of learning the art of meditation and partaking of the sweet truth that it has brought within our reach. We must meditate, brothers. These grapes will yield no wine till we tread upon them. These olives must be put under the wheel, and pressed again and again, that the oil may flow therefrom.

In a dish of nuts, you may know which nut has been eaten because there is a little hole that the insect has punctured through the shell—just a little hole, and then inside there is the living thing eating up the kernel. Well, it is a grand thing to bore through the shell of the letter, and then to live inside feeding upon the kernel. I would wish to be such a little worm as that, living within and upon the Word of God, having bored my way through the shell, and having reached the innermost mystery of the blessed Gospel. The Word of God is always most precious to the man who most lives upon it.

As I sat last year under a wide-spreading beech, I was pleased to mark with prying curiosity the singular habits of that most wonderful of trees, which seems to have an intelligence about it which other trees have not. I wondered and admired the beech; but I thought to myself, I do not think half as much of this beech tree as yonder squirrel does. I see him leap from bough to bough, and I feel sure that he dearly values the old beech tree, because he has his home somewhere inside it in a hollow place. These branches are his shelter, and those beech-nuts are his food. He lives upon the tree. It is his world, his playground, his granary, his home; indeed, it is everything to him. [But] it is not so to me, for I find my rest and food elsewhere. With God’s Word it is well for us to be like squirrels, living in it and living on it. Let us exercise our minds by leaping from bough to bough of it, find our rest and food in it, and make it our all in all. We shall be the people that get the profit out of it if we make it to be our food, our medicine, our treasury, our armoury, our rest, our delight. May the Holy Ghost lead us to do this and make the Word thus precious to our souls.

Beloved, I would next remind you that for this end we shall be compelled to *pray*. It is a grand thing to be driven to think, it is a grander thing to be driven to pray through having been made to think. Am I not addressing some

of you who do not read the Word of God, and am I not speaking to many more who do read it, but do not read it with the strong resolve that they will understand it? I know it must be so. Do you wish to begin to be true readers? Will you henceforth labour to understand? Then you must get to your knees. You must cry to God for direction.

Who understands a book best? The author of it! If I want to ascertain the real meaning of a rather twisted sentence, and the author lives near me and I can call upon him, I shall ring at his door and say, "Would you kindly tell me what you mean by that sentence? I have no doubt whatever that it is very clear, but I am such a simpleton that I cannot make it out. I have not the knowledge and grasp of the subject that you possess, and therefore your allusions and descriptions are beyond my range of knowledge. It is quite within your range and commonplace to you, but it is very difficult to me. Would you kindly explain your meaning to me?" A good man would be glad to be thus treated, and would think it no trouble to unravel his meaning to a candid enquirer. Thus I should be sure to get the correct meaning, for I should be going to the fountain head when I consulted the author himself.

So, beloved, the Holy Spirit is with us, and when we take His book and begin to read, and want to know what it means, we must ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the meaning. He will not work a miracle, but He will elevate our minds, and He will suggest to us thoughts that will lead us on by their natural relation, the one to the other, till at last we come to the pith and marrow of His divine instruction. Seek then very earnestly the guidance of the Holy Spirit, for if the very soul of reading be the understanding of what we read, then we must in prayer call upon the Holy Ghost to unlock the secret mysteries of the inspired Word.

If we thus ask the guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit, it will follow, dear friends, that we shall be ready to use *all means and helps* towards the understanding of the Scriptures. When Philip asked the Ethiopian eunuch whether he understood the prophecy of Isaiah, he replied, "How can I, unless some man should guide me?" (Act 8:31). Then Philip went up and opened to him the Word of the Lord. Some, under the pretence of being taught of the Spirit of God, refuse to be instructed by books or by living men. This is no honouring of the Spirit of God; it is a disrespect to Him, for if He gives to some of His servants more light than to others—and it is clear he does—then they are bound to give that light to others, and to use it for the good of the church. But if the other part of the church refuse to receive that light, to what end did the Spirit of God give it? This would imply that there is a mistake somewhere in the economy of gifts and graces, which is managed by the Holy Spirit. It cannot be so.

The Lord Jesus Christ pleases to give more knowledge of His Word and more insight into it to some of His servants than to others, and it is ours joyfully to accept the knowledge that He gives in such ways as He chooses to give it. It would be most wicked of us to say, "We will not have the heavenly treasure which exists in earthen vessels. If God will give us the heavenly treasure out of His own hand, but not through the earthen vessel, we will have it. But we think we are too wise, too heavenly minded, too spiritual altogether to care for jewels when they are placed in earthen pots. We will not hear anybody, and we will not read anything except the book itself, neither will we accept any light, except that which comes in through a crack in our own roof. We will not see by another man's candle, we would sooner remain in the dark." Brethren, do not let us fall into such folly. Let the light come from God, and though a child shall bring it, we will joyfully accept it. If any one of His servants, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, shall have received light from him, behold, "all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1Co 3:23), and therefore accept of the light that God has kindled, and ask for grace that you may turn that light upon the Word, so that when you read it you may understand it.

I do not wish to say much more about this, but I should like to push it home upon some of you. You have Bibles at home, I know; you would not like to be without Bibles—you would think you were heathens if you had no Bibles. You have them very neatly bound, and they are very fine looking volumes, not much thumbed, not much worn, and not likely to be so, for they only come out on Sundays for an airing, and they lie in lavender with the clean pocket handkerchiefs all the rest of the week. You do not read the Word, you do not search it, and how can you expect to get the divine blessing? If the heavenly gold is not worth digging for, you are not likely to discover it.

Often and often have I told you that the searching of the Scriptures is not the way of salvation. The Lord hath said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Act 16:31). But still, the reading of the Word often leads, like the hearing of it, to faith, and faith bringeth salvation; for faith cometh by hearing (Rom 10:17), and reading is a sort of hearing. While you are seeking to know what the Gospel is, it may please God to bless your souls. But what poor reading some of you give to your Bibles! I do not want to say anything that is too severe because it is not strictly true—let your own consciences speak—but still, I make bold to enquire: Do not many of you read the Bible in a very hurried way, just a little bit, and off you go? Do you not soon forget what you have read, and lose what little effect it seemed to have? How few of you are resolved to get at its soul, its juice, its life, its essence, and to drink in its meaning. Well, if you do not do that, I tell you again your reading is miserable reading,

dead reading, unprofitable reading; it is not reading at all, the name would be misapplied. May the blessed Spirit give you repentance touching this thing.

2. Seek Out the Spiritual Teaching of the Word.

But now, secondly, and very briefly, let us notice that in reading we ought to *seek out the spiritual teaching* of the Word. I think that is in my text, because our Lord says, “Have ye not read?” Then, again, “Have ye not read?” And then He says, “If ye had known what this meaneth”—and the meaning is something very spiritual. The text He quoted was, “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice”—a text out of the prophet Hosea (6:6). Now, the scribes and Pharisees were all for the letter: the sacrifice, the killing of the bullock, and so on. They overlooked the spiritual meaning of the passage, “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice”—namely, that God prefers that we should care for our fellow-creatures rather than that we should observe any ceremonial of His Law, so as to cause hunger or thirst, and thereby death, to any of the creatures that His hands have made. They ought to have passed beyond the outward into the spiritual, and all our readings ought to do the same.

Notice, that this should be the case when we read the *historical passages*. “Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungered, and they that were with him; how he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shew-bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?” (Mat 12:4). This was a piece of history, and they ought so to have read it as to have found spiritual instruction in it. I have heard very stupid people say, “Well, I do not care to read the historical parts of Scripture.” Beloved friends, you do not know what you are talking about when you say so.

I say to you now by experience that I have sometimes found even a greater depth of spirituality in the histories than I have in the Psalms. You will say, “How is that?” I assert that when you reach the inner and spiritual meaning of a history you are often surprised at the wondrous clearness, the realistic force, with which the teaching comes home to your soul. Some of the most marvelous mysteries of revelation are better understood by being set before our eyes in the histories than they are by the verbal declaration of them. When we have the statement to explain the illustration, the illustration expands and vivifies the statement.

For instance, when our Lord himself would explain to us what faith was, He sent us to the history of the brazen serpent (Num 21:9). And who that has ever read the story of the brazen serpent has not felt that he has had a better idea of faith through the picture of the dying snake-bitten persons looking to the serpent of brass and living, than from any description that even Paul has given us, [as] wondrously as he defines and describes. Never, I pray you, depreciate the historical portions of God’s Word, but when you cannot get good out of them, say, “That is my foolish head and my slow heart. O Lord, be pleased to clear by brain and cleanse my soul.” When He answers that prayer you will feel that every portion of God’s Word is given by inspiration, and is and must be profitable to you. Cry, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Psa 119:18).

Just the same thing is true with regard to all the *ceremonial precepts*, because the Saviour goes on to say, “Have ye not read in the law, how that on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?” There is not a single precept in the old Law but has an inner sense and meaning. Therefore, do not turn away from Leviticus, or say, “I cannot read these chapters in the books of Exodus and Numbers. They are all about the tribes and their standards, the stations in the wilderness and the halts of the march, the tabernacle and furniture, or about golden knops and bowls, and boards, and sockets, and precious stones, and blue and scarlet and fine linen.” No, but look for the inner meaning. Make thorough search; for as in a king’s treasure that which is the most closely locked up and the hardest to come at, is the choicest jewel of the treasure, so is it with the Holy Scriptures.

Did you ever go to the British Museum Library? There are many books of reference there that the reader is allowed to take down when he pleases. There are other books for which he must write a ticket, and he cannot get them without the ticket. But they have certain choice books that you will not see without a special order, and then there is an unlocking of doors, and an opening of cases, and there is a watcher with you while you make your inspection. You are scarcely allowed to put your eye on the manuscript, for fear you should blot a letter out by glancing at it—it is such a precious treasure; there is not another copy of it in all the world, and so you cannot get at it easily. Just so, there are choice and precious doctrines of God’s Word that are locked up in such cases as Leviticus or Solomon’s Song, and you cannot get at them without a deal of unlocking of doors; and the Holy Spirit Himself must be with you, or else you will never come at the priceless treasure. The higher truths are as choicely hidden away as the precious regalia²⁸ of princes; therefore, search as well as read. Do not be satisfied with a ceremonial

²⁸ **regalia** – emblems and symbols of royalty, such as crown or scepter.

precept till you reach its spiritual meaning, for that is true reading. You have not read till you understand the spirit of the matter.

It is just the same with the *doctrinal statements* of God's Word. I have sorrowfully observed some persons who are very orthodox, and who can repeat their creed very glibly, and yet the principal use that they make of their orthodoxy is to sit and watch the preacher with the view of framing a charge against him. He has uttered a single sentence that is judged to be half a hair's breadth below the standard! "That man is not sound. He said some good things, but he is rotten at the core, I am certain. He used an expression that was not eighteen ounces to the pound." Sixteen ounces to the pound are not enough for these dear brethren of whom I speak, they must have something more and over and above the shekel of the sanctuary. Their knowledge is used as a microscope to magnify trifling differences.

I hesitate not to say that I have come across persons who "Could a hair divide betwixt the west and north-west side" in matters of divinity, but who know nothing about the things of God in their real meaning. They have never drank them into their souls, but only sucked them up into their mouths to spit them out on others. The doctrine of election is one thing, but to know that God has predestinated *you*, and to have the fruit of it in the good works to which you are ordained, is quite another thing. To talk about the love of Christ, to talk about the heaven that is provided for His people, and such things—all this is very well, but this may be done without any personal acquaintance with them. Therefore, beloved, never be satisfied with a sound creed, but desire to have it graven on the tablets of your heart. The doctrines of grace are good, but the grace of the doctrines is better still. See that you have it, and be not content with the idea that you are instructed, until you so understand the doctrine that you have felt its spiritual power.

This makes us feel that, in order to come to this, we shall need to feel *Jesus present with us* whenever we read the Word. Mark that fifth verse, which I would now bring before you as part of my text that I have hitherto left out. "Have ye not read in the law, how on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple." Ay, they thought much about the letter of the Word, but they did not know that He was there who is the Sabbath's Master—man's Lord and the Sabbath's Lord, and Lord of everything. Oh, when you have got hold of a creed, or of an ordinance, or anything that is outward in the letter, pray the Lord to make you feel that there is something greater than the printed book, and something better than the mere shell of the creed. There is one person greater than they all, and to Him we should cry that He may be ever with us. Oh living Christ, make this a living word to me. Thy Word is life, but not without the Holy Spirit. I may know this book of thine from beginning to end, and repeat it all from Genesis to Revelation, and yet it may be a dead book, and I may be a dead soul. But, Lord, be present here, then will I look up from the book to the Lord—from the precept to Him who fulfilled it, from the Law to Him who honoured it, from the threatening to Him who has borne it for me, and from the promise to Him in whom it is "Yea and amen."

Ah, then we shall read the book so differently. He is here with me in this chamber of mine; I must not trifle. He leans over me; He puts His finger along the lines; I can see His pierced hand—I will read it as in His presence. I will read it knowing that He is the substance of it, that He is the proof of this book as well as the writer of it—the sum of this Scripture as well as the author of it. That is the way for true students to become wise! You will get at the soul of Scripture when you can keep Jesus with you while you are reading.

Did you never hear a sermon as to which you felt that if Jesus had come into that pulpit while the man was making his oration, He would have said, "Go down, go down; what business have you here? I sent you to preach about Me, and you preach about a dozen other things. Go home and learn of Me, and then come and talk." That sermon which does not lead to Christ, or of which Jesus Christ is not the top and the bottom, is a sort of sermon that will make the devils in hell to laugh, but might make the angels of God to weep, if they were capable of such emotion. You remember the story I told you of the Welshman who heard a young man preach a very fine sermon, a grand sermon, a highfaluting, spread-eagle sermon. And when he had done, he asked the Welshman what he thought of it. The man replied that he did not think anything of it. "And why not?" "Because there was no Jesus Christ in it." "Well," said he, "but my text did not seem to run that way." "Never mind," said the Welshman, "your sermon ought to run that way." "I do not see that, however," said the young man. "No," said the other, "you do not see how to preach yet. This is the way to preach. From every little village in England—it does not matter where it is—there is sure to be a road to London. Though there may not be a road to certain other places, there is certain to be a road to London. Now, from every text in the Bible there is a road to Jesus Christ, and the way to preach is just to say, 'How can I get from this text to Jesus Christ?' and then go preaching all the way along it." "Well, but," said the young man, "suppose I find a text that has not got a road to Jesus Christ." "I have preached for forty years," said

the old man, “and I have never found such a Scripture, but if I ever do find one I will go over hedge and ditch but what I will get to Him, for I will never finish without bringing in my Master.”

Perhaps you will think that I have gone a little over hedge and ditch tonight, but I am persuaded that I have not, for the sixth verse comes in here. [It] brings our Lord in most sweetly, setting Him in the very forefront of you Bible readers, so that you must not think of reading without feeling that He is there who is Lord and Master of everything that you are reading, and who shall make these things precious to you if you realize Him in them. If you do not find Jesus in the Scriptures, they will be of small service to you, for what did our Lord Himself say? “Ye search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, but ye will not come unto me that ye might have life” (Joh 5:39-40). And therefore your searching comes to nothing; you find no life, and remain dead in your sins. May it not be so with us!

3. Such a Reading of Scripture Is Profitable.

Lastly, such a reading of Scripture, as implies the understanding of and the entrance into its spiritual meaning, and the discovery of the divine Person who is the spiritual meaning, is profitable, for here our Lord says, “If ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless” (Mat 12:7). It will save us from making a great many mistakes if we get to understand the Word of God, and among other good things we shall not condemn the guiltless.

I have no time to enlarge upon these benefits, but I will just say, putting all together, that the diligent reading of the Word of God with the strong resolve to get at its meaning often *begets spiritual life*. We are begotten by the Word of God; it is the instrumental means of regeneration. Therefore, love your Bibles! Keep close to your Bibles. You seeking sinners, you who are seeking the Lord, your first business is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; but while you are yet in darkness and in gloom, oh, love your Bibles and search them! Take them to bed with you, and when you wake up in the morning, if it is too early to go downstairs and disturb the house, get half-an-hour of reading upstairs. Say, “Lord, guide me to that text that shall bless me. Help me to understand how I, a poor sinner, can be reconciled to Thee.”

I recollect how, when I was seeking the Lord, I went to my Bible and to Baxter’s *Call to the Unconverted*, and to Alleine’s (1634-1668) *Alarm*, and Doddridge’s (1702-1751) *Rise and Progress*, for I said in myself, “I am afraid that I shall be lost, but I will know the reason why. I am afraid I never shall find Christ, but it shall not be for want²⁹ of looking for Him.” That fear used to haunt me, but I said, “I will find Him if He is to be found. I will read. I will think.” There was never a soul that did sincerely seek for Jesus in the Word but, by-and-by, he stumbled on the precious truth that Christ was near at hand, and did not want any looking for; that He was really there—only they, poor blind creatures, were in such a maze that they could not just then see Him. Oh, cling you to Scripture. Scripture is not Christ, but it is the silken clue that will lead you to Him. Follow its leadings faithfully.

When you have received regeneration and a new life, keep on reading, because it will *comfort* you. You will see more of what the Lord has done for you. You will learn that you are redeemed, adopted, saved, sanctified. Half the errors in the world spring from people not reading their Bibles. Would anybody think that the Lord would leave any one of His dear children to perish, if he read such a text as this—“I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand” (Joh 10:28)? When I read that, I am sure of the final perseverance of the saints. Read, then, the Word and it will be much for your comfort.

It will be for your *nourishment*, too. It is your food as well as your life. Search it, and you will grow strong in the Lord and in the power of His might (Eph 6:10).

It will be for your *guidance* also. I am sure those go rightest who keep closest to the book. Oftentimes when you do not know what to do, you will see a text leaping up out of the book, and saying, “Follow me.” I have seen a promise sometimes blaze out before my eyes, just as when an illuminated device flames forth upon a public building. One touch of flame and a sentence or a design flashes out in gas. I have seen a text of Scripture flame forth in that way to my soul; I have known that it was God’s Word to me, and I have gone on my way rejoicing.

And, oh, you will get a thousand helps out of that wondrous book if you do but read it; for, understanding the words more, you will prize it more, and as you get older, the book will grow with your growth—and turn out to be a grey-beard’s manual of devotion just as it was aforetime a child’s sweet story book. Yes, it will always be a new book, just as new a Bible as it was printed yesterday, and nobody had ever seen a word of it till now; and yet it will be a deal more precious for all the memories that cluster round it. As we turn over its pages, how sweetly do we recollect passages in our history that will never be forgotten to all eternity, but will stand for ever intertwined with

²⁹ want – lack.

gracious promises. Beloved, the Lord teach us to read His book of life that He has opened before us here below, so that we may read our titles clear in that other book of love that we have not seen as yet, but which will be opened at the last great day. The Lord be with you, and bless you.

*Portion of Scripture read before sermon: Psalm 119:97-112
Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Vol. 25, No. 1503;
Available in print from Chapel Library with two other sermons under the title "The Bible."*

OUR SUFFERING SUBSTITUTE

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."

—1 Peter 3:18

GOD is just, and a just God must punish sin. The great question is, "How can God be just, and yet the Justifier of the ungodly?" False religions endeavour to answer this question, but they completely fail. The poor heathen thinks he has found the answer in his own terrible sacrifices. He thinks he may give "his first-born for his transgression, the fruit of his body for the sin of his soul." It is not thus that God's justice is vindicated, neither is it thus that His mercy shines forth in its glory.

There is a cold, speculative theology that seeks to put this question far away. There are a few men who scoff at the atonement, and reject the thought of sacrifice...but that system which denies the doctrine of atonement by the blood of Jesus Christ, or which puts it in the background, never can succeed. Its adherents may profess to be intellectual, because they are ignorant; but they will never convince the masses. It is stamped on nature by God that every man feels in his conscience a craving after a reply to the question, "How can the just God justly forgive me the sinner?" If that question be not answered in some way, so that it may be seen how God can save, and yet maintain His justice, no system of theology can by any possibility succeed.

We must resist the tendency, which seems to be in the minds of some, to keep back this vital truth, the fundamental truth of the Christian religion, namely, the doctrine of the substitutionary sacrifice of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Let us not argue against this tendency, but let us rather destroy it by our own personal determination to preach more earnestly and more constantly, "Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1Co 2:2). The quickest way to slay error is to proclaim the truth. The surest mode of extinguishing falsehood is to boldly advocate Scripture principles. Scolding and protesting will not be so effectual in resisting the progress of error as the clear proclamation of the truth in Jesus.

Let me now try to preach the doctrine of substitution, which is the Scripture answer to the questions, "How can God's justice have its full dominion, and yet God's mercy exercise its sway?"—"How can there be a full-orbed justice and a full-orbed mercy, and neither of them eclipse or cast a shadow over the other?"

1. The Person of the Suffering Substitute

Behold the person of the suffering Substitute: "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that *he* might bring us to God."

The Substitute was of *complex nature*. He was truly man, and yet He was truly God. *Christ Jesus* who "suffered" in the room, place, and stead of God's chosen people, was *man*, man of the substance of His mother, most surely man. He partook of all the weakness of humanity, and was in all respects—sin only excepted—tempted as we are; yea, He became bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh (Gen 2:23). He was the perfect man, the only man in whom there never dwelt sin. There was no sin in His nature. No taint of original depravity ran in His veins. In His human nature He was "without spot" or "blemish" (1Pe 1:19). Conceived in a miraculous manner, He partook not in any degree of that transgression which is transmitted to us; for we are born in sin, and "shapen in iniquity" (Psa 51:5).

Christ did not receive any of that imputed sin which has fallen upon the race from Adam. Christ never fell in Adam. He was "the seed of the woman," but He never lay in the loins of Adam. As a private person, Christ never

fell; by nature, He was not in any sense a participator or partaker in Adam's sin. Though on the part of His people Jesus took upon Himself Adam's transgression, and bore it right away; He himself was, in His original, without the shadow of a spot—the immaculate, the perfect Lamb of God's Passover (Joh 1:29; 1Co 5:7).

The life of the man Christ Jesus was in every respect *blameless*. From His eye no fire of unhallowed anger ever flashed. On His lips the word of deceit never rested. His pure mind never knew an imagination of sin. Satan's sparks fell on Christ's soul like fire dropping into the ocean, and were quenched for ever. Hell's quiver of temptations was emptied upon Him, but no single arrow ever stuck in His flesh and blood. He stood invincible and invulnerable. He could not be wounded by temptation. "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me" (Joh 14:30), was His own triumphant declaration. Not only did Christ not sin, but He could not sin. He "knew no sin" (2Co 5:21). He had no acquaintance with sin; He was a stranger to sin; sin had no commerce with Him; He had no dealings with sin personally. His head turned not dizzy when upon the pinnacle of the temple (Mat 4). When down in the depths of humiliation, no grief found expression void of completest resignation. He was ever pure, perfect, spotless, holy, acceptable unto God.

The sufferings of Jesus have power to bless others, seeing they were not necessary for Himself. He had no need to suffer as the result of sin, nor yet that, by the discipline of suffering, He might be purged from its evil. There was no reason in Himself why He should ever know pain or heave a sigh. His sufferings all had reference to His people. His object in suffering, bleeding, dying, was to secure the salvation of His chosen. Our souls may now trust Jesus, the perfect Man, with the utmost confidence.

Let us also ever bear in mind that, while Christ was truly man, yet was *He also very God*. We believe and must ever teach that the perfect humanity of Christ did not lower His perfect deity; His divinity was undiluted and infinite. He was "Very God of very God," possessing all the attributes of the eternal Jehovah. He who did hang upon the cross, was the same God who made all worlds. The very Word who did bear our sins in His own body on the tree, was that Word by whom all things were made, and without whom "was not anything made that was made" (Joh 1:3). We know nothing of a human atonement apart from the deity of Christ Jesus.

We dare not trust our souls upon a savior who is but a man. If all the men that have ever lived and all the angels that exist, could have wrought together and striven throughout eternity to offer a sacrifice that should be a propitiation for the sins of a single man, they must have failed. None but the shoulders of the Incarnate God could bear the stupendous burden. No hand but that which set fast the spheres could shake the mountains of our guilt and bear them away. We must have a divine Sacrifice, and it is our joy to know that we have this in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As for those who do not believe in the deity of Jesus Christ, let them go their way and preach what they will, we cannot stay to enter into controversy with them. We would speak of them as Mr. Gadsby (1773-1844) did. A building where Unitarianism was taught was erected opposite the chapel in which William Gadsby preached the gospel of the grace of God. One asked Mr. Gadsby, "Do you not feel sad about this opposition?" He replied, "*Opposition*, man! I do not know of any opposition." "No opposition?" "No, brother, none whatever. Suppose I kept a baker's shop, and sold good wheaten bread, and some man came and opened an ironmonger's shop opposite, would that be opposition?" "No, that would be quite a different line of business." "So," said Mr. Gadsby, "the Unitarian Chapel is no opposition to us; it is in a different line altogether. It is a different article they have to deal out. We deal with the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and on that a soul may rest for eternity; but they deal with another gospel, which is not another (Gal 1:6-7), with that which can never bring peace on earth or blessedness in the world to come. There is no opposition." Of course, in another meaning of the word, there is the greatest possible "opposition" between us and Unitarians. And we will pretend to no manner of union with them, for we can never give up our belief in the divinity and deity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, nor can we have any fellowship with those who reject that blessed truth (Eph 5:11).

Let us stand beneath the cross of Calvary, and behold our Lord Jesus hanging there, and remember that His bleeding body was in alliance with the unsuffering Deity. Those wounds of His, that streaming, spear-rent side, was taken into union with the nature of the living and eternal God. The infinite merit of the Godhead was imparted to the sufferings of the manhood. Neither your sins nor mine can ever exceed the merit of the precious blood of Christ. If our sins be high as mountains, the ocean of His atonement, like Noah's flood, covers the utmost summits of the mountains. It prevails twenty cubits upwards, till all the highest mountains are covered. Though our sins be never so crimson, the blood of Jesus Christ is more crimson, and the one washes out the other. Though our iniquities be never so dark and bitter, His death was more bitter and dark, and the black bitterness of His death hath taken away the blackness and bitterness of our sins; and therefore it is that "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him" (Heb 7:25).

Sinner, look at Jesus Christ! There is power in His atoning blood to wash away all thy sins. None can limit the efficacy of the precious blood of Christ. No sins can be too black or too numerous for that precious blood to cleanse. The blood of Jesus Christ is sufficient to accomplish all that God has purposed to accomplish by its shedding. Christ shall never fail in any respect. His cross is a battering-ram against which nothing shall stand. Before the cross of Christ, the stupendous ramparts of our condemnation must rock to and fro even to their fall; and not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down. We need a greater confidence in the cross of Jesus Christ, a surer rest evermore on that Rock of Ages cleft for us.

2. The Sufferings of the Substitute

Contemplate the sufferings of the substitute: “Christ also hath once suffered for sins” (1Pe 3:18). These were endured on behalf of all them that believe. See Him in Gethsemane.

*“Gethsemane, the olive-press!
(And why so called let Christians guess)
Fit name, fit place, where vengeance strove,
And griped and grappled hard with love.
Twas here the Lord of life appears,
And sigh’d, and groan’d, and pray’d, and fear’d;
Bore all incarnate God could bear,
With strength enough, and none to spare.”*

There, for us, Jesus sweated until His soul became so full of agony that the blood flushed the rivers of His veins, and at last burst the banks and overflowed. *“His head, His hair, His garments bloody were.”* He was clad in a ruby robe of His own blood; and there He continued still wrestling, with His soul burdened, and “sorrowful even unto death” (Mat 26:38), that He might prevail on His people’s behalf, and that He might suffer the wrath of God for their sins.

He rose from the place where He had been pleading, renewed in strength, and went forth to meet His doom. He was betrayed by Judas, one of the twelve. His own familiar friend, whom He had trusted, who did eat of His bread, lifted up his heel against Him. You who have been forsaken by your firmest friend in the hour of your direst need, you that have known a plighted troth broken, pretended love turned into a deadly hatred, you may guess—but you can only faintly guess—the tremendous sorrow that came into the Redeemer’s soul when the traitor, Judas Iscariot, betrayed him.

They hurry the Savior away to Annas, to Caiaphas, to Pilate, to Herod, then back again to Pilate, without any breathing time, without any respite. They accuse Him of sedition. *The King of kings seditious!* They accuse Him of blasphemy; as if *God* could blaspheme! They could find no witnesses against Him except the basest scum of the people, who were prepared to swear to any falsehood—and even these agreed not one with another. There stood the perfect man, the Son of God, accused and slandered by men who were not worthy to be spit upon.

They condemn the innocent, they mock Him, they laugh at Him, they jeer at His majesty, and torment His sacred person. He is given up to the tender mercies of the Roman soldiery. They set Him in an old chair as though it were a throne. They had just before torn His back with scourges till His bones stood up like white cliffs in a sea of blood. They crown Him with thorns. They cast an old purple robe on His shoulders; they mock and deride Him, as though He were a sham king. For a scepter, they give Him a reed; for homage, they give Him spittle; for the kiss of salutation, they give Him the lips of mockery. Instead of bowing before Him as their King, they blindfold Him and smite Him in the face. *Was ever grief like Thine, Thou King of sorrow, despised by Thine own subjects? Thou, who didst give them breath, dost have that breath back again on Thee in violent and blasphemous oaths! Thou didst give them life; and they spent that life in mocking Thee!*

Jesus is led forth to Calvary. He is nailed to the cross by cruel and wicked hands. The rude rabble jeer at His sufferings. Within His soul, there is an agony such as we cannot fathom. Above, there are the swelling waves of Almighty wrath against our sins, covering all His soul. Hark! that dreadful soul-piercing cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mat 17:46). It seems to be the gathering up of all His griefs, sorrows, and sufferings into one expression. Like some enormous lake, which receives the torrents of a thousand rivers, and holds all within its banks, so does that sentence seem to grasp all His woes, and express them all, “My God, my God, *why hast thou forsaken me?*”

At last, He bows His head, and yields up His spirit! At one tremendous draught of love, the Lord hath drained destruction dry for all His people. He has “suffered” all that they ought to have suffered. He hath given to the justice of God a full recompense for all their sins. He has on their behalf presented a complete atonement,

*“And, to the utmost farthing paid
Whate’er His people owed.”*

What joy it is, believer, to think that thou hast such a perfect atonement to rest upon! If there were one sin Christ did not suffer for on the cross, or one evil thought of one of His people that He did not bear, we could not be saved. But He has “finished” the whole of His people’s transgression; He has made an end of all their sins. He has obeyed all the jots and the tittles, as well as the great and weighty things, of the Law of God; He has magnified it, and made it honourable. He has gone to “the end of the law for righteousness” (Rom 10:4)—not half-way, but all the way; not near to its boundary, but even to its very end. He has not merely sipped from the cup of wrath, not merely tasted a portion of its bitter draught, but He has drained it to the very dregs. Ere He died, He turned the cup of wrath bottom upwards, for He had taken all it contained. And when He saw that there was not a single black drop trembling on its brim, He exclaimed with the loud voice of triumph, “It is finished!” (Joh 19:30). He had drunk the whole. Glory in this, ye living people of the living Christ! He hath offered for you a complete sacrifice, acceptable unto His Father. Glory in this, ye chosen people of the living God, that “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.”

3. The Result of the Substitution

Rejoice in the result of the substitution: the sufferings are finished; the debt is paid. Justice is satisfied; the Law is magnified; righteousness is established. For all His people’s sins Christ has made a complete atonement, and for their justification He has risen from the dead (Rom 4:25).

Now, poor trembling seeker, what sayest thou to this? Canst thou not now rest on Christ? God is satisfied with His Son’s atoning sacrifice; canst thou be dissatisfied with it? God thinks Jesus enough; canst thou think Him too little? Did the Lord, the King, against whom thou hast offended, accept the reconciliation; and dost thou unbelievingly and distrustfully say, “I fear it is not sufficient”? Cast away thy guilty fears, I beseech thee. May the blessed Comforter enable thee now to say,

*“Just as I am—without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd’st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come!”*

Thou art to be saved by faith in Christ, who “hath once suffered for sins” (1Pe 3:18), and in Christ alone. Do not seek to make a savior of thine own feelings. Do not think thou must experience this or that before thou comest unto Jesus. Christ wants no preparation from thee. Salvation consists in simply casting thyself down on Christ. Cast thyself down on thy very face in the dust before Him, and once for all have done with thine own wretched self. Rely not on anything thou canst do, or think, or say, or know; rest alone on Jesus only, and thou art saved! Be thou who thou mayest and what thou mayest, though thou wert the very worst sinner out of hell—be thy soul the blackest yet—if thou wilt trust in Christ who “hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust,” thou shalt be saved.

Trembling sinner, look to Jesus and thou art saved. Dost thou say, “My sins are many”? His atonement is wondrous. Dost thou cry, “My heart is hard”? Jesus can soften it. Dost thou exclaim, “Alas, I am so unworthy”? Jesus loves the unworthy. Dost thou feel, “I am so vile”? It is the vile Jesus came to save. Down with thee, sinner; down, down with thyself, and up with Christ, who hath suffered for thy sins upon Calvary’s cross. Turn thine eye thither; see Jesus only. He suffers. He bleeds. He dies. He is buried. He rises again. He ascends on high. Trust Him and thou art safe. Give up all other trusts and rely on Jesus alone, alone on Jesus, and thou shalt pass from death unto life. This is the sure sign, the certain evidence of the Spirit’s indwelling, of the Father’s election, of the Son’s redemption—when the soul is brought simply and wholly to rest and trust in Jesus Christ, who “hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.”

May the Holy Ghost bless these words, and send them home with comfort to many hearts, for our Lord Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen. ✠

Available in print as a tract from Chapel Library.

THREEFOLD SANCTIFICATION

“Sanctified by God the Father.”—Jude 1:1

“Sanctified in Christ Jesus.”—1 Corinthians 1:2

“Through sanctification of the Spirit.”—1 Peter 1:2

I. Introduction

Mark, beloved, the union of the three divine Persons in all their gracious acts. We believe that there is one God, and although we rejoice to recognize the Trinity, yet it is ever most distinctly a Trinity *in Unity*. Our watch-word still is, “Hear O Israel, the LORD our God is one LORD” (Deu 6:4). How unwisely do those young believers talk who make preferences in the Persons of the Trinity; who think of Christ as if He were the embodiment of everything that is lovely and gracious, while the Father they regard as severely just, but destitute of kindness.

And how foolish are those who magnify the decree of the Father, or the atonement of the Son, so as to depreciate the work of the Spirit. In deeds of grace none of the Persons of the Trinity act apart from the rest. They are as united in their deeds as in their essence. In their love towards the chosen they are one, and in the actions which flow from that great central source they are still undivided.

Specially I would have you notice this in the case of sanctification. While we may without the slightest mistake speak of sanctification as the work of the Spirit, yet we must take heed that we do not view it as if the Father and the Son had no part therein. It is correct to speak of sanctification as the work of the Father, of the Spirit, and of the Son. Still doth Jehovah say, “Let *us* make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen 1:26), and thus we are “*his* workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10).

My brethren, I beg you to notice and carefully consider the value that God sets upon real holiness, since the Three Persons are represented as co-working to produce a Church without “spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing” (Eph 5:27). Those men who despise holiness of heart are in direct conflict with God. Holiness is the architectural plan upon which God buildeth up His living temple. We read in Scripture of the “beauties of holiness” (Psa 110:3); nothing is beautiful before God but that which is holy. All the glory of Lucifer, that son of the morning, could not screen him from divine abhorrence when he had defiled himself by sin. “Holy, Holy, Holy” (Rev 4:8), the continual cry of cherubim, is the loftiest song that creature can offer, and the noblest that the Divine Being can accept. See then, He counteth holiness to be His choice treasure. It is as the seal upon His heart, and as the signet upon His right hand. He could as soon cease to be, as cease to be holy; and sooner renounce the sovereignty of the world, than tolerate anything in His presence contrary to purity, righteousness, and holiness.

I pray you, ye who profess to be followers of Christ, set a high value upon purity of life and godliness of conversation. Value the blood of Christ as the foundation of your hope, but never speak disparagingly of the work of the Spirit, which is your meetness³⁰ for the inheritance of the saints in light. Yea, rather, prize it; prize it so heartily that you dread the very appearance of evil. Prize it so that in your most ordinary actions you may be “a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, strewing forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1Pe 2:9).

My design was to have entered at large upon the doctrine of sanctification this morning. I intended to use the word “sanctification” in the mode in which it is understood among theologians; for you must know that the term “sanctification” has a far narrower meaning in bodies of divinity than it has in Scripture. But in studying the subject I found myself lost in its ever widening extent, so that I concluded to attempt less, in the hope of efficiently doing more.

On some future occasion we will enter at length into the Spirit’s work, but now I only call attention to the fact that sanctification is treated in Scripture in various ways. I think we may do some service in illuminating the understanding of believers, if we shall this morning draw their attention not to the theological but to the Scriptural uses of

³⁰ **meetness** – appropriateness; suitability.

the term “sanctification,” and show that, in God’s holy Word, it has a much wider meaning than is accorded to it by systematic divines.

It has been well said that the Book of God, like the works of God, is not systematically arranged. How different is the freedom of nature from the orderly precision of the scientific museum! If you visit the British Museum, you see all the animals there placed in cases according to their respective orders. You go into God’s world and find dog and sheep, horse and cow, lion and vulture, elephant and ostrich, roaming abroad as if no zoology had ever ventured to arrange them in classes. The various rocks are not laid in order as the geologist draws them in his books, nor are the stars marked off according to their magnitudes. The order of Nature is variety. Science does but arrange and classify, so as to assist the memory.

So systematic divines, when they come to deal with God’s Word, find Scriptural truths put, not in order for the classroom, but for common life. The systematic divine is as useful as the analytical chemist, or the anatomist, but still the Bible is not arranged as a body of divinity. It is a handbook to heaven; it is a guide to eternity, meant for the man at the plough, as much as for the scholar at his table. It is a primer for babes, as well as a classic for sages. It is the humble, ignorant man’s book, and though there are depths in it in which the elephant may swim, yet there are shallows where the lamb may wade. We bless God that He has not given us a body of divinity in which we might lose ourselves, but that He has given us His own Word, put into the very best practical form for our daily use and edification.

II. Set Apart

It is a recognised truth among us, that the Old Testament very often helps us to understand the New, while the New also expounds the Old. With God’s Word, self-interpretation³¹ is the best. “Diamond cut diamond” is a rule with a goldsmith; so must it be with a scriptural student. They who would know best God’s Word must study it in its own light.

Now, in the Old Testament we find the word “sanctify” very frequently indeed, and it is used there in three senses. Let me call your attention to the *first* one.

The word “sanctify” in the Old Testament frequently has the meaning of *setting apart*. It means the taking of something that was common before, which might legitimately have been put to ordinary uses, and setting it apart for God’s service alone. It was then called *sanctified* or *holy*. Take, for instance, the passage in the 13th chapter of Exodus at the 2nd verse. “Sanctify unto me all the firstborn.” On account of the destruction of the firstborn of Egypt, God claimed the first-born of men and the first-born of cattle to be His. The tribe of Levi was set apart to be the representatives of the first-born, to stand before the Lord to minister day and night in His tabernacle and in His temple, hence those who were thus set apart to be priests and Levites were said to be “sanctified.”

There is an earlier use of the term in the 2nd chapter of Genesis, at the 3rd verse. It is said, “And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.” It had been an ordinary portion of time before, but He set it apart for His own service, that on the seventh day man should do no work for himself, but rest and serve his Maker.

So in Leviticus 27:14 you read, “And when a man shall sanctify his house to be holy unto the Lord,” etc., which was meant as a direction to devout Jews who set apart a house or field to be God’s—intending that either the produce of the field or the occupation of the house should be wholly given either to God’s priests or Levites, or in some other way set apart to holy uses. Now, nothing was done to the house; there were no ceremonies; we do not read that it was cleansed or washed or sprinkled with blood; but the mere fact that it was set apart for God was considered to be a sanctification.

So in the most notable of instances in the Book of Exodus 29:44, we read that God said, “I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar,” by which plainly enough was meant that He would set it apart to be His house, the special place of His abode—where between the wings of the cherubim the bright light of the Shekinah might shine forth, the glorious evidence that the Lord God dwelt in the midst of His people.

To the same effect are such as the following. The sanctification of the altar, instruments and vessels, in Numbers 7:1; the setting apart of Eleazer the son of Abinadab, to keep the ark of the Lord while it was at Kirjathjearim, 1 Samuel 7:1; and the establishment of cities of refuge in Joshua 20:7, where in the original we find that the word rendered “appointed” is the same which elsewhere is translated “sanctified.”

³¹ **self-interpretation** – the hermeneutical principle that “Scripture interprets Scripture,” in which a clearer passage is used to shed light upon a less clear passage.

It plainly appears from the Old Testament that the word “sanctify” sometimes has the meaning simply and only of setting apart for holy uses. This explains a text in John 10:36, “Say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, ‘thou blasphemest,’ because I said I am the Son of God?” Jesus Christ there speaks of Himself as “sanctified” by His Father. Now He was not purged from sin, for He had none. Immaculately conceived, gloriously preserved from all touch or stain of evil, he needed no sanctifying work of the Spirit within Him to purge Him from dross or corruption. All that is here intended is that He was set apart.

So in that notable and well known passage in John 17:19, “And for their sakes I sanctify myself that they also might be sanctified through the truth;” by which again He meant only that He gave up Himself specially to God’s service, to be occupied only with His Father’s business. He could say, “It is my meat and my drink to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work” (Joh 4:34).

Brethren, you understand now the text in Jude, “Sanctified by God the Father” (1:1). Surely it means that God the Father has specially set apart His people, or sanctified them. Not that God the Father works operatively in the believer’s heart (although Paul tells us it is God that worketh in us to will and to do, Phi 2:13), that belongs immediately and effectively to the Holy Spirit; but He in the decree of election separated unto Himself a people who were to be sanctified to Himself forever and ever. He by the gift of His Son for them redeemed them from among men that they might be holy; and He by continually sending forth the Spirit fulfils His divine purpose that they should be a separate people sanctified from all the rest of mankind.

In this sense every Christian is perfectly sanctified already. We may speak of believers as those who are sanctified by God the Father, that is to say, they are set apart. They were set apart before they were created, they were legally set apart by the purchase of Christ, they are manifestly and visibly set apart by the effectual calling of the Spirit of grace. They are, I say, in this sense at all periods sanctified; and speaking of the work as it concerns God the Father, they are completely sanctified unto the Lord forever.

Is not this doctrine clear enough to you all? Leave the doctrine a moment, and let us look at it practically. Brothers and sisters, have we ever realized this truth as we ought to do? When a vessel, cup, altar, or instrument was set apart for divine worship, it was never used for common purposes again. No man but the priest might drink out of the golden cup; the altar might not be trifled with; God’s brazen laver was not for ordinary ablution;³² even the tongs upon the altar and the snuffers for the lamps were never to be profaned for any common purpose whatsoever. What a suggestive and solemn fact is this! If you and I be sanctified by God the Father, we ought never to be used for any purpose but for God.

“What,” say you, “not for ourselves?” My brethren, not for ourselves! Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price (1Co 6:19-20). “But must we not work and earn our own bread?” Verily ye must, but still not with that as your object. You must still be diligent “in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord” (Rom 12:11). Remember, if ye be servants, ye are to serve not with eye service as men pleasers, but serving the Lord. If any man shall say “I have an occupation in which I cannot serve the Lord”—leave it, you have no right in it! But I think there is no calling in which man can be found, certainly no lawful calling, in which he may not be able to say, “Whether I eat or drink, or whatsoever I do, I do all to the glory of God” (1Co 10:31).

The Christian is no more a common man than was the altar a common place. It is as great a sacrilege for the believer to live unto himself, or to live unto the world, as you and I could have profaned the most Holy Place, used the holy fire for our own kitchen, or the censer for common perfume, or the candlestick for our own chamber. These things were God’s; none might venture to appropriate them; and we are God’s and must be used only for Him.

Oh, Christians, would that ye could know this! Ye are Christ’s men, God’s men; servants of God through Jesus Christ. Ye are not to do your own works; ye are not to live for your own objects. Ye are to say at all times, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus” (Gal 6:14); you are practically to take this for your motto, “For me to live is Christ and to die in gain” (Phi 1:21).

I fear me, nine out of ten of professing Christians have never recognized this fact. They think if they were to devote a part of their substance, that would do, or a part of their time will suffice. Oh! Christ did not buy a part of you; men and brethren, Jesus Christ did not purchase a part of you! He bought you entire, body, soul, and spirit, and He must have you, the whole man. Oh, if ye are to be partly saved by Him and partly by yourselves, then live to yourselves; but if God hath wholly set you apart to be vessels of mercy fitted for His use, oh, do not rob the Lord. Treat not as common cups those things which are as the bowls of the altar.

There is another practical thought here. It was a crime that brought destruction upon Babylon when Belshazzar in his drunken frolic cried, Bring forth the cups of the Lord, the goodly spoil of the temple at Jerusalem (Dan 5:2).

³² **ablution**—act of washing the body; purification by water.

They brought the golden candlestick, and there it stood flaming high in the midst of the marble hall. The despot, surrounded by his wives and his concubines, filled high the bowl with the foaming draught and, bidding them pass round the cups of Jehovah, the heathen, the worshippers of idols, drank confusion to the God of heaven and earth. In that moment, just as the sacred vessel touched the sacrilegious lip, a hand was seen mysteriously writing out his doom: "Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting" (Dan 5:27). This was the crime that filled up the ephah³³ of his sin. Now was the measure of his iniquity fully accomplished. He had used for lascivious and drunken purposes vessels that belonged to Jehovah, the God of the whole earth.

Oh, take heed, take heed, ye that profess to be sanctified by the blood of the covenant, that you reckon it not to be an unholy thing. See to it that ye make not your bodies, which ye profess to be set apart to God's service, slaves of sin, or your members servants of iniquity unto iniquity; lest, O ye professors, ye should hear in that hour the voice of the recording angel as he cries, "Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting." Be ye clean, ye that bear the vessels of the Lord; and ye beloved who hope that ye are Christ's, and have a humble faith in Him this morning. See that ye walk circumspectly, that by no means ye prostitute to the service of sin that which was set apart in the eternal covenant of grace³⁴ to be God's alone.

If you and I are tempted to sin, we must reply, "No! let another man do that, but I cannot; I am God's man; I am set apart for Him. How shall 'I do this great wickedness and sin against God' (Gen 39:9)?" Let dedication enforce sanctification. Think of the dignity to which God has called you: Jehovah's vessels, set apart for the Master's use.

Far hence, far hence be everything which would make you impure. When Antiochus Epiphanes offered a sow on the altar of the Lord in the temple at Jerusalem,³⁵ his awful death might have been easily foretold. Oh! how many there are who make a high profession who have offered unclean flesh upon the altars of God; have made religion a stalking-horse to their own emolument; and espoused the faith to gain esteem and applause among men! What saith the Lord concerning such? "Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense saith the Lord" (Heb 10:30). Their god was their belly; they gloried in their shame; they minded earthly things; they die justly accursed. Spots are they in your solemn feasts; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever (Jude 1:13). But ye, beloved, be not carried away with the error of the wicked, but keep yourselves unspotted from the world (Jam 1:27).

III. A Holy Thing

Secondly, in the Old Testament, the word "sanctify" is now and then used in another sense, one which I do not perceive to be hinted at in our biblical encyclopoedias, but which is needed to make the subject complete. The word "sanctify" is used, not only to signify that the thing is set apart for holy uses, but that it is to be regarded, treated, and declared as a *holy thing*. To give you an instance, there is a passage in Isaiah 8:13 that is to the point when it is said, "Sanctify the Lord of Hosts, himself." You clearly perceive that the Lord does not need to be set apart for holy uses; and again, that the Lord of Hosts needs not to be purified, for He is holiness itself. It means, adore and reverence the Lord, with fear and trembling approach His throne, regard Him as the Holy One of Israel.

But let me give you other instances. When Nadab and Abihu, as recorded in the tenth of Leviticus, offered sacrifice to God and put strange fire on the altar, the fire of the Lord went forth and consumed them, and this was the reason given: "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me"—by which He did not mean that He would be set apart, nor yet that He would be made holy by purification, but that He would be treated and regarded as a most Holy Being with whom such liberties were not to be taken.

And again in Numbers 20:12, on that unfortunate occasion when Moses lost his temper and smote the rock twice, saying, "Hear now, ye rebels, must we fetch you water out of this rock?" The Lord said that he should see the promised land but should never enter it, the reason being, "Because ye believed me not to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel"—by which He meant that they had not so acted as to honor God's name among the people.

A yet more familiar instance, occurs in what is commonly called "The Lord's Prayer," "Our Father which art in heaven, [sanctified] be thy name." The word "hallowed" is simply an English variation, the Greek is "*sanctified* be thy name." Now we know that God's name does not need purifying, or setting apart; so that the sense here can only

³³ **ephah** – a large measure of grain; any large portion.

³⁴ **covenant of grace** – God's gracious, eternal purpose of redemption, conceived before the creation of the world, first announced in Genesis 3:15, progressively revealed in history, accomplished in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and appropriated by faith in Him.

³⁵ **Antiochus Epiphanes** (c. 215 - 164 BC) – Syrian king who conquered Jerusalem in 167 BC and attempted to adopt Greek culture in Judea. He set up an altar to Zeus in the Temple and strictly prohibited the religious practice of Judaism. The Jews under the Maccabaeans retook the Temple three years later.

be, “Let Thy name be revered and adored throughout the whole earth, and let men regard it as being a sacred and holy thing.”

My beloved brethren, have we not some light here concerning our second text, “Sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1Co 1:2). If the word “sanctified” may mean “regarded as holy and treated as such,” can you not see how in Christ Jesus the saints are regarded by God as being holy, and treated as such? Mark, we do not lay that down as being the only meaning of the text, for we shall have to show that another sense may be attached to it. There are brethren who have enlarged upon our being sanctified in Christ, and have almost forgotten the work of the Spirit. Now, if they only speak of our being sanctified in Christ in the sense of being treated as holy, in fact as being justified, we have no quarrel with them; but if they deny the work of the Spirit, they are guilty of deadly error.

I have sometimes heard the term used *imputed sanctification*, which is sheer absurdity. You cannot even use the term *imputed justification*. “Imputed righteousness” is correct enough, and implies a glorious doctrine; but justification is not imputed, it is actually conferred. We are justified through the imputed righteousness of Christ, but as to being imputedly sanctified, no one who understands the use of language can so speak. The term is inaccurate and unscriptural. I know it is said that the Lord Jesus is made of God unto us, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1Co 1:30); but this sanctification is not by imputation, nor does the text say so. Why, you might as readily prove imputed wisdom or imputed redemption by this text, as force it to teach imputed sanctification. It is a fact that for the sake of what Jesus Christ did, God’s people—though in themselves but partially sanctified, as being yet subject to sin—are for Christ’s sake treated and regarded as if they were perfectly holy; but this, according to theological definitions, is rather justification than sanctification. (It must however be admitted that the Scripture sometimes uses the word “sanctification” in such a manner as to make it tantamount to justification.)

This, however, we can clearly see: that God’s people have access with boldness to the Lord because they are regarded through Christ as though they were perfectly holy. Oh! brethren, think of this for a moment. A holy God cannot have dealings with unholy men. A holy God—and is not Christ Jesus God?—cannot have communion with unholiness, and yet you and I are unholy. How then does Christ receive us to His bosom? How does His Father walk with us and find Himself agreed? Because He views us, not in ourselves, but in our great federal Head, the Second Adam (Rom 5:12 ff.). He looks at us,

*“Not as we were in Adam’s fall,
When sin and ruin covered all;
But as we’ll stand another day,
Fairer than sun’s meridian ray.”*

He looks on the deeds of Christ as ours; on His perfect obedience and sinless life as ours, and thus we may sing in the language of Hart,

*“With thy spotless garments on,
Holy as the Holy One,”*

We may boldly enter into that which is within the veil, where no unholy thing may come, yet where we may venture because God views us as holy in Christ Jesus. This is a great and precious doctrine.

But still, since the use of the term “sanctification” in any other sense than that in which it is commonly employed as meaning the work of the Spirit, tends to foster confused notions, and really does I fear lead some to despise the work of the Spirit of God, I think it is better in ordinary conversation between Christians, for them to speak of sanctification without confounding it with what is quite a distinct act, namely, justification through the imputed righteousness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Yet, if we hear a brother so talk, we must, not be too severe upon him, as though he assuredly erred from the faith, for in Scripture the terms “sanctification” and “justification” are frequently used interchangeably, and Christ’s righteousness made the subject-matter of both works of grace.

IV. To Make Holy

We now come to the usual sense in which the word “sanctification” is employed. It means actually to purify or make holy; not merely to set apart, nor to account holy, but to *make* really and actually so in nature. You have the word in this sense in many places in the Old Testament.

You will find it in Exodus 19:10-12. On the third day, God was about to proclaim on the top of Sinai His holy Law, and the mandate went forth, “Sanctify the people today and tomorrow,” which sanctification consisted in certain outward deeds by which their bodies and clothes were put into a cleanly state, and their souls were brought into a reverential state of awe.

In the third of Joshua you find when the children of Israel were about to pass the Jordan, it was said, “Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.” They were to prepare themselves to be beholders of a scene so august, when Jordan was driven back and the river was utterly dried up before the feet of the priests of God. There was in this case an actual purification. Men in the old times were sprinkled with blood, and thus sanctified from defilement, and considered to be pure in the sight of God.

Now this is the sense in which we view our third text, “Through sanctification of the Spirit” (1Pe 1:2), and this, I repeat, is the general sense in which we understand it in common conversation among Christian men.

Sanctification begins in regeneration. The Spirit of God infuses into man the new principle called the spirit, which is a third and higher nature, so that the believing man becomes body, soul, *and spirit*, and in this he is distinct and distinguished from all other men of the race of Adam. This work, which begins in regeneration, is carried on in two ways: by vivification and by mortification; that is, by giving life to that which is good, and by sending death to that which is evil in the man—mortification, whereby the lusts of the flesh are subdued and kept under; and vivification, by which the life which God has put within us is made to be [a] well of water springing up unto everlasting life. This is carried on every day in what we call perseverance, by which the Christian is preserved and continued in a gracious state, and is made to abound in good works unto the praise and glory of God. It culminates or comes to perfection in “glory,” when the soul being thoroughly purged is caught up to dwell with holy beings at the right hand of the Majesty on High.

Now, this work, though we commonly speak of it as being the work of the Spirit, is quite as much the work of the Lord Jesus Christ as of the Spirit. In looking for texts on the subject, I have been struck with the fact that where I found one verse speaking of it as the Spirit’s work, I found another in which it was treated as the work of Jesus Christ. I can well understand that my second text, “Sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1Co 1:2), has as great a fullness of meaning as the third, “Through sanctification of the Spirit.” Lend me your attention. I fear that not many of you will be interested, except those of you who have a share in this precious work, others may think the subject too dry for them. Oh that they may yet know how precious to believers is the purifying work of sanctification.

Sanctification is a work *in* us, not a work *for* us. It is a work in us and there are two agents: one is the Worker who works this sanctification effectually, that is the Spirit; and the other, the agent, the efficacious means by which the Spirit works this sanctification is, Jesus Christ and His most precious blood. Suppose, to put it as plainly as we can, there is a garment which needs to be washed. Here is a person to wash it, and there is a bath in which it is to be washed—the person is the Holy Spirit, but the bath is the precious blood of Christ. It is strictly correct to speak of the person cleansing as being the sanctifier: it is quite as accurate to speak of that which is in the bath and which makes it clean as being the sanctifier too.

Now, the Spirit of God sanctifies us; He works it effectively; but He sanctifies us through the blood of Christ, through the water that flowed with the blood from Christ’s side. To repeat my illustration, here is a garment that is black; a fuller,³⁶ in order to make it white, uses nitre and soap, both the fuller and the soap are cleansers—so both the Holy Spirit and the atonement of Christ are sanctifiers. I think that will be plain enough.

Let us enlarge upon the doctrine. The Spirit of God is the great worker by whom we are cleansed. I shall not, this morning, quote the texts. Most of you have the “Baptist Confession of Faith,”³⁷ published by Passmore and Alabaster, price 4d., and the “Catechism,”³⁸ which are generally distributed among the families of the church. They will furnish you with abundance of texts on that subject, for this is a doctrine which is generally received among us: that it is the Spirit of God who creates in us a new heart and a right spirit, according to the tenor of the covenant.

“A new heart also will I give you,” and “a right spirit” will I put within (see Jer 31:31-34; Eze 36:26; Heb 8:10; 10:16-17; Psa 51:10). “I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes” (Eze 36:27). He renews and changes the nature, turns the bias of the will, makes us seek after that which is good and right; so that every good thing in us may be described as “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22; Eph 5:9). All our virtues and all our graces are efficiently worked in us by the Spirit of the living God.

Never, I pray you, brethren, never, never forget this. Oh, it will be an ill day for any church when the members begin to think lightly of the work of the Holy Spirit within us! We delight to magnify the work of Christ *for* us, but

³⁶ fuller – one who makes his living doing laundry.

³⁷ **London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689** – adopted by the Baptist churches of the time to express their agreement with the orthodox doctrines of the Christian faith. It is 95% the same as the Westminster Confession of Faith, differing in two chapters: congregational church government (vs. presbyterianism) and believer’s baptism (vs. infant baptism). Available from Chapel Library.

³⁸ **A Catechism with Proofs** – Baptist catechism written in 1693 by Benjamin Keach for teaching the doctrines of the *London Confession*. By 1738, this catechism was adopted by the Philadelphia Association of Baptists in America, the spiritual parent of all Baptist churches in the USA. Spurgeon edited and reprinted it in 1855 for his own congregation, shortening the expositions of the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer. The catechism has been in continual use by Baptists in English-speaking countries to train their families for 300 years. Available from Chapel Library.

we must not depreciate the work of the blessed Spirit *in* us. In the days of my venerable predecessor, Dr. Gill,³⁹ who was, in the opinion even of ultra-Calvanists, sound to the core, this pernicious evil broke out in our church. There were some who believed in what was called “imputed sanctification” and denied the work of the blessed Spirit. I was reading last night in our old Church-book a note written there in the doctor’s own hand-writing, as the deliberate opinion of this church:

“Agreed: That to deny the internal sanctification of the Spirit, as a principle of grace and holiness wrought in the heart, or as consisting of grace communicated to and implanted in the soul—which, though but a begun work, and as yet incomplete, is an abiding work of grace, and will abide, notwithstanding all corruptions, temptations, and snares, and be performed by the Author of it until the day of Christ, when it will be the saints meetness for eternal glory—is a greivous error, which 1) highly reflects dishonor on the blessed Spirit and His operations of grace on the heart, 2) is subversive of true religion and powerful godliness, and 3) renders persons unfit for church communion. Wherefore, it is further agreed, that such persons who appear to have embraced this error be not admitted to the communion of this Church; and should any such who are members of it appear to have received it and continued in it, that they be forthwith excluded from it.”

Two members then present declaring themselves to be of the opinion condemned in the above resolution, and also a third person who was absent, but who was well known to have been under this awful delusion, were consequently excluded that evening. Nay, more, a person of another church who held the opinion thus condemned was forbidden to commune at the table, and his pastor at Kettering was written to upon the subject, warning him not to allow so great an errorist to remain in fellowship. So that the Doctor [Gill] thought the error to be so deadly, that he used the pruning knife at once; he did not stop till it spread, but he cut off the very twigs; and this is one of the benefits of church discipline when we are enabled to carry it out under God, that it does nip error in the very bud, and thus those who as yet are not infected are kept from it by the blessed providence of God through the instrumentality of the church. We have always held, and still hold and teach, that the work of the Spirit in us, whereby we are conformed unto Christ’s image, is as absolutely necessary for our salvation, as is the work of Jesus Christ, by which He cleanses us from our sins.

Pause here one moment, and let me not distract your minds, while I say that while the Spirit of God is said in Scripture to be the author of sanctification, yet there is a visible agent, which must not be forgotten. “Sanctify them,” said Christ, “through thy *truth*. Thy word is truth” (Joh 17:17). Young men of the Bible class, look out the passages of Scripture which prove that the instrument of our sanctification is the Word of God. You will find that there are very many. It is the Word of God that sanctifies the soul. The Spirit of God brings to our minds the commands and precepts and doctrines of truth, and applies them with power. These are heard in the ear, and being received in the heart, they work in us to will and to do of God’s good pleasure (Phi 2:13).

How important then that the truth should be *preached*. How necessary that you never tolerate a ministry which leaves out the great doctrines or the great precepts of the Gospel. The truth is the sanctifier; and if we do not hear the truth, depend upon it, we shall not grow in sanctification. We only progress in sound living as we progress in sound understanding. “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path” (Psa 119:105).

Do not say of such-and-such an error, “Oh, it is a mere matter of opinion.” If it be a mere matter of opinion to-day, it will be a matter of practice tomorrow. No man has an error of judgment, without sooner or later having an error in practice. As every grain of truth is a grain of diamond dust, prize it all. Hold fast the truth that ye have received and that ye have been taught. “Hold fast the form of sound words” (2Ti 1:13); and in this day when articles are ridiculed, when creeds are despised, hold fast to that which ye have received, that ye may be “faithful among the faithless found”; for by so holding the truth shall ye be sanctified by the Spirit of God. The agent, then, is the Spirit of God working through the truth.

But now let me bring you back to my old figure. In another sense we are sanctified through Christ Jesus, because it is His blood and the water that flowed from His side in which the Spirit washes our heart from the defilement and propensity of sin. It is said of our Lord, “Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle or any such thing” (Eph 5:25-27) Remember again, “Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate” (Heb 13:12). “He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren” (Heb 2:11).

I say, again, there are hundreds of texts of this kind. “Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins” (Mat 1:21). “God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom

³⁹ John Gill (1697-1771) – Baptist minister, theologian, and biblical scholar, who preceded Spurgeon in the pulpit of the New Park Street Church by 100 years.

the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world” (Gal 6:14). In that memorable passage where Paul, struggling with corruption, exclaims, “Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom 7:24), the answer is not concerning the Holy Spirit; but he says, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 7:25). Space forbids the multiplication of texts; but there are many passages to the effect that our sanctification is the work of Jesus Christ.

He is our sanctifier, for He filled the sacred laver of regeneration in which we are washed, filled it with the blood and with the water that flowed from His side, and in this by the Holy Spirit we are washed. There is no being sanctified by the Law; the Spirit does not use legal precepts to sanctify us. There is no purification by mere dictates of morality; the Spirit of God does not use them. No, just as when Marah’s waters were bitter, Moses to make them sweet commanded them to take a tree and cast it into the waters, and they were sweet (Exo 15:23-25); so the Spirit of God, finding our natures bitter, taketh the tree of Calvary, casteth it into the stream, and everything is made pure. He finds us lepers, and to make us clean He dips the hyssop of faith in the precious blood, and sprinkles it upon us and we are clean. There is a mysterious efficacy in the blood of Christ not merely to make satisfaction for sin, but to work the death of sin (Rom 6).

The blood appears before God and He is well pleased; it falls on us, lusts wither, and old corruptions feel the death-stroke. Dagon falls before the ark (1Sa 5:2-4), and although the stump thereof is left, and corruptions still remain, yet Christ shall put an end to all our inbred sins, and through Him we shall mount to heaven perfect even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Just as the Spirit only works through the truth, so the blood of Christ only works through *faith*. Young men of the Catechumen and Bible classes, again I say, turn to your Bibles at your leisure, and find out the many passages that speak of faith as sanctifying the soul and purifying the mind. Our faith lays hold on the precious atonement of Christ. It sees Jesus suffering on the tree, and it says, “I vow revenge against the sins which nailed him there”; and thus His precious blood works in us a detestation of all sin, and the Spirit through the truth, working by faith, applies the precious blood of sprinkling—and we are made clean, and are accepted in the beloved.

V. Conclusion

I am afraid that I have confused and darkened counsel with words; but yet, I think, I may have suggested some trains of thought that will lead you to see that Holy Scripture teaches us a sanctification, not narrow and concise so as to be written down with a short definition as in our creed-books, but wide, large, and expansive. A work in which we are sanctified by God the Father, sanctified in Christ, and yet have our sanctification through the Spirit of God.

Oh! my dear hearers, strive after practical holiness. You that love Christ, do not let any say of you, “There is a Christian, but he is worse than other men.” It is not our eloquence, our learning, our fame, our wealth, that can ever commend Christ to the world; it is the holy living of Christians.

I was speaking, the other day, to a brother minister about this Bi-centenary movement,⁴⁰ which I fear will be an immense injury to Christ’s Church. I feared lest it should be made an opportunity for strife among brethren. Error must be corrected, but love must not be wounded. He remarked, and I thought it was so truthful, that the only way by which Dissent flourished of old was by the then superior holiness of its ministers, so that whilst the Church [of England] clergyman was hunting, the Dissenting minister was visiting the sick, and said he, “This is the way in which we shall lose power, if our ministers become political and worldly, it will be all over with us.”

I have never shunned to rebuke, when I thought it necessary, but I hate contention. The only allowable strife is to labor who can be the most holy, the most earnest, the most zealous, who can do the most for the poor and the ignorant, and who can lift Christ’s cross the highest. This is the way to lift up the members of any one particular denomination: by the members of that body being more devout, more sanctified, more spiritual-minded than the others. All mere party fightings will only gender strife, and animosities, and bickerings, and are not of the Spirit of God. But to live unto God and to be devoted to Him, this is the strength of the Church; this will give us the victory, God helping us, and unto His name shall be all the praise.

As for persons here who are not converted, and are unregenerate, I cannot address them about sanctification. I have opened a door this morning, but you cannot enter. Only remember, that if you cannot enter into this, you cannot enter into heaven, for,

*“Those holy gates for ever bar,
Pollution, sin, and shame;*

⁴⁰ **Bi-centenary movement** – movement observing the 200th anniversary of the ejection of 2,000 dissenting ministers from the Church of England.

*None shall obtain admission there,
But followers of the Lamb.”*

May it be yours, to come humbly and confess your sin, and ask and find forgiveness, and then, but not till then, there is hope that you may be sanctified in the Spirit of your mind. The Lord bless you for Jesus’ sakes.

No. 434; A sermon delivered on Sunday morning, February 9th, 1862, at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington. Available in print from Chapel Library with two other sermons under the title “Your Sanctification.”

PERFECT SANCTIFICATION

“By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”
—Hebrews 10:10

DEAR friends, ever since the Lord has quickened us by His grace, we have begun to look into ourselves and to search our hearts to see our condition before God. Hence many things that once caused us no disquietude, now create in us great anxiety. We thought that we were all right, and felt it to be enough to be quite as good as others. We dreamed that if we were not quite as good as we should be, we should certainly grow better, though we did not stop to enquire how or why. We took stock of our condition and concluded that we were rich and increased with goods, and had need of nothing (Rev 3:17).

A change has come over the spirit of the scene; the grace of God has made us thoughtful and careful. We dare not take things at haphazard now. We test and prove things, for we are very anxious not to be deceived. We look upon eternal realities as being of the utmost consequence, and we dare not take them for granted as being certain to be right. We are afraid of being presumptuous; we long to be sincere. We hold an assize⁴¹ within our spirits; and we are so afraid that we may be partial, as probably we shall be, that we ask the Lord to search us and try us, to see if there be any wicked way in us, that He may lead us out of such a way into the way everlasting (Psa 139:23-24).

This is all very wise and very proper, and I would not for a moment try to take off the people of God from a proper measure of this state of heart; and yet let it never be forgotten that we are in the sight of God other, in some respects, than we shall ever see ourselves to be if we look through the glass of feeling and consciousness. There are other matters to be taken into consideration, matters that our anxiety may lead us to overlook, and our inward search may cause us to forget.

Faith reveals to us another position for the people of God besides that which they occupy in themselves. Some call it an “evangelical fiction” and the like; but, thank God, it is a blessed fact that, sinners as we are in ourselves, yet believers are *saints* in God’s sight; and that sinful as they feel themselves to be, yet they are washed, cleansed, and sanctified in Jesus Christ. Notwithstanding all that we mourn over, the very fact that we do mourn over it becomes an evidence that we are no longer what we once were, and do not stand now where we once stood.

We have passed from death unto life. We have escaped from under the dominion of Law into the kingdom of grace (Rom 6:14). We have come from under the curse, and we dwell in the region of blessing. We have believed on Him that justifieth the ungodly, and our faith is counted for righteousness (Rom 4:5). There is therefore now no condemnation to us, for we are in Christ Jesus our Lord, and walk no longer after the flesh but after the Spirit (Rom 8:1). That your hearts may be gladdened, I want you to think of the noble position into which the grace of God has lifted all believers—the condition of sanctification that is spoken of in the text: for by the “will of God we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

We shall, *first*, speak of the eternal will; *secondly*, of the effectual sacrifice by which that will has been carried out; and, *thirdly*, of the everlasting result accomplished by that will through the sacrifice of the body of Christ. May

⁴¹ assize – court of judgment.

the Holy Spirit, who has revealed the grand doctrine of justification, now enable us to understand it and to feel its comforting power.

I. The Eternal Will

First, then, *the eternal will*—"By the which will we are sanctified."

A. The Father

This will must, first of all, be viewed as the will ordained of old by the Father, the *eternal* decree of the infinite Jehovah, that a people whom He chose should be sanctified and set apart unto Himself. The will of Jehovah stands fast forever and ever, and we know of it that it is altogether unchangeable, and that it has no beginning. It is an eternal will: we have no vacillating deity, no fickle God. He wills changes, but He never changes His will. "He is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth" (Job 22:13).

The will of God is *invincible* as well as eternal. We are told in Ephesians that He worketh all things after the counsel of His own will (Eph 1:11). "Who can stay his hand, or say unto him, what doest thou?" (Dan 4:35). The good pleasure of His will is never defeated: there cannot be such a thing as a vanquished God. His purpose shall stand, and He will do all His pleasure.

In fact, the will of God is the *motive force* of all things. "He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast" (Psa 33:9). His Word is omnipotent because His will is at the back of it, and it puts force into it. He said "Let there be light," and there was light (Gen 1:3), because He willed that there should be light. He bade creatures come forth, numerous as the drops of dew, to people the world that he had made—and forth they came, flying, leaping, swimming, in varied orders of life, because of His own will He did create them. His will is the secret power that sustains the universe and threads the starry orbs, and holds them like a necklace of light about the neck of nature. His will is the Alpha and the Omega of all things.

It was according to this eternal, invincible will of God that He chose, created, and set apart a people that should show forth the glory and riches of His grace, a people that should bear the image of His only-begotten Son, a people that should joyfully and willingly serve Him in His courts forever and ever, a people who should be His own sons and daughters, to whom He would say, I will dwell in them and walk in them, and "they shall be my people, and I will be their God" (Eze 11:20). Thus stood the eternal will of old. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom 8:29).

But the people concerning whom this will was made were dead in sin, defiled with evil, polluted by transgression. The old serpent's venom was in their veins. They were fit to be set apart for the curse, but not to be set apart for the service of the thrice holy God. And the question was, how then should the will of the Immutable Invincible ever be carried out? How shall these rebels become absolved? How shall these fountains of filth become clear as crystal, pouring forth floods of living water and divine praise? How shall these unsanctified and defiled ones become sanctified unto the service of God? It must be—but how shall it be?

Then came the priests, with smoking censers, and with basins full of blood, steaming as it came fresh from the slaughtered victims, and they sprinkled this blood upon the book and upon the people, upon the altar, and upon the mercyseat, and upon all the hangings of the tabernacle, and all the ground whereon the worshippers walked, for almost all things under the Law were sanctified by blood. Everywhere was this blood of bulls and of goats. Fresh every morning and renewed every evening.

Still, God's will was not done; the chosen were not thus sanctified—and we know they were not, because it is written, "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not" (Heb 10:5). His will was not fulfilled in them; it was not His will that they should sanctify the people. They were inefficacious to such an end, for, as the Holy Ghost has said, it was "not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (Heb 10:4). And so, if these offerings had been all, centuries of the house of Aaron and of the priests of the tribe of Levi might have come and gone, and yet the will decreed by the eternal Father would not have been an accomplished fact.

B. The Son

Thus we are landed at our second point, which is that this will by which we are sanctified was performed of the ever blessed Son. It was the will of God the Father, but it was carried out by the divine Son when He came into the world. A body was prepared for Him (Heb 10:5), and into that body, in a mysterious manner that we will not attempt even to conceive of, He entered, and there He was the incarnate God!

This incarnate God—by offering His own blood, by laying down His own life, by bearing in His own body the curse, and in His own spirit enduring the wrath—was able to effect the purpose of the everlasting Father in the *purging* of His people, in the *setting of His chosen apart*, and making them henceforth *holiness* unto the Lord.

Do you not see what the will of the Father was, that He should have a people that should be sanctified unto Himself? But that will could not be carried out by the blood of bulls and of goats; it must be achieved by the offering up of the body of Jesus Christ once for all! Our Lord Jesus Christ has done whatsoever that will of the Father required for its perfect achievement. This is our satisfaction.

We will not enter at this time into a detailed account of our Lord's active and passive obedience by which He magnified the Law and set apart His people. I pray you, however, never fall into the error of dividing the work of Christ, as some do, and saying, "Here He made atonement for sin, and there He did not." In these modern times certain brethren have invented refinements of statement of so trivial a character that they are not even worth the trouble of thinking over, and yet, like babes with a new rattle, they make a noise with them all day long. It is amusing how these wise professors make grave points out of mere hairsplitting distinctions, and if we do not agree with them they give themselves mighty airs, pitying our ignorance, and esteeming themselves as superior persons who have an insight into things that ordinary Christians cannot see. God save us from having eyes which are so sharp that we are able to spy out new occasions for difference, and fresh reasons for making men offenders for mere words. I believe in the life of Christ as well as in His death, and I believe that He stood for me before God as much when He walked the acres of Palestine as when He hung on the cross at Jerusalem. You cannot divide and split Him in sunder and say, "He is so far an example, and so far an atonement," but you must take the entire Christ, and look at Him from the very first as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (Joh 1:29).

"Oh, but," they say, "he made no atonement except in His death," which is, let me tell you, an absurdity in language. Listen a minute. When does a man die? I cannot tell you. There is the minute in which the soul separates from the body; but all the time that a man may be described as dying, he is alive, is he not? A man does not suffer when actually dead. What we call the pangs of death are truly and accurately pangs of life. Death does not suffer; it is the end of suffering. A man is in life while he suffers; and if they say, "It is Christ's death that makes an atonement, and not his life," I reply that death, alone and by itself, makes no atonement. Death in its natural sense, and not in this modern non-natural severance from life, does make atonement; but it cannot be viewed apart from life by any unsophisticated mind.

If they must have distinctions, we could make distinctions enough to worry them of such an unprofitable business, but we have nobler work to do. To us our Lord's death seems to be the consummation of His life, the finishing stroke of a work that His Father had given Him to do among the sons of men. We view Him as having come in a body prepared for Him to do the will of God once, and that "once" lasted throughout His one life on earth. We will not, however, dwell on any moot point, but unfeignedly rejoice that whatever was wanted⁴² to make God's people wholly sanctified unto God, Christ has wrought out.

"By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once" (Heb 10:10). It is finished. Does the divine Law require for our acceptance perfect submission to the will of the Lord? He has rendered it. Does it ask complete obedience to its precepts? He has presented the same. Does the fulfilled will of the Lord call for abject suffering, a sweat of blood, pangs unknown, and death itself? Christ has presented it all, whatever that "all" may be. As when God created, His word effected all His will; so when God redeemed, His blessed and incarnate Word has done all His will. In every point as God looked on each day's work and said, "It is good" (Gen 1), so as He looks upon each part of the work of His dear Son, He can say of it, "It is good." The Father joins in the verdict of His Son, that "it is finished" (Joh 19:30): all the will of God for the sanctification of His people is accomplished!

C. The Holy Spirit

Beloved, this work must be *applied* to us by the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Ghost who brings us to know that Jesus Christ has sanctified us, or set us apart, and made us acceptable with God. It is the Holy Spirit who has given us the New Testament, and shed a light upon the Old. It is the Holy Spirit who speaks to us through the ministers of Christ when He blesses them to our conversion. Especially is it the Holy Ghost who takes away from us all hope of being sanctified before God by any means of our own, brings us to see our need of cleansing and reconciliation, and then takes of the things of Christ and reveals them unto us. Not without the going forth of His sacred power are we made to take the place of separation, and dedication, to which the Lord of old ordained us.

Thus it is by the will of the Father, carried out by the Son, and applied by the Holy Spirit, that the church of God is regarded as sanctified before God, and is acceptable unto Him.

I do not tarry longer on any one point, because these great things are best spoken of with few words; they are subjects better fed upon by quiet thought than exhibited in speech.

⁴² wanted – lacked.

II. The Effectual Sacrifice

I invite you, dear friends, in the second place, to consider the effectual sacrifice by which the will of God with regard to the sanctity of His people has been carried out. “By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ.”

This implies, first, *His incarnation*, which of course includes His eternal deity. We can never forget that Jesus Christ is God. The church has given forth many a valiant confession to His deity, and woe be to her should she ever hesitate on that glorious truth! Yet sometimes she has great need earnestly to insist upon His humanity. As you bow before your glorious Lord, and adore Him with all the sanctified, yet remember that He whom you worship was truly and really a *man*. The gospel of His incarnation is not a spiritual idea, nor a metaphor, nor a myth. In very deed and truth the God that made heaven and earth came down to earth, and hung upon a woman’s breast as an infant.

That child, as He grew in stature and wisdom, was as certainly God as He is at this moment in glory. He was as surely God when He was here hungering and suffering, sleeping, eating, drinking, as He was God when He hung up the morning stars and kindled the lamps of night, or as He shall be when sun and moon shall dim at the brightness of His coming. Jesus Christ, very God of very God, did certainly stoop to become such as we are, and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. It is a truth you all know, but I want you to grasp it and realize it. It will help you to trust Christ if you clearly perceive that, divine as He is, He is bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh—your kinsman, though the Son of God.

All this is implied in the text, because it speaks of the offering of the body of Christ. But why does it specially speak of the body? I think to show us the reality of that offering; His soul suffered, and His soul’s sufferings were the soul of His sufferings. But still, to make it palpable to you, to record it as a sure historical fact, he mentions that there was an offering of the body of Christ.

I take it, however, that the word means the whole of Christ—that there was an offering made of all of Christ, the body of Him, or that of which He was constituted. It is my solemn conviction that the deity co-worked with His humanity in the wondrous passion by which He has sanctified His elect. I am told that deity cannot suffer. I am expected to subscribe to that because theologians say so. Well, if it be true, then I shall content myself with believing that the deity helped the humanity by strengthening it to suffer more than it could otherwise have endured.

But I believe that deity can suffer, heterodox as that notion may seem to be. I cannot believe in an impassive God as my Father. If He pities and sympathizes, surely He must have some sensibilities. Is He a God of iron? If He wills it He can do anything, and therefore He can suffer if He pleases. It is not possible for God to be *made* to suffer, that would be a ridiculous supposition; yet if He wills to do so, He is certainly capable of doing that as well as anything else, for all things are possible to Him (Mat 19:26). I look upon our Lord Jesus as in His very Godhead stooping down to bear the weight of human sin and human misery, sustaining it because He was divine, and able to bear what else had been too great a load. Thus the whole of Christ was made a sacrifice for sin. It was the offering, not of the spirit of Christ, but of the very body of Christ—the essence, subsistence, and most manifest reality and personality of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Most High.

And this was *wholly* offered. I do not know how to bring out my own thought here; but to accomplish the will of God in sanctifying all His people, Christ must be the offering, and He must be wholly offered. There were certain sacrifices that were only presented to God in part, so far as the consumption by fire was concerned. A part was eaten by the priest or by the offerer, and so far it was not a whole burnt offering. In this there was much precious truth set forth, of which we will not speak at this present. But as our sin-offering, making expiation for guilt, our blessed Lord and Master gave Himself wholly for us, as an atoning sacrifice and offering for sin—and that “Himself” sums up all you can conceive to be in and of the Christ of God.

The pangs and griefs that like a fire went through Him did consume Him, even to the uttermost of all that was in Him. He bore all that could be borne, stooped to the lowest to which humility could come, descended to the utmost abyss to which a descent of self-denial could be made. He made Himself of no reputation: He emptied Himself of all honor and glory (Phi 2). He gave up Himself without reserve. He saved others; Himself He could not save. He spares us in our chastisements, but Himself He spared not. He says of Himself, in the twenty-second Psalm, “I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people” (22:6).

You do not know, you cannot imagine, how fully the sacrifice was made by Christ. It was not only a sacrifice of all of Himself, but a complete sacrifice of every part of Himself for us. The blaze of eternal wrath for human sin was focussed upon His head! The anguish that must have been endured by Him—who stood in the place of millions of sinners to be judged of God and smitten in their stead—is altogether inconceivable. Though Himself perfectly

innocent, yet in His own person to offer up such a sacrifice as could honor the divine justice on account of myriads of sins of myriads of the sons of men, was a work far beyond all human realization. You may give loose to your reason and your imagination, and rise into the seventh heaven of sublime conception as with eagle wing, but you can never reach the utmost height. Here is the sum of the matter—"Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift" (2Co 9:15), for unspeakable, inconceivable it certainly is when we view the Lord Jesus as a sacrifice for the sins of men.

This offering was made once, and only once. The pith of the text lies in the finishing words of it, "through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*." Those words "for all" are very properly put in by the translators; but you must not make a mistake as to their meaning. The text does not mean that Christ offered Himself up once for all, that is, for all mankind. That may be a doctrine of Scripture, or it may not be a doctrine of Scripture, but it is not the teaching here. The passage means "once for all" in the sense of "all at once," or "only once." As a man might say, "I gave up my whole estate once for all to my creditors, and there was an end of the matter," so here our Lord Jesus Christ is said to have offered Himself up as a sacrifice once for all—that is to say, only once, and there was an end of the whole matter. His sacrifice on behalf of His people was for all the sins before He came.

Think of what they all were. Ages had succeeded ages, and there had been found amongst the various generations of men criminals of the blackest dye, and crimes had been multiplied; but the prophet said in vision concerning Christ, as he looked on all the multitude, "All we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa 53:6). That was before He came. Reflect that there has been no second offering of Himself ever since, and never will be, but it was once, and that once did the deed. Let your mind conceive of this, nearly two thousand years have passed since the offering, and if the prophet were to stand here to-night and look back through those eighteen hundred years and more, he would still say, "All we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Oh! it is a wonderful conception—the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus was the reservoir into which all the sin of the human race ran, from this quarter, and that, and that, and that, and that. All the sin of His people rolled in a torrent unto Him, and gathered as in a great lake. In Him was no sin, and yet the Lord made Him to be sin for us. You may have seen a deep mountain tarn⁴³ that has been filled to the brim by innumerable streamlets from all the hillsides round about. Here comes a torrent gushing down, and there trickles from the moss that has overgrown the rock a little drip, drip, drip, which falls perpetually: great and small tributaries all meet in the black tarn, which after the rain is full to the brim, and ready to burst its banks. That lone lake pictures Christ, the meetingplace of the sin of His people. It was all laid on Him, that from Him the penalty might be exacted. At His hands the price must be demanded for the ransom of all this multitude of sins.

And it is said that He did this *once for all*. I have no language with which to describe it, but I see before me the great load of sin, the huge, tremendous world of sin. No, no, it is greater than the world. Atlas might carry that, but this is a weight compared with which the world is but as a pin's head. Mountains upon mountains, alps on alps, are nothing to the mighty mass of sin that I see before my mind's eye; and lo, it all falls upon the Well-beloved.

He stands beneath it and bows under it, till the bloody sweat starts from every pore, and yet He does not yield to its weight so as to get away from the burden. It presses more heavily; it bows Him to the dust; it touches His very soul; it makes Him cry in anguish, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mat 27:46), and yet at the last He lifts Himself up and flings it all away, and cries, "It is finished!" (Joh 19:30)—and it is *gone*!

There is not a wreck of it left; no, not an atom of it left. It is all gone at once, and once for all. He has borne the immeasurable weight and cast it off from His shoulders forever; and as it lies no more on Him, so also it lies no more on them. Sin shall never be mentioned against His people anymore forever. Oh, wondrous deed of Deity! Oh, mighty feat of love accomplished once for all. The Redeemer never offered Himself to death before. He never will do it again.

Look this way, my brethren: the reason why it never will be done again is because there is no need for it. All the sin that was laid upon Jesus is gone; all the sin of His people is forever discharged. He has borne it; the debt is paid. The handwriting of ordinances against us is nailed to His cross; the accuser's charge is answered forever.

What then shall we say of those who come forward and pretend that they perpetually present the body of Christ in the unbloody sacrifice of the mass? Why, this: that no profane jest from the lip of Voltaire⁴⁴ ever had even the slightest degree of God-defiant blasphemy in it compared with such a hideous insult as this horrible pretense. It is

⁴³ **tarn** – a lake formed from drainage from the hillsides, with no feeding nor draining tributary.

⁴⁴ **Voltaire** (1694-1778) – French writer and poet; a leading figure of the Enlightenment.

infernal. I will say no less. There can be nothing more intolerable than that notion, for our Lord Jesus Christ has offered Himself for sin once, and once for all; and he who dares to think of offering Him again insults Him by acting as if that once were not enough. I cannot believe any language of abhorrence to be too strong if the performers and attendants at the mass really knew what is implied in their professed act and deed. In the judgment of Christian charity we may earnestly pray, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luk 22:34).

Our words fail and our conceptions faint at the thought of the great Substitute with all the sins of His people condensed into one black draught and set before Him. How shall we think of Him as putting that cup to His lip, and drinking, drinking, drinking all the wrath till He had drained the cup to the bottom, and filled Himself with horror? Yet see, He has finished the death-drink and turned the cup upside down, crying, “It is finished.” At one tremendous draught the loving Lord has drained destruction dry for all His people, and there is no dreg nor drop left for any one of them; for now is the will of God accomplished—by the which will we are sanctified “through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:10). Glory be to God! And yet again, glory be to God!

*“He bore on the tree the sentence for me,
And now both the Surety and sinner are free.
In the heavenly Lamb thrice happy I am;
And my heart doth rejoice at the sound of His name.”*

III. The Everlasting Result

Now I close with our third head, and that is the everlasting result. The everlasting result of this effectual carrying out of the will of God is that now God regards His people’s sin as *expiated*,⁴⁵ and their persons as sanctified. Our sin is removed by expiation. Atonement has been offered, and its efficacy abides forever. There is no need of any other expiation. Believers repent bitterly, but not in the way of expiation. There is no penance to be exacted of them by way of putting away guilt. Their guilt is gone; their transgression is forgiven. The covenant is made with them, and it runs thus: “Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more for ever” (Heb 8:12). Their sins have, in fact, been ended, blotted out, and annihilated by the Redeemer’s one sacrifice.

Next, they are *reconciled*. There is no quarrel now between God and those who are in Christ Jesus. Peace is made between them twain. The middle wall that stood between them is taken away. Christ by His one sacrifice has made peace for all His people, and effectually established an amity that never shall be broken.

*“Lord Jesus, we believing
In thee have peace with God,
Eternal life receiving,
The purchase of thy blood.
Our curse and condemnation
Thou bearest in our stead;
Secure is our salvation
In thee, our risen Head.”*

Moreover, they are not only accepted and reconciled, but they are *purified*; the taint that was upon them is taken away. In God’s sight they are regarded no more as unclean. They are no longer shut without the camp; they may come to the throne of the heavenly grace when they will. God can have communion with them. He regards them as fit to stand in His courts and to be His servants, for they are purified, reconciled, expiated through the one offering of Christ. Their admission into the closest intimacy with God could never be allowed if He did not regard them as purged from all uncleanness, and this has been effected not at all by themselves, but alone by the great sacrifice.

*“Thy blood, not mine, O Christ,
Thy blood so freely spilt,
Has blanced my blackest stains,
And purged away my guilt.
“Thy righteousness, O Christ,
Alone does cover me;
No righteousness avails
Save that which is in Thee.”*

⁴⁵ **expiated** – to have made satisfaction for an offense by which guilt is done away.

Now, what has come of it? That is the point. I want you now just to let me leave the doctrine and try and bring out the experience arising from it. What Christ has done in the carrying out of the great will of God has effected salvation for all His chosen; but this is applied to them actually and experimentally by the Holy Ghost's dwelling in them, by which indwelling they know they are now God's people. The Israelites were God's people after a fashion; the Levites were more peculiarly so, and the priests were still more especially so, and these had to present perpetual sacrifices and offerings that God might be able to look upon them as His people, for they were a sinful people.

You and I are not typically,⁴⁶ but truly and really His people. Through Jesus Christ's offering of Himself once for all we are really set apart to be the Lord's people henceforth and forever, and He says of us—I mean, of course, not of us all, but of as many as have believed in Jesus, and to whom the Holy Ghost has revealed His finished work—"I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (2Co 6:16). You, believers, are sanctified in this sense: that you are now the set-apart ones unto God, and you belong wholly to Him.

Will you think that over? "I am now not my own. I do not belong now to the common order of men, as all the rest of men do. I am set apart. I am called out. I am taken aside. I am one of the Lord's own. I am His treasure and His portion. He has through Jesus Christ's death made me one of those of whom He says, they "shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations" (Num 23:9). I want you to feel it so that you may live under the power of that fact; that you may feel, "My Lord has cleansed me. My Lord has made expiation for me. My Lord has reconciled me unto God, and I am God's man, I am God's woman. I cannot live as others do. I cannot be one among you. I must come out. I must be separate. I cannot find my pleasure where you find yours. I cannot find my treasure where you find yours. I am God's, and God is mine. That wondrous transaction on the cross of which our minister has tried to speak, but of which he could not speak as he ought—that wondrous unspeakable deed upon the cross, that wonderful life and death of Jesus—has made me one of God's people, set apart unto Him, and *as such I must live.*"

When you realize that you are God's people, the next thing is to reflect that God in sanctifying a people set them apart for His service, and He made them fit for His service. You, beloved, through Christ's one great offering of His body for you, are permitted now to be the servants of God. You know it is an awful thing for a man to try and serve God—until God gives him leave, there is a presumption about it. Suppose that one of the Queen's enemies, who has sought her life and has always spoken against her, were to say, "I mean to be one of her servants; I will go into her palace and I will serve her," having all the while in his heart a rebellious, proud spirit. His service could not be tolerated; it would be sheer impudence. Even so, "Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes?" (Psa 50:16).

A wicked man, pretending to serve God, stands in the position of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, trying to offer incense; because he is not purified and not called to the work, and has no fitness for it. But now, beloved, you that are in Christ are called to be His servants. You have permission and leave to serve Him. It ought to be your great joy to be accepted servants of the living God. If you are only the Lord's shoeblick you have a greater privilege than if you were an emperor. If the highest thing you ever will be allowed to do should be to loose the latchet of your Master's shoe, or to wash His servants' feet, if that master be Christ, you are favored above the mightiest of the mighty. Men of renown may envy you: their orders of the Garter or the Golden Fleece are nothing compared with the high dignity of being servitors of King Jesus.

Look upon this as being the result of Christ's death upon the cross, that such a poor, sinful creature as you are, that were once a slave of the devil, are now suffered to be the servant of God. On the cross my Master bought for me the privilege to preach to you at this time; and He bought for you, dear mother, the privilege to go home and train your little child for the great Father in heaven. In fact, He bought for us a sanctification that has made us the Lord's people, and has enabled us to engage in His service. Do we not rejoice in this?

Next to that we have this privilege, that what we do can now be accepted. Because Jesus Christ by the offering of His body once has perfected the Father's will and has sanctified us, therefore what we do is now accepted with God. We might have done whatever we would, but God would not have accepted it of a sinner's hands—of the hands of those that were out of Christ.

Now He accepts anything of us. You dropped a penny into the box; it was all that you could give, and the Lord accepted it. It dropped into *His* hand. You offered a little prayer in the middle of business this afternoon because you heard an ill word spoken, and your God accepted that prayer. You went down the street and spoke to a poor sick person; you did not say much, but you said all you could—the great God accepted it. Acceptance in the Beloved, not only for our persons, but for our prayers and our work, is one of the sweetest things I know of. We are

⁴⁶ **typically** – pertaining to a type, form, or figure that illustrates a spiritual truth.

accepted. That is the joy of it. Through that one great, bloody sacrifice, once for all offered, God's people are forever accepted, and what His people do for Him is accepted too; and now we are privileged to the highest degree, being sanctified—that is to say, made into God's people, God's servants, and God's accepted servants.

Every privilege that we could have had, if we had never sinned, is now ours; and we are in Him as His children. We have more than would have come to us by the covenant of works. And if we will but know it and live up to it, even the very privilege of suffering and the privilege of being tried, the privilege of being in want, should be looked upon as a great gift. Methinks an angel spirit, seated high alone there, meditating and adoring, might say within himself, "I have served God: these swift wings have borne me through the ether on His errands, but I never suffered for Him. I was never despised for Him. Drunkards never called me ill names. I was never misrepresented as God's servant. After all, though I have served Him, it has been one perpetual joy. He hath set a hedge about me and all that I have." If an angel could envy anybody, I think he would envy the martyr who had the privilege of burning quick to the death for Christ, or such as Job, who, when stripped of everything and covered with sores, could sit on a dunghill and yet honor His God—because such as these achieved a service unique within itself, which has sparkling diamonds of the first water glittering about it, such as cannot be found in an unsuffering ministry be it as complete as it may. You are favored sons of Adam, you who have become sons of God. You are favored beyond cherubim and seraphim in accomplishing a service for the manifestation of the riches of the grace of God, which unfallen spirits never could accomplish. Rejoice and be exceeding glad that this one offering has put you there.

And now you are eternally secure. No sin can ever be laid to your door, for it is all put away, and sin being removed, every other evil has lost its fang and sting. Now you are eternally beloved, for you are one with Him who can never be other than dear to the heart of Jehovah. That union never can be broken, for nothing can separate us from the love of God, and hence your security can never be imperilled. Now are you in some measure glorified, for the spirit of glory and of Christ doth rest upon you (1Pe 4:14), and our conversation is in heaven, from whence we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus, who hath already raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenlies (Eph 1). Heaven is already ours in promise, in price, and in principle, and the preparation for it also has begun. I feel at this hour that,

*"All that remains for me
Is but to love and sing,
And wait until the angels come
To bear me to their King."*

In such a spirit would I always live. Brethren and sisters, are you dispirited at this time? Have you a great trouble upon you? Are you alone in the world? Do others misjudge you, or does the iron of scandal pierce your very soul? Do fierce coals of juniper await those vicious tongues that wrong you? Do you feel bowed into the dust? Yet, what art thou at to be despairing? Child of God and heir of all things, why art thou cast down? Joint heir with Christ, why grovellest thou? Why liest thou among the pots when thou hast already angels' wings about thee?

Up, man, up! Thy heritage is not here among the dragons and the owls. Up! Thou art one of God's eagles, born for brighter light than earth could bear—light that would blind the blear-eyed sons of men if they were once to get a veiled glimpse of it. Thou, a twice-born man, one of the imperial family, one that shall sit upon a throne with Christ as surely as Christ sits there, what art thou at to be moaning and groaning? Wipe thy eyes and smooth thy brow, and in the strength of the Eternal go to thy life-battle!

It will not be long. The trumpet of victory almost sounds in thy ears. Wilt thou now beat a retreat? No. Play the man and win the day. "Trust in the Lord and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed" (Psa 37:3), till He comes to catch thee away where thou shalt see what Jesus did for thee when He made His body once for all a sacrifice, that He might fulfill the will of the eternal Father, and sanctify thee and all His people unto God forever and ever. May the best of blessings rest upon all who are in Christ Jesus. ❧

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PREPARATION FOR REVIVAL

“Can two walk together, except they be agreed!”

—Amos 3:3

Introduction

The believer is *agreed* with God. The war between the most holy God and His offending creatures is over in the case of bloodwashed sinners; not suspended by a truce, but ended forever by a peace which passeth all understanding. The believer is fully agreed with God concerning the divine Law: he confesses that “the law is holy...and just, and good” (Rom 7:12); he would not have it altered if he could. He rejoices in the way of God’s testimonies more than in all riches; yea, in His precepts doth he take delight, praying evermore, “O let me not wander from thy commandments” (Psa 119:10). He joyfully acknowledges that the Judge of all the earth rules mankind by a law in which there is no injustice, by statutes that subserve the best interests of the governed, while they secure the glory of the great Governor. The Christian “consents unto the law that it is good” (Rom 7:16).

He is agreed with God, moreover, that a breach of the Law should be visited with penalty; he would be unwilling that sin should go unpunished. He feels that the sanctions of law, however terrible, are absolutely necessary and require to be severe.

Above all, he is agreed with God in that great atonement for sin which God Himself has ordained and provided in the person of Jesus Christ. Gazing upon the matchless sacrifice of Calvary, while the Lord is content, the believer is satisfied. Where God finds satisfaction for His injured honour, the believer finds the noblest object of admiration and adoration. Thou lovest Golgotha, O thou Judge of the earth; and thy people are perfectly agreed with Thee in this. Henceforth the Christian is at one with God in his love of holiness; he delights in the law of God after the inward man (Rom 7:22).

Sin, which is abhorrent to the Most High, is obnoxious to the Christian in that measure in which he is enlightened and conformed unto the image of Christ. Great God, Thou hast unsheathed Thy sword, and bathed it in heaven for the destruction of all evil, and Thy redeemed are on Thy side, abhorring that which is evil (Rom 12:9), and resolving to fight under Thy command till the last sin shall be cut off (Col 3:5). Thou hast uplifted Thy banner because of the truth, and around Thy standard the soldiers of the cross are rallying—for Thy battle, O Most High, is the battle of the church; Thy foes are our foes, and Thy friends are the excellent of the earth, in whom is all our delight.

I trust that most of us, who are here met in the name of Jesus, feel a deep, sincere, and constant agreement with God. We have been guilty of murmuring at His will; but yet our newborn nature evermore at its core and center knoweth that the will of the Lord is wise and good; and we therefore bow our heads with reverent agreement, and say, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Mat 26:39). “The will of the Lord be done” (Act 21:14). Our soul, when through infirmity she is tempted to rebellion, nevertheless struggles after complete resignation of her wishes and desires to the will of the Most High. We do not covet the life of self-will, but we sigh after the spirit of self-denial, yea, of self-annihilation, that Christ may live in us, and that the old Ego, the carnal “I,” may be altogether slain.

I would be as obedient to my God as are those firstborn sons of light, His messengers of flaming fire. As the mercury feels the mysterious changes of the air, and sensitively moves in accordance with the atmosphere, so would I, being surrounded by my God, evermore perceive His wish and will, and move at once in obedience thereto. Our strength shall be perfect when we have no independent will, but move and act only as we are moved and acted on by our gracious God. I hope that at this hour we can truly say that, notwithstanding our many sins, we do love the Lord our God; and if we could have our will this morning, we would follow His commands without the slightest departure from the narrow path. We are in heart agreed with God.

The text reminds us that this agreement gives us power to walk with God. May we be enabled to claim this privilege that divine grace has bestowed on us, power to walk with God in daily, habitual, friendly, intimate, joyous communion. Believer, you can walk with God this very day. He is as near to thee as He was to Abraham beneath the oak at Mamre (Gen 18), or Moses at the back of the desert (Exo 3). He is as willing to show thee His love as He was to reveal Himself to Daniel on the banks of Ulai (Dan 8), or to Ezekiel by the streams of Chebar (Eze 1). Thou hast no greater distance this day between thee and thy God, than Jacob had when he laid hold upon the angel and prevailed (Gen 32). He is thy father, as truly as He was the father of the people whom He covered by day with a cloud, and cheered by night with a pillar of fire (Exo 13:21); and though no Shekinah lights up a golden mercy-seat,

yet the throne of grace is quite as glorious and even more accessible than in the days of old. He shall hide thee in His pavilion, as He did his servant David; yea, in the secret of the tabernacle shall be thy hiding-place. Enoch's privilege was not peculiar to Him; it is thy birthright: claim it. Noah's high honour of walking with God was not reserved for him alone; it belongs to thee also, shut in as thou art in the ark of the covenant, and saved from the deluge of divine wrath. It should be the Christian's delight to be always with His God; walking with Him in unbroken fellowship. Enoch did not take a turn or two with God, as Matthew Henry observes, but he walked with him four hundred years.

O that we might cease to be with our God as wayfaring men who tarry but for a night: may we dwell in God, and may He dwell in us. Walking implies action; and our actions should always be in the Lord. The Christian, whatsoever he eateth, or drinketh, or doeth, should do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by Him. Walking has in it the thought of progress; but all our progress should be with God. As we are rooted and grounded in Christ, so we must ask to grow up in Him; ever abiding in our highest moments with God, and never imagining or conceiving any progress which shall remove us from humble confidence in Him. Beloved brother in the Lord, it may be that thy heart is agreed with God, and yet thou hast lost for a time thy walking with Him; be not at ease in thy soul till thou hast regained it. Search thine own heart by the light of the Word and of the Holy Spirit; and when thou knowest thyself to be agreed with God, through Him who is our peace, hesitate not to draw near with holy confidence to thy Father and thy God, notwithstanding all thy past wanderings; for He welcomes thee to walk with Him, seeing that thou art agreed.

At this season we, as a church, have had our hearts set upon a revival of religion in our midst. Many of us will be greatly and grievously disappointed if such a revival shall not take place. We have felt moved to cry for it; I think I may say we have been almost unanimously thus moved. Already there are signs that God is visiting us in a very remarkable manner, but our souls are set upon a greater work than we have ever seen. Now, dear friends, we need as the first and most essential thing in this matter, that God should walk with us. In vain we shall struggle after revival unless we have His presence. If, then, we desire to have His presence with us, we must see to it that we are perfectly agreed with Him both in the design of the work, and in the method of it; and I desire this morning to stir up your pure minds to heart-searching and vigilant self-examination, that every false way may be purged from us, since God will not walk with us as a church, unless we be agreed with Him.

The first remark, then, of this morning, is simply this,—we desire in this matter to walk together with God; but, in the second place, if we would have Him with us we must be agreed with Him; and therefore, thirdly, we desire to purge ourselves of everything which would mar our perfect agreement with God, and so prevent His coming to our aid. I do ask the prayers of God's people that He may enable me to speak to profit this morning, for if ever I felt my own unfitness to edify the saints, I do so just now: I will even confess that if I could have had my own choice, I should have left it to someone else to address you this morning. My harp is out of tune, and the strings are all loosened, but the chief musician understands His instruments, and knows how to get music out of us, and in answer to prayer He will doubtless sustain us and give you a blessing.

1. Walk with God.

Let us, first, *avow our desire that in our present effort we may walk with God*; otherwise our strivings after revival will be very wearisome.

I know of nothing more saddening than to attend a prayer-meeting where the devotion is forced, and the fervour laborious; where brethren puff and strain like engines with a load behind them too heavy for them to drag. It is painful to detect an evident design to get up an excitement, and wind up the people to the proper pitch; when the addresses are adapted to foster hotheadedness, and the prayers to beget superstition. God's true saints cannot but feel that to gain the graces of the Spirit by fleshly vehemence is sad work. They retire from such a meeting, and they say, "How different is this from occasions when God's Spirit has been really at work with us!" Then, like a ship with her sails filled with a fair wind, floating majestically along without tugging and straining, the church, borne onward with the breath of the divine Spirit, with a full tide of heaven's grace, speeds on her glorious way. "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence" (Exo 33:15), was the request of Moses; and I think we may rather deprecate than desire a revival if God's presence be not in it.

Lord, let us stay as we are, crying and groaning to see better days, rather than permit us to be puffed up with the notion of revival without Thine own power in it; let us have no special prayer-meetings merely for the sake of them; but let us, O let us receive special blessings as the result of prayer: if thou dost not intend to help us now let us weep in secret, but let us not rejoice in a mere name if the substance be lacking.

During a course of meetings by which we desire to excite the hearts of believers to a deeper interest in spiritual things; if there be not a gracious power in them, you will soon perceive a dulness, a flagging, a heaviness, a weariness stealing over the assembly; the numbers will decline, the prayers will become less fervent, and the whole thing will degenerate into a hollow sham or a mournful monotony. To come up from the wilderness is hard climbing unless we lean on our beloved. O thou who art our beloved and adorable Lord, lest our souls grow weary in well-doing, and faint for heaviness, be pleased to let us enjoy communion with Thyself.

Not only is there weariness in our own attempts, but they always end in disappointment, unless God walketh with us. Ye may pray, and pray, and pray, but there shall be no conversions, no sense of quickening, until the Spirit's working be distinctly recognized. The minister shall be just as much a preacher of the mere letter as ever he was; the church officers shall be as formal and official as ever they were; the church members shall be as inconsistent and as indifferent as they were wont to be; the congregation shall be as uninterested and as unmoved as they were in the worst times, except the Spirit of God work with us. In this thing we may quote the words of the psalmist, "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep" (Psa 127:1-2). O friends, it is well to have a holy industry and a devout perseverance; it is well to strain every nerve, and put forth every effort; but all this must end in the most sorry, heart-sickening failure, unless the Lord rend the heavens and come down. I am telling you what you all do know, and what I trust you feel, but it is what we are constantly forgetting; for many are they that go a warfare at their own charges, and so become both bankrupt and defeated; and many be they who would build God's house simply by stress of human effort, but they fail, because God is not there to give them success.

Yet more; supposing that in this our attempt at revival, we should not be favoured with the presence of God; then prayer will be greatly dishonoured. I take it, that when a church draws near to God in special prayer, asking any mercy, if she does not receive that mercy on account of some disagreement with God, then her belief in prayer is, for the future, greatly weakened; and this is a most serious evil, for it loosens the girdle of the loins of God's saints. Anything which makes men doubt the efficacy of prayer, is an injury to their spirituality; and thus upon the largest scale God's church will suffer loss if her prayers shall remain unanswered. We must go on; it would be ruin to forbear or to turn our backs. As a church, we must now conquer or die. How can I again stir you up to supplication, if on this occasion your prayers should be in vain? I shall come into this pulpit with but a faint heart to speak of my Master's faithfulness if He does not give you evidences of it.

Ah! my brethren, when you are lifting up your voices in intercession, I cannot expect to mark your earnestness nor to behold your faith, unless that faith shall be confirmed just now by a shower divine mercy. To the world at large the non-hearing of prayer would be a ready argument, either against the existence of God, or else against the reality of His promise. I hope such a thing as this will not occur. "Aha! aha!" saith the enemy, "see what has come of it all! The people cried, but they cried in vain. They met in large numbers; they approached the mercy-seat with tears and groans, but no result has come of it; there have been no more conversions than before, and God's strength has not been put forth." Would you desire that such a calamity as this should occur. The true soldiers of the cross in our Israel would almost as soon lay down their necks, as that God's honour should thus be attained in the presence of his foes.

Moreover, every attempt at revival of religion which proves a failure—and fail it must without the presence of God—leaves the church in a worse condition than it was before; because, if it should prove a failure, from the want of any stir at all; then God's people fall back into their former lethargy, with an excuse for continuing in it; or if a false stir be made, a reaction follows of a most injurious character. I suppose the worst time in the Christian church is generally that which follows the excitement of a revival; and if that revival has had no reality in it, the mischief which is done is awful and incalculable. If no excitement shall come at all, the mischief is still as great; God's people, being disappointed, have little heart to listen to further exhortations to future zealous action, become contented with their Laodicean lukewarmness, and it becomes impossible to bestir them again. If a revival should apparently have success and yet God be not in it, perhaps this is even worse. The wild-fire and madness of some revivals have been a perfect disgrace to the common sense of the age, let alone the spirituality of the church.

I know, and speak not without book, when I declare that some churches have been seriously deteriorated and permanently injured by large admissions of excited but unconverted persons; so that the only thing a fresh pastor could do was to begin afresh, and purge the church book throughout, sweeping off scores of carnal persons; the beginning anew being almost hopeless, because, after the paroxysm⁴⁷ of passion about religion has passed, there follows a season in which religion is treated with indifference, if not with disdain. I had rather see a church asleep,

⁴⁷ **paroxysm** – a sudden outburst.

than see it awake into the fever of fanaticism: better that she should lie still than do mischief. O dear friends, we have felt in our souls, not that we may have revival, but that we must have it; and when we think of the incalculable damage that shall be done to us all if the Lord does not visit us, I am sure we must again draw near to the angel and wrestle afresh, with this determination, that we will not let Him go unless He bless us.

We may be confirmed in our anxious desire to have the Lord walking with us in this thing, when we consider the blessings which are sure to flow from His presence. Ah! what holy quickening shall come upon every one of us. The preacher will not have to lament that he has so little power in prayer; both alone and in your presence he shall be strengthened to intercede as an angel of God. You shall not have to mourn that the service lacks its former sweetness. You will feel the blessedness you knew when first you saw the Lord. You will not have to mourn that you are cold and dead, that your songs languish, and that your prayers expire; instead thereof, every action shall be fraught with vigour, every thought shall glow with earnestness, every word shall be clothed with divine power. Let God arise; and doubts and fears shall betake themselves to their hiding-places, as the bats conceal themselves at the rising of the dawn. Let the Lord visit you; and difficulties which frown like Alps, will sink to plains. Let Him arise; and all your enemies shall flee before you, as the smoke before the wind; the heavens shall drop with showers of mercy; and even your sins and all the guilt thereof, shall shake as Sinai shook at the presence of the God of Israel. A church with God's presence in it is holy, happy, united, earnest, laborious, successful; fair as the moon before the Lord, and clear as the sun in the eyes of men, she is terrible as an army with banners to her enemies.

If God shall be pleased to be with His church, then direct good shall visit our congregation. We used to say at Park Street, that there were not many seat-holders unconverted. The like is to a great extent true here. The immense increase of our church gives us the hope that the day will come when there will not be a single seat unoccupied by a believer: but it is not the case yet. I suppose the church is about half the congregation now. There are some, however, that from the very first have listened; but so far as salvation is concerned, they have listened in vain: they have been moved to tears, they have made good resolutions; but after ten or eleven years of ministry, they are just where they were, except that they have accumulated fresh guilt. Some desire to be Christians, but they harbour some darling lust. We know some who used to feel under the Word, but do not feel now. The voice which once was like a trumpet, now lulls them to sleep. Some have made a compromise; and one day they will serve God and another day they will serve their sins; like the Samaritans who feared the Lord and served other gods. Now let our cries be heard for the Master's presence, and we shall soon see these brought in; hearts of stone shall be turned to flesh; the iron of the Word shall break the northern iron and steel; Jehovah Jesus shall ride victoriously through those gates which have been barred against Him, and there shall be shouting in heaven because the Lord hath gotten Him the victory.

Wider blessings will follow. A church is never blessed alone. If any one church shall stand in the vigour of piety, other churches shall take example therefrom, and make an advance towards a better state. Here we have around us many churches, hills which God has blessed; but they, like ourselves, have a tendency to slumber. Let God pour out His Spirit here, and the shower will not be confined to these fields, but will drop upon other pastures, and they shall rejoice on every side. Our testimony for God rings through this land; from one end of it to the other. Our ministry is not hidden under a bushel nor confined to a few. Tens of thousands listen every week to our word; and if the Lord shall be pleased to bless it, then shall it be as ointment poured forth, to load the moral atmosphere with a savour of Christ crucified. One nation cannot feel the power of God without communicating some of its blessing to another. The Atlantic cannot divide: no tongue or language can separate us. If God bless France or Switzerland, the influence shall be felt upon the Continent; if He should bless our island, all the whole earth must feel the power thereof. Therefore do we feel encouraged mightily to pray. O, my brethren, the world grows old; man's faith is getting weary of long waiting; the false prophets begin again to appear, and cry lo here, and lo there; but the Lord must come; of this are we confident: in such an hour as we think not, He may appear. How would we have Him find us at His coming? Would we have Him find His servants sleeping? His stewards wasting His goods? His vinedressers with neglected vines? His soldiers with swords rusted into their scabbards? No, we would have Him find us watching, standing upon the watch-tower, feeding His sheep, tending His lambs, succouring the needy, comforting the weary, helping the oppressed.

Gird up your loins then, I pray you, as men that watch for their Lord. If my words could have the power in them which I feel they lack, I would stir you up, dear brethren and sisters, to seek unto the mighty God of Jacob, that when the Son of Man cometh, if He find no faith upon the earth elsewhere, at least He may find it in you: if zeal shall be extinct in every other place, at least may He find one live coal yet glowing in your bosom. For this we want His presence, for without it we can do nothing.

2. Be Agreed with Him.

This brings me, in the second place, to observe, that if we would have the presence of God, it is necessary that we should be agreed with Him.

We must be agreed with God as to the end of our Christian existence. God hath formed us for Himself, that we may show forth His praise. The main end of a Christian man is, that having been bought with precious blood, he may live unto Christ, and not unto himself. O brethren! I am afraid we are not agreed with God in this. I must say it, painful though it be, there are many professors, and there are some in this church, who at least appear to believe that the main end of their Christian existence is to get to heaven, to get as much money as they can on earth, and to leave as much as they can to their children when they die; I say, “to get to heaven,” for they selfishly include that as one of the designs of divine grace; but I question, if it were not for their happiness to go to heaven, whether they would care much about going, if it were only for God’s glory; for their way of living upon earth is always thus: “What shall I eat? what shall I drink? wherewithal shall I be clothed?” Religion never calls out their thoughtfulness. They can judge, and weigh, and plot, and plan to get money, but they have no plans as to how they can serve God. The cause of God is scarcely in their thoughts. They will pinch and screw to see how little they can contribute in any way to the maintenance of the cause of truth, or to the spread of the Redeemer’s kingdom; they will so far condescend to consider religion, as to think how they can profess it in the most economical manner, but nothing more. You will not hear me speak so foolishly and madly, as if I thought that it were not just and laudable in a man to seek to make money to supply the wants of his family, or even to provide for them on his own decease; such a thing is just and right: but whenever this gets to be the main thought; and I am persuaded it is the leading thought of too many professors, such men forget whose they are, and whom they serve; they are living to themselves; they have forgotten who it is that has said, “Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as with silver and gold” (1Pe 1:18).

Oh! I pray God that I may feel that I am God’s man, that I have not a hair on my head which is not consecrated, nor a drop of my blood which is not dedicated to His cause; and I pray, brethren and sisters, that you may feel the same; that selfishness may clean die out of you; that you may be able to say without any straining of the truth, “I have nothing to care for, nor to live for in this world, but that I may glorify God, and spread forth the savour of my Saviour’s name.” We cannot expect the Master’s blessing till we are agreed about this. This is God’s will: is it our will today? I know I have around me many faithful hearts, who will say, “My desire is, that whether I live or die, Christ may be glorified in me”: if we be all of that mind, God will walk with us; but every one who is of another mind, and of a divided heart, is a hindrance and an injury to us in our progress. It would be no loss to lose such persons, but a spiritual benefit to the entire cause, if this dead lumber were cast out. When the body gets a piece of rotten bone into it, it never rests, till, with pain, it casts out the dead thing: and so with the church; the church may be increased by dead members, but when she begins to get vigorous and full of life, her first effort is with much pain, perhaps with much marring of her present beauty, to cause the dead substance to come forth; and if this should be the case, though we shall pity those who are cast forth, yet for our own health’s sake, we may thank God and take courage.

If we would have God with us we must be agreed as to the real desirableness and necessity of the conversion of souls. God thinks souls to be very precious, and His own words are, “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.” Are we agreed with God in that? Our God thinks souls to be so precious, that if a man could gain the whole world and lose his soul, he would be a loser. Are we agreed with Him there? In the person of Christ, our God wept over Jerusalem; watered with tears that city which must be given up to the flames. Have we tears, too? have we compassion, too? When God thinks of sinners it is in this wise: “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim” (Hos 11:8)? Can we bemoan sinners in that way? Do we stir our souls to an agony of grief because men will turn from God and will wilfully perish in their sin? If, on the contrary, you and I selfishly say, “We are safe, it does not matter to us whether others are brought to know Christ,” we are not agreed, God will not work with us; and such of you as feel this indifferentism, this cursed lethargy, are our bane, our burden, our hindrance. God forgive you, and stir you up to feel that your heart will not rest unless poor sinners are plucked as brands from the burning. Are we agreed here?

If we would have the Lord with us, in the next place, we must be agreed as to the means to be used in revival. We are agreed that the first means is the preaching of Christ. We do not want any other doctrine than that we have received—Christ lifted up upon His cross, as the serpent was lifted up upon the pole. This is the remedy which we, in this house of prayer, believe in. Let others choose sweet music, or pictures, or vestments, or baptismal water, or confirmation, or human rites; we abhor them, and pour contempt upon them; as for us, our only hope lies in the

doctrine of a substitute for sinners, the great fact of the atonement, the glorious truth that Christ Jesus came into the world to seek and to save sinners. I think we are agreed with God in this, that the preaching of Christ is the way by which believers shall be saved.

God's great agency is the Holy Spirit. We are agreed, brethren, that we do not want sinners to be converted by our persuasion, we do not want them brought into the church by excitement; we want the Spirit's work, and the Spirit's work alone. I would not bend my knee once in prayer, much less day by day, to win a mere excitement; we have done without it, and we shall do without it by the grace of God; but I would give mine eyes, if I might but know that the Holy Spirit himself would come forth, and show what divinity can do in turning hearts of stone to flesh. In this thing, I think, that we are agreed with God.

But God's way of blessing the church is by the instrumentality of all her members. The multitude must be fed, but it must not be by Christ's hand alone, "He gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples, to the multitude" (Mat 14:19). Are you all agreed here? I am afraid not. Many of you are engaged in works of usefulness, and I will make this my boast this day, that I had never thought that I should meet with a people so apostolic in their zeal as the most of you have been. I have marvelled, and my heart has rejoiced when I have seen what self-sacrifice some of the poorest among you have made for Christ; what zeal, what enthusiasm you have manifested in the spreading abroad of the Saviour's name. But still there are some of you who are doing nothing whatever, you have a name to live, but I fear that you are dead; you are very seldom at a prayer-meeting—even some church members and persons whom I know are not kept at home by business, but by sheer indifference to the cause of God. Some of you are never provoked to zeal and to good works. That you come and listen to us, is something; and for what you do we are grateful; but for what you do not do, over this we mourn, because we fear that we are restrained in our efforts for the spread of the Saviour's kingdom, because as a church we are not agreed in God's plan; and we shall be restrained until every man in the church can say, "I will consecrate myself this day unto the Lord of hosts; if there is anything to be done, be it to be a door-keeper in the house of God, here am I.

*"There's not a lamb among His flock, I would disdain to feed;
There's not a foe before whose face I'd fear his cause to plead."*

Yet again, dear friends, are we agreed this day as to our utter helplessness in this work? I caught a good sentence the other day. Speaking with a Wesleyan minister, I said to him, "Your denomination during the past year did not increase: you have usually had a large increase to your numbers. You were never so rich as now; your ministers were never so well educated; you never had such good chapels as now, and yet you never had so little success. What are you doing?—knowing this to be the fact, what are you doing? How are the minds of your brethren exercised with regard to this?" He comforted me much by the reply. He said, "It has driven us to our knees: we thank God that we know our state and are not content with it. We have had a day of humiliation, and I hope," he said, "some of us have gone low enough to be blessed." There is a great truth in that last sentence, "low enough to be blessed," I do fear me that some of us never do go low enough to be blessed. When a man says, "Oh! yes, we are getting on very well, we do not want any revival that I know of," I fear me, he is not low enough to be blessed; and when you and I pray to God with pride in us, with self-exaltation, with a confidence in our own zeal, or even in the prevalence of our own prayers of themselves, we have not come low enough to be blessed. An humble church will be a blessed church; a church that is willing to confess its own errors and failures, and to lie at the foot of Christ's cross, is in a position to be favoured of the Lord. I hope we are agreed, then, with God, as to our utter unworthiness and helplessness, so that we look to Him alone.

I charge you all to be agreed with God in this thing, that if any good shall be done, any conversions shall occur, all the glory must be given to Him. Revivals have often been spoiled, either by persons boasting that such-and-such a minister was the means of them, or else, as in the case of the North of Ireland, by boasting that the work was done without ministers. That revival, mark you, was stopped in its very midst and seriously damaged by being made a kind of curiosity, and a thing to be gazed at and to be wondered at by persons both at home and abroad. God does not care to work for the honour of men, either of ministers or of laymen, or of churches either; and if we should say, "Ah! well, I should like to see the presence of God with us that we may have many conversions, and put it in the magazine, and say, that is how things are done at the Tabernacle," why we should not have a blessing that way. Crowns! crowns! crowns! but all for Thy head Jesus! laurels and wreaths! but none for man, all for Him whose own right hand and whose holy arm hath gotten Him the victory. We must all be agreed on this point, and I hope we are.

3. Put Away All Things That Offend Our God.

And now to conclude. Let us put away all those things that offend our God.

Before God appeared upon Mount Sinai, the children of Israel had to cleanse themselves for three days. Before Israel could take possession of the promised rest of Canaan, Joshua had to see to it that they were purified by the rite of circumcision. Whenever God would visit His people, He always demands of them some preparatory purging, that they may be fit to behold His presence; for two cannot walk together, unless that which would make them disagree be purged out. A few suggestions then, as to whether there is anything in us with which God cannot agree. Here I cannot preach to you indiscriminately, but put the task into the hand of each man to preach to himself. In the days of the great weeping, we read that every man wept apart and his wife apart, the son apart, and the daughter apart, all the families apart. So it must be here.

Is there pride in me? Am I puffed up with my talent, my substance, my character, my success? Lord purge this out of me, or else thou canst not walk with me, for none shall ever say that God and the proud soul are friends: He giveth grace to the humble; as for the proud, He knoweth them afar off, and will not let them come near to Him.

Am I slothful? do I waste hours which I might usefully employ? Have I the levity of the butterfly, which flits from flower to flower, but drinks no honey from any of them? or have I the industry of the bee, which, wherever it lights, would find some sweet store for the hive? Lord, thou knowest my soul, thou understandest me. Am I doing little where I might do much? Hast thou had but little reaping for much sowing? Have I hid my talent in a napkin? Have I spent that talent for myself, instead of spending it for thee? Slothful souls cannot walk with God. "My Father worketh," saith Jesus, "and I work"; and you who stand in the marketplace idle, may stand there with the devil, but you cannot stand there with God. Let every brother who is guilty of this, purge away his sloth.

Or am I guilty of worldliness. This is the crying sin of many in the Christian church. Do I put myself into association with men who cannot by any possibility profit me? Am I seen where my Master would not go? Do I love amusements which cannot afford me comfort when I reflect upon them; and which I would never indulge in, if I thought that Christ would come while I was at them? Am I worldly in spirit as to fashion? Am I as showy, as volatile, as frivolous as men and women of the world? If so, if I love the world, the love of the Father is not in me; consequently He cannot walk with me, for we are not agreed.

Again, am I covetous? do I scrape and grind? is my first thought, not how I can honour God, but how I can accumulate wealth? When I gain wealth, do I forget to make use of it as a steward? If so, then God is not agreed with me; I am a thief with His substance; I have set myself up for a master instead of being a servant, and God will not walk with me till I begin to feel that this is not my own, but His; and that I must use it in His fear.

Again, am I of an angry spirit? Am I harsh towards my brethren? Do I cherish envy towards those who are better than myself, or contempt towards those who are worse off? If so, God cannot walk with me, for He hates envy, and all contempt of the poor is abhorrent to Him.

Is there any lust in me? Do I indulge the flesh? Am I fond of carnal indulgences by which my soul suffers? If so, God will not walk with me; for chambering, and wantonness, and gluttony, and drunkenness, separate between a believer and His God: these things are not convenient to a Christian. Before the great feast of unleavened bread, a Jewish parent would sweep out every piece of leaven from his house; and so anxious would he be, and so anxious is the Jew at the present day, that he take a candle and sweeps out every cupboard, no matter though there may have been no food put in there at any time, he is afraid lest by accident a crumb may be somewhere concealed in the house; and so, from the garret to the cellar, he clears the whole house through, to purge out the old leaven. Let us do so. I cannot think you will do so as the effect of such poor words as mine; but if my soul could speak to you, and God blessed the utterance, you would. For my own part, I cry unto my Master, that if there be anything that can make me more fit to be the messenger of God to you and to the sons of men, however painful might be the preparatory process, He would graciously be pleased not to spare me of it. If by sickness, if by serious calamities, if by slander and rebuke, more honour can be brought to Him, then hail! and welcome! all these things; they shall be my joy; and to receive them shall be delight. I pray you, utter the same desire: "Lord, make me fit to be the means of glorifying thee."

*"The dearest idol I have known, Whate'er that idol be;
Help me to tear it from its throne, And worship only thee."*

What! do you demur? Do you want forever to go on in the old dead-and-alive way in which the churches are just now? Do you feel no sacred passion stirring your breast to anguish for the present, and to hope for the future? O ye cravens, who dread the battle, slink to your beds; but ye who have your Master's spirit in you, and would long to see brighter and better days, lift up your heads with confidence in Him who will walk with us if we be agreed.

My text has a main bearing upon the unconverted: I think of preaching from it this evening to those who are not agreed with God, and who cannot walk with Him. I pray that they may be reconciled unto God by the death of His

Son; and the most likely means to accomplish this, will be by your earnest and fervent prayers. O Lord, hear and answer for Jesus' sake. Amen. ❧

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DOCTRINE

THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

—2 Corinthians 5:20-21

THE heart of the Gospel is *redemption*, and the essence of redemption is the *substitutionary sacrifice of Christ*. They who preach this truth preach the Gospel in whatever else they may be mistaken; but they who preach not the atonement, whatever else they declare, have missed the soul and substance of the divine message.

In these days I feel bound to go over and over again the elementary truths of the Gospel. In peaceful times we may feel free to make excursions into interesting districts of truth which lie far afield; but now we must stay at home, and guard the hearths and homes of the Church by defending the first principles of the faith. In this age there have risen up in the Church itself men who speak perverse things. There be many that trouble us with their philosophies and novel interpretations, whereby they deny the doctrines they profess to teach, and undermine the faith they are pledged to maintain. It is well that some of us, who know what we believe, and have no secret meanings for our words, should just put our foot down and maintain our standing, holding forth the word of life, and plainly declaring the foundation truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let me give you a parable. In the days of Nero there was great shortness of food in the city of Rome, although there was abundance of corn to be purchased at Alexandria. A certain man who owned a vessel went down to the sea coast, and there he noticed many hungry people straining their eyes toward the sea, watching for the vessels that were to come from Egypt with corn. When these vessels came to the shore, one by one, the poor people wrung their hands in bitter disappointment, for on board the galleys there was nothing but sand which the tyrant emperor had compelled them to bring for use in the arena. It was infamous cruelty, when men were dying of hunger to command trading vessels to go to and fro, and bring nothing else but sand for gladiatorial shows, when wheat was so greatly needed. Then the merchant whose vessel was moored by the quay said to his shipmaster, "Take thou good heed that thou bring nothing back with thee from Alexandria but corn; and whereas, aforetime thou hast brought in the vessel a measure or two of sand, bring thou not so much as would lie upon a penny this time. Bring thou nothing else, I say, but wheat: for these people are dying, and now we must keep our vessels for this one business of bringing food for them."

Alas! I have seen certain mighty galleys of late loaded with nothing but mere sand of philosophy and speculation, and I have said within myself, "Nay, but I will bear nothing in my ship but the revealed truth of God, the bread of life so greatly needed by the people." God grant us this day that our ship may have nothing on board it that may merely gratify the curiosity, or please the taste; but that there may be necessary truths for the salvation of souls. I would have each one of you say: "Well, it was just the old, old story of Jesus and His love, and nothing else." I have no desire to be famous for anything but preaching the old Gospel. There are plenty who can fiddle to

you the new music; it is for me to have no music at any time but that which is heard in heaven—"Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood...To him be glory...for ever and ever" (Rev 1:5-6)!

I intend, dear friends, to begin my discourse with the second part of my text, in which the doctrine of substitution is set forth in these words—"He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." This is the basis and power of those appeals which it is our duty to make to the consciences of men.

I have found, my brethen, by long experience, that nothing touches the heart like the Cross of Christ; and when the heart is touched and wounded by the two-edged sword of the Law, nothing heals its wounds like the balm which flows from the pierced heart of Jesus. The Cross is life to the spiritually dead. There is an old legend which can have no literal truth in it, but if it be regarded as a parable it is then most instructive. They say that when the Empress Helena was searching for the true Cross they digged deep at Jerusalem and found the three crosses of Calvary buried in the soil. Which out of the three crosses was the veritable Cross upon which Jesus died they could not tell, except by certain tests. So they brought a corpse and laid it on one of the crosses, but there was neither life nor motion. When the same dead body touched another of the crosses it lived; and then they said, "This is the true Cross."

When we see men quickened, converted, and sanctified by the doctrine of the substitutionary sacrifice, we may justly conclude that it is the true doctrine of atonement. I have not known men made to live unto God and holiness except by the doctrine of the death of Christ on man's behalf. Hearts of stone that never beat with life before have been turned to flesh through the Holy Spirit causing them to know this truth. A sacred tenderness has visited the obstinate when they have heard of Jesus crucified for them. Those who have lain at hell's dark door, wrapped about with a sevenfold death-shade, even upon them hath a great light shined. The story of the great Lover of the souls of men who gave Himself for their salvation is still in the hand of the Holy Ghost the greatest of all forces in the realm of mind.

So this morning I am going to handle, first, *the great doctrine*, and then afterwards, and secondly, as God shall help me, we shall come to *the great argument* which is contained in the 20th verse: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

1. The Great Doctrine

First, then, with as much brevity as possible I will speak upon the great doctrine. *The great doctrine*, the greatest of all, is this: that God, seeing men to be lost by reason of their sin, hath taken that sin of theirs and laid it upon His only begotten Son, making Him to be sin for us, even Him Who knew no sin; and that, in consequence of this transference of sin, he that believeth in Christ Jesus is made just and righteous, yea, is made to be the righteousness of God in Christ. Christ was made sin that sinners might be made righteousness. That is the doctrine of the substitution of our Lord Jesus Christ on the behalf of guilty men.

A. Who Was Made Sin for Us?

Now consider, first, *who was made sin for us?* The description of our great Surety here given is upon one point only, and it may more than suffice us for our present meditation. Our Substitute was spotless, innocent, and pure. "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." Christ Jesus, the Son of God, became incarnate, and was made flesh, and dwelt here among men; but though He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, He knew no sin. Though upon Him sin was laid, yet not so as to make Him guilty. He was not, He could not be, a sinner: He had no personal knowledge of sin. Throughout the whole of His life He never committed an offence against the great Law of truth and right. The Law was in His heart; it was His nature to be holy. He could say to all the world, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" (Joh 8:46). Even his vacillating⁴⁸ judge enquired, "Why, what evil hath he done?" (Mar 15:14). When all Jerusalem was challenged and bribed to bear witness against Him, no witnesses could be found. It was necessary to misquote and wrest His words before a charge could be trumped up against Him by His bitterest enemies. His life brought Him in contact with both the tables of the Law, but no single command had He transgressed. As the Jews examined the Paschal lamb⁴⁹ before they slew it, so did scribes and Pharisees, and doctors of the law, and rulers and princes, examine the Lord Jesus, without finding offence in Him. He was the Lamb of God, without blemish and without spot.

As there was no sin of commission, so was there about our Lord no fault of omission. Probably, dear brethen, we that are believers have been enabled by divine grace to escape most sins of commission; but I for one have to

⁴⁸ **vacillating** – indecisive.

⁴⁹ **Paschal lamb** – lamb slain and eaten at Jewish Passover.

mourn daily over sins of omission. If we have spiritual graces, yet they do not reach the point required of us. If we do that which is right in itself, yet we usually mar our work upon the wheel, either in the motive, or in the manner of doing it, or by the self-satisfaction with which we view it when it is done. We come short of the glory of God in some respect or other. We forget to do what we ought to do, or, doing it, we are guilty of lukewarmness, self-reliance, unbelief, or some other grievous error.

It was not so with our divine Redeemer. You cannot say that there was any feature deficient in His perfect beauty. He was complete in heart, in purpose, in thought, in word, in deed, in spirit. You could not add anything to the life of Christ without its being manifestly an excrescence.⁵⁰ He was emphatically an all-round man, as we say in these days. His life is a perfect circle, a complete epitome⁵¹ of virtue. No pearl has dropped from the silver string of His character. No one virtue has overshadowed and dwarfed the rest: all perfections combine in perfect harmony to make in Him one surpassing perfection.

Neither did our Lord know a sin of thought. His mind never produced any evil wish or desire. There never was in the heart of our blessed Lord a wish for an evil pleasure, nor a desire to escape any suffering or shame which was involved in His service. When He said, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Mat 26:39). He never desired to escape the bitter potion at the expense of His perfect lifework. The "if it be possible," meant, "if it be consistent with full obedience to the Father, and the accomplishment of the divine purpose." We see the weakness of His nature shrinking, and the holiness of His nature resolving and conquering, as He adds, "nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." He took upon Him the likeness of sinful flesh, but though that flesh often caused Him weariness of body, it never produced in Him the weakness of sin. He took our infirmities, but He never exhibited an infirmity which had the least of blameworthiness attached to it. Never fell there an evil glance from those blessed eyes; never did His lips let drop a hasty word; never did those feet go on an ill errand, nor those hands move towards a sinful deed; because His heart was filled with holiness and love. Within as well as without our Lord was unblemished. His desires were as perfect as His actions. Searched by the eyes of Omniscience, no shadow of fault could be found in Him.

Yea, more, there were no tendencies about our Substitute towards evil in any form. In us there are always those tendencies, for the taint of original sin is upon us. We have to govern ourselves and hold ourselves under stern restraint, or we should rush headlong to destruction. Our carnal nature lusteth to evil, and needs to be held in as with bit and bridle. Happy is that man who can master himself. But with regard to our Lord, it was His nature to be pure, and right, and loving. All His sweet wills were towards goodness. His unconstrained life was holiness itself: He was "the holy child Jesus." The prince of this world found in Him no fuel for the flame which he desired to kindle. Not only did no sin flow from Him, but there was no sin in Him, nor inclination, nor tendency in that direction. Watch Him in secret, and you find Him in prayer; look unto His soul, and you find Him eager to do and suffer the Father's will. Oh, the blessed character of Christ! If I had the tongues of men and of angels I could not worthily set forth His absolute perfection. Justly may the Father be well pleased with Him! Well may heaven adore Him!

Beloved, it was absolutely necessary that any one who should be able to suffer in our stead should himself be spotless. A sinner obnoxious⁵² to punishment by reason of his own offences, what can he do but bear the wrath which is due to his own sin? Our Lord Jesus Christ as man was made under the Law: but He owed nothing to that Law, for He perfectly fulfilled it in all respects. He was capable of standing in the room, place, and stead of others, because He was under no obligations of His own. He was only under obligations towards God because He had voluntarily undertaken to be the Surety and Sacrifice for those whom the Father gave Him. He was clear Himself, or else He could not have entered into bonds for guilty men.

Oh, how I admire Him, that being such as He was, spotless and thrice holy, so that even the heavens were not pure in His sight, and He charged his angels with folly, yet He condescended to be made sin for us! How could He endure to be numbered with the transgressors and bear the sin of many? It may be no misery for a sinful man to live with sinful men; but it would be a heavy sorrow for the pure-minded to dwell with a company of abandoned and licentious⁵³ wretches. What an overwhelming sorrow it must have been to the pure and perfect Christ to tabernacle among the hypocritical, the selfish, and the profane! How much worse that He Himself should have to take upon Himself the sins of those guilty men. His sensitive and delicate nature must have shrunk from even the shadow of sin, and yet read the words and be astonished: "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." Our perfect

⁵⁰ **excrescence** – an abnormal or disfiguring outgrowth.

⁵¹ **epitome** – a highly representative example.

⁵² **obnoxious** – liable for punishment.

⁵³ **licentious** – morally unrestrained.

Lord and Master bare our sins in His own body on the tree. He, before Whom the sun itself is dim and the pure azure of heaven is defilement, was made sin. I need not put this in fine words: the fact is itself too grand to need any magnifying by human language. To gild refined gold, or paint the lily, were absurd; but much more absurd would it be to try to overlay with flowers of speech the matchless beauties of the Cross. It suffices in simple rhyme to say,

*“Oh, hear that piercing cry!
What can its meaning be?
‘My God! my God! oh! why hast thou
In wrath forsaken me?’
“Oh ’twas because our sins
On him by God were laid;
He who himself had never sinn’d,
For sinners, sin was made.”*

B. What Was Done with Him?

This leads me on to the second point of the text, which is, *what was done with Him who knew no sin?* He was “made sin.” It is a wonderful expression: the more you weigh it the more you will marvel at its singular strength. Only the Holy Ghost might originate such language. It was wise for the divine Teacher to use very strong expressions, for else the thought might not have entered human minds. Even now, despite the emphasis, clearness, and distinctness of the language used here and elsewhere in Scripture there are found men daring enough to deny that substitution is taught in Scripture. With such subtle wits it is useless to argue. It is clear that language has no meaning for them.

To read the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, and to accept it as relating to the Messiah, and then to deny His substitutionary sacrifice is simply wickedness. It would be vain to reason with such beings; they are so blind that if they were transported to the sun they could not see. In the Church and out of the Church there is a deadly animosity to this truth. Modern thought labours to get away from what is obviously the meaning of the Holy Spirit, that sin was lifted from the guilty and laid upon the Innocent. It is written, “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53:6). This is as plain language as can be used; but if any plainer was required, here it is: “He hath made him to be sin for us.”

The Lord God laid upon Jesus, Who voluntarily undertook it, all the weight of human sin. Instead of its resting on the sinner, who did commit it, it was made to rest upon Christ, Who did not commit it; while the righteousness which Jesus wrought out was placed to the account of the guilty, who had not worked it out, so the guilty are treated as righteous. Those who by nature are guilty, are regarded as righteous, while He Who by nature knew no sin whatever, was treated as guilty. I think I must have read in scores of books that such a transference is impossible; but the statement has had no effect upon my mind. I do not care whether it is impossible or not with learned unbelievers: it is evidently possible with God, for He has done it.

But they say it is contrary to reason. I do not care for that, either: it may be contrary to the reason of those unbelievers, but it is not contrary to mine; and if I am to be guided by reason, I prefer to follow my own. The atonement is a miracle, and miracles are rather to be accepted by faith than measured by calculation. A fact is the best of arguments. It is a fact that the Lord hath laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all. God’s revelation proves the fact, and our faith defies human questioning! God saith it, and I believe it; and believing it, I find life and comfort in it. Shall I not preach it? Assuredly I will.

*“E’er since by faith I saw the stream
His flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.”*

Christ was not guilty, and could not be made guilty; but He was treated as if He were guilty, because He willed to stand in the place of the guilty. Yea, He was not only treated as a sinner, but He was treated as if He had been sin itself in the abstract.⁵⁴ This is an amazing utterance. The sinless One was made to be sin.

Sin pressed our great Substitute very sorely. He felt the weight of it in the Garden of Gethsemane, where He “sweat...as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground” (Luk 22:44). The full pressure of it came upon Him when He was nailed to the accursed tree. There in the hours of darkness He bore infinitely more than we can tell.

⁵⁴ **abstract** – not concrete; not to be perceived as a material thing.

We know that He bore condemnation from the mouth of a man, so that is written, “He was numbered with the transgressors” (Isa 53:12). We know that He bore shame for our sakes. Did not your hearts tremble last Sunday evening when our text was, “Then did they spit in his face” (Mat 26:67)? It was a cruel scorn that exhausted itself upon His blessed person. This, I say, we know. We know that He bore pains innumerable of body and mind: He thirsted, He cried out in the agony of desertion, He bled, He died. We know that He poured out His soul unto death, and yielded up the ghost. But there was at the back, and beyond all this, an immeasurable abyss of suffering. The Greek Liturgy⁵⁵ fitly speaks of Ò Thine unknown sufferings: probably to us they are *unknowable* sufferings. He was God as well as man, and the Godhead lent an omnipotent power to the manhood, so that there was compressed within His soul, and endured by it, an amount of anguish of which we can form no conception. I will say no more: it is wise to veil what it is impossible to depict. This text both veils and discovers⁵⁶ His sorrow, as it says, “He made him to be sin.” Look into the words. Perceive their meaning, if you can. The angels desire to look into it. Gaze into this terrible crystal. Let your eyes search deep into this opal, within whose jewelled depth there are flames of fire. The Lord made the perfectly innocent One to be sin for us: that means more humiliation, darkness, agony, and death than you can conceive. It brought a kind of distraction and well-nigh a destruction to the tender and gentle spirit of our Lord. I do not say that our Substitute endured a hell, that were unwarrantable. I will not say that He endured either the exact punishment for sin, or an equivalent for it; but I do say that what He endured rendered to the justice of God a vindication of His Law more clear and more effectual than would have been rendered to it by the damnation of the sinners for whom He died. The Cross is under many aspects a more full revelation of the wrath of God against human sin than even Tophet,⁵⁷ and the smoke of torment which goeth up for ever and ever. Who would know God’s hate of sin must see the Only Begotten bleeding in body and bleeding in soul even unto death: he must, in fact, spell out each word of my text, and read its innermost meaning. There, my brethen, I am ashamed of the poverty of my explanation, and I will therefore only repeat the full and sublime⁵⁸ language of the apostle—“He hath made him to be sin for us.” It is more than “He hath put him to grief” (Isa 53:10); it is more than “God hath forsaken him” (Psa 71:11); it is more than “The chastisement of our peace was upon him” (Isa 53:5). It is the most suggestive of all descriptions—“He hath made him to be sin for us.” Oh depth of terror, and yet height of love!

C. *Who Did It?*

So I pass on to notice in the third place, *who did it?* The text saith, “*He* hath made him to be sin for us” ; that is, God Himself it was Who appointed His dear Son to be made sin for guilty men. The wise ones tell us that this substitution cannot be just. Who made them judges of what is right and just? I ask them whether they believe that Jesus suffered and died at all? If they believe that He did, how do they account for the fact? Do they say that He died as an example? Then I ask, is it just for God to allow a sinless being to die as an example? The fact of our Lord’s death is sure, and it has to be accounted for. Ours is the fullest and truest explanation.

In the appointment of the Lord Jesus Christ to be made sin for us, there was first of all a display of the divine sovereignty. God here did what none but He could have done. It would not have been possible for all of us together to have laid sin upon Christ; but it was possible for the great Judge of all, Who giveth no account of His matters, to determine that so it should be. He is the fountain of rectitude,⁵⁹ and the exercise of His divine prerogative⁶⁰ is always unquestionable righteousness. That the Lord Jesus, Who offered Himself as a willing surety and substitute, should be accepted as Surety and Substitute for guilty man was in the power of the great Supreme. In His divine sovereignty He accepted Him, and before that sovereignty we bow. If any question it, our only answer is, “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?” (Rom 9:20).

The death of our Lord also displayed divine justice. It pleased God as the Judge of all, that sin should not be forgiven without the exaction of the punishment which had been so righteously threatened to it, or such other display of justice as might vindicate the Law. They say that this is not the God of love. I answer, it is the God of love, pre-eminently so. If you had upon the bench to-day a judge whose nature was kindness itself, it would behoove⁶¹ him as a judge to execute justice, and if he did not, he would make his kindness ridiculous; indeed, his kindness to the criminal would be unkindness to society at large. Whatever the judge may be personally, he is officially compelled to do justice. And “shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen 18:25). You speak of the

⁵⁵ **Greek Liturgy** – communion service in Eastern Orthodox Church.

⁵⁶ **discovers** – reveals.

⁵⁷ **Tophet** – the place of abomination, the very pit of hell.

⁵⁸ **sublime** – noble; exalted; majestic.

⁵⁹ **rectitude** – strong moral integrity in character and actions.

⁶⁰ **prerogative** – an exclusive privilege or right.

⁶¹ **behoove** – be necessary for.

Fatherhood of God. Enlarge as you please upon that theme, even till you make a heresy of it; but still God is the great moral Governor of the universe, and it behooves Him to deal with sin in such a way that it is seen to be an evil and a bitter thing. God cannot wink at wickedness. I bless His holy name, and adore Him that He is not unjust in order to be merciful, that He does not spare the guilty in order to indulge His gentleness. Every transgression and disobedience has its just recompense⁶² of reward. But through the sacrifice of Christ He is able justly to pardon. I bless His holy name that to vindicate His justice He determined that, while a free pardon should be provided for believers, it should be grounded upon an atonement which satisfied all requirements of the Law.

Admire also in the substitutionary sacrifice the great grace of God. Never forget that He Whom God made to be sin for us was His own Son; ay, I go further, it was in some sense His own Self; for the Son is One with the Father. You may not confound the persons, but you cannot divide the substance of the blessed Trinity in Unity. You may not so divide the Son of God from the Father as to forget that God was in Him reconciling the world unto Himself. It is the Father's other Self Who on the Cross in human form doth bleed and die. "Light of light, very God of very God." It is this Light that was eclipsed, that Godhead which purchased the Church with His own blood. Herein is infinite love! You tell me that God might have pardoned without atonement. I answer, that finite and fallible love might have done so, and thus have wounded itself by killing justice; but the love which both required and provided the atonement is indeed infinite. God Himself provided the atonement by freely and fully giving up Himself in the Person of His Son to suffer in consequence of human sin.

What I want you to notice here is this, if ever your mind should be troubled about the propriety or rightness of a substitutionary sacrifice, you may at once settle the matter by remembering that God Himself "hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." If God did it, it is well done. I am not careful to defend an act of God: let the man who dares accuse his Maker think what he is at. If God Himself provided the sacrifice, be you sure that He has accepted it. There can be no question ever raised about it, since Jehovah made to meet on Him our iniquities. He that made Christ to be sin for us, knew what He did, and it is not for us to begin to say, "Is this right, or is this not right?" The thrice holy God hath done this, and it must be right. That which satisfies God may well satisfy us. If God is pleased with the sacrifice of Christ, shall not we be much more than pleased? Shall we not be delighted, entranced, imparadised,⁶³ to be saved by such a sacrifice as God Himself appoints, provides, and accepts? "He hath made him to be sin for us."

D. What Happens to Us in Consequence?

The last point is, *what happens to us in consequence?* "That we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Oh this weighty text! No man living can exhaust it. No theologian lived, even in the palmiest⁶⁴ days of theology, who could ever get to the bottom of this statement.

Every man that believes in Jesus is, through Christ having taken his sin, made to be righteousness before God. We are righteous through faith in Christ Jesus, "justified by faith" (Rom 3:28). More than this, we are made not only to have the character of "righteous," but to become the substance called "righteousness." I cannot explain this, but it is no small matter. It means no inconsiderable thing when we are said to be "made righteousness." What is more, we are not only made righteousness, but we are made "the righteousness of God." Herein is a great mystery. The righteousness which Adam had in the garden was perfect, but it was the righteousness of man; ours is the righteousness of God. Human righteousness failed; but the believer has a divine righteousness which can never fail. He not only has it, but he is it; he is "made the righteousness of God in Christ." We can now sing,

*"With my Saviour's vesture on,
Holy as the Holy One."*

How acceptable with God must those be who are made by God Himself to be "the righteousness of God in him"! I cannot conceive of anything more complete.

As Christ was made sin, and yet never sinned, so are we made righteousness, though we cannot claim to have been righteous in and of ourselves. Sinners though we be, and forced to confess it with grief, yet the Lord doth cover us so completely with the righteousness of Christ, that only His righteousness is seen, and we are made the righteousness of God in Him. This is true of all the saints, even of as many as believe on His name. Oh, the splendour of this doctrine!

Canst thou see it, my friend? Sinner though thou be, and in thyself defiled, deformed, and debased, yet if thou wilt accept the great Substitute which God provides for thee in the Person of His dear Son, thy sins are gone from

⁶² **recompense** – something given in payment for something else.

⁶³ **imparadised** – to make blissfully happy.

⁶⁴ **palmiest** – most prosperous, flourishing.

thee, and righteousness has come to thee. Thy sins were laid on Jesus, the Scapegoat; they are thine no longer. He has put them away. I may say that His righteousness is imputed unto thee, but I go further, and say with the text, “Thou art made the righteousness of God in him.” No doctrine can be more sweet than this to those who feel the weight of sin and the burden of its curse.

2. A Great Argument

So now, gathering all up, I have to close with the second part of the text, which is not teaching, but the application of teaching—a great argument. “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech⁶⁵ you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

Oh, that these lips had language, or that this heart could speak without them! Then would I plead with every unconverted, unbelieving soul within this place, and plead as for my life. Friend, you are at enmity with God, and God is angry with you; but on His part there is every readiness for reconciliation. He has made a way by which you can become His friend a very costly way to Himself, but free to you. He could not give up His justice, and so destroy the honour of His own character; but He did give up His Son, His Only Begotten, and His Well-Beloved; and that Son of His has been made sin for us, though He knew no sin.

See how God meets you! See how willing, how anxious He is that there should be reconciliation between Himself and guilty men. O sirs, if you are not saved it is not because God will not or cannot save you; it is because you refuse to accept His mercy in Christ. If there is any difference between you and God to-day it is not from want of kindness on His part; it is from want of willingness on yours. The burden of your ruin must lie at your own door; your blood must be on your own skirts.

Now observe what we have to say to you to-day is this: we are anxious that you should be at peace with God, and therefore we act as ambassadors for Christ. I am not going to lay any stress upon the office of ambassador as honourable or authoritative, for I do not feel that this would have weight with you; but I lay all the stress upon the peace to which we would bring you. God has reconciled me to Himself, and I would fain⁶⁶ have you reconciled also. I once knew Him not, neither did I care for Him. I lived well enough without Him, and sported with trifles of a day, so as to forget Him. He brought me to seek His face, and seeking His face I found Him. He has blotted out my sins and removed my enmity. I know that I am His servant, and that He is my Friend, my Father, my All.

And now I cannot help trying in my poor way to be an ambassador for Him with you. I do not like that any of you should live at enmity with my Father Who made you; and that you should be wantonly provoking Him by preferring evil to good. Why should you not be at peace with One Who so much wants to be at peace with you? Why should you not love the God of love, and delight in Him Who is so kind to you? What He hath done for me He is quite willing to do for you: He is a God ready to pardon.

I have preached His gospel now for many years, but I never met with a sinner yet that Christ refused to cleanse when he came to Him. I never knew a single case of a man who trusted Jesus, and asked to be forgiven, confessing his sin and forsaking it, who was cast out. I say I never met with one man whom Jesus refused; nor shall I ever do so. I have spoken with harlots whom He has restored to purity, and drunkards whom He has delivered from their evil habit, and with men guilty of foul sins who have become pure and chaste through the grace of our Lord Jesus. They have always told me the same story, “I sought the Lord, and He heard me. He hath washed me in His blood, and I am whiter than snow.” Why should you not be saved as well as these?

Dear friend, perhaps you have never thought of this matter, and this morning you did not come here with any idea of thinking of it, but why should you not begin? You came just to hear a well-known preacher. I pray you forget the preacher, and think only of yourself, your God and your Saviour. It must be wrong for you to live without a thought of your Maker. To forget Him is to despise Him. It must be wrong for you to refuse the great atonement—you do refuse it if you do not accept it at once. It must be wrong for you to stand out against your God, and you do stand out against Him if you will not be reconciled to Him. Therefore I humbly play the part of an ambassador for Christ, and I beseech you believe in Him and live.

Notice how the text puts it: “We are ambassadors for Christ, *as though God did beseech you by us.*” This thought staggers me. As I came along this morning I felt as if I could bury my head in my hands and weep as I thought of God beseeching anybody. He speaks, and it is done; myriads of angels count themselves happy to fly at His command; and yet man has so become God’s enemy that He will not be reconciled to Him. God would make Him His friend, and spends the blood of His dear Son to cement that friendship; but man will not have it. See the

⁶⁵ **beseech** – to ask earnestly; to implore.

⁶⁶ **fain** – with eagerness; gladly.

great God turns to beseeching His obstinate creature! His foolish creature! In this I feel a reverent compassion for God. Must He beseech a rebel to be forgiven? Do you hear it? Angels, do you hear it? He Who is the King of kings veils His sovereignty, and stoops to beseeching His creature to be reconciled to Him!

I wonder not that some of my brethen start back from such an idea, and cannot believe that it could be so; it seems so derogatory to the glorious God. Yet my text saith it, and it must be true—"As though God did beseech you by us." This makes it awful work to preach, does it not? I ought to beseech you as though God spoke to you through me, looking at you through these eyes, and stretching out His hands through these hands. He saith, "All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people" (Rom 10:21). He speaks softly, and tenderly, and with paternal affection through these poor lips of mine, "as though God did beseech you by us."

Furthermore notice that next line, which if possible has even more force in it: "*We pray you in Christ's stead.*" Since Jesus died in our stead we, His redeemed ones, are to pray others in His stead; and as He poured out His heart for sinners in their stead, we must in another way pour out our hearts for sinners in His stead. "*We pray you in Christ's stead.*" Now if my Lord were here this morning how would He pray you to come to Him? I wish, my Master, I were more fit to stand in Thy place at this time. Forgive me that I am so incapable. Help me to break my heart, to think that it does not break as it ought to do, for these men and women who are determined to destroy themselves, and, therefore, pass Thee by, my Lord, as though Thou wert but a common felon, hanging on a gibbet!⁶⁷ O men, How can you think so little of the death of the Son of God? It is the wonder of time, the admiration of eternity. O souls, why will you refuse eternal life? Why will ye die? Why will ye despise Him by Whom alone you can live?

There is but one gate of life, that gate is the open side of Christ; why will ye not enter, and live? "Come unto me," saith He; "Come unto me." I think I hear Him say it: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Mat 11:28-29). I think I see Him on that last day, that great day of the feast, standing and crying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink" (Joh 7:37). I hear him sweetly declare, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (Joh 6:37). I am not fit to pray you in Christ's stead, but I do pray you with all my heart. You that hear my voice from Sunday to Sunday, do come and accept the great Sacrifice, and be reconciled to God. You that hear me but this once, I would like you to go away with this ringing in your ears, "Be ye reconciled to God." I have nothing pretty to say to you; I have only to declare that God has prepared a propitiation,⁶⁸ and that now He entreats sinners to come to Jesus, that through Him they may be reconciled to God.

We do not exhort you to some impossible effort. We do not bid you do some great thing. We do not ask you for money or price; neither do we demand of you years of miserable feeling, but only this—*be ye reconciled*. It is not so much reconcile yourselves as "be reconciled." Yield yourselves to Him who round you now the bands of a man would cast, drawing you with cords of love because He was given for you. His spirit strives with you; yield to His striving. With Jacob you know there wrestled a man till the breaking of the day; let that Man, that God-man, overcome you. Submit yourselves. Yield to the grasp of those hands which were nailed to the Cross for you. Will you not yield to your best Friend? He that doth embrace you now presses you to a heart that was pierced with the spear on your behalf. Oh, yield thee! Yield thee, man!

Dost thou not feel some softness stealing over thee? Steel not thine heart against it. He saith, with a tone most still and sweet. "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Believe and live! Quit the arch-enemy who has held thee in his grip. Escape for thy life, look not behind thee, stay not in all the plain, but flee where thou seest the open door of the great Father's house. At the gate the bleeding Saviour is waiting to receive thee, and to say, "I was made sin for thee, and thou art made the righteousness of God in Me." Father, draw them! Father, draw them! Eternal Spirit, draw them, for Jesus Christ Thy Son's sake! Amen. ❧

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⁶⁷ **gibbet** – a gallows.

⁶⁸ **propitiation** – an appeasement; a sacrifice that turns away wrath.

JESUS, THE SUBSTITUTE FOR HIS PEOPLE

“Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”

—Romans 8:34

1. Fear of Condemnation

The most dreadful alarm that can disturb a reasonable man is the fear of being condemned by the Judge of all. To be condemned of God now, how dreadful! To be condemned of Him at the last great day, how terrible! Well might Belshazzar's loins be loosed when the hand-writing on the wall condemned him as weighed in the balances and found wanting (Dan 5:27). And well may the conscience of the convicted one be comparable to a little hell when, at its lesser judgment-seat, the Law pronounces sentence upon him on account of his past life.

I know of no greater distress than that caused by the suspicion of condemnation in the believer's mind. We are not afraid of tribulation, but we dread condemnation. We are not ashamed when wrongly condemned of men, but the bare idea of being condemned of God makes us, like Moses, “exceedingly fear and quake” (Heb 12:21). The bare possibility of being found guilty at the great judgment-seat of God is so alarming to us that we cannot rest until we see it removed.

When Paul offered a loving and grateful prayer for Onesiphorus, he could ask no more for him than, “the Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day” (2Ti 1:18). Yet, though condemnation is the most fatal of all ills, the apostle Paul in the holy ardour of his faith dares ask, “Who is he that condemneth?” (Rom 8:34). He challenges earth and hell and heaven. In the justifiable venturesomeness of his confidence in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, he looks up to the excellent glory and to the throne of the thrice holy God, and even in His presence before Whom the heavens are not pure, and Who charged His angels with folly, he dares to say, “Who is he that condemneth?”

By what method was Paul, who had a tender and awakened conscience, so completely delivered from all fear of condemnation? It certainly was not by any depreciation of the enormity of sin. Amongst all the writers who have ever spoken of the evil of sin, none have inveighed against it more heartily, or mourned it more sincerely from their very soul, than the apostle. He declares it to be exceeding sinful. You never find him suggesting apologies or extenuations; he neither mitigates sin nor its consequences. He is very plain when he speaks of the wages of sin and of what will follow as the consequences of iniquity. He sought not that false peace which comes from regarding transgression as a trifle; in fact he was a great destroyer of such refuges of lies.

Rest assured, dear hearer, that you will never attain to a well-grounded freedom from the fear of condemnation by trying to make your sins appear little. That is not the way: it is far better to feel the weight of sin till it oppresses your soul than to be rid of the burden by presumption and hardness of heart. Your sins are damnable, and must condemn you—unless they are purged away by the great sin-offering.

Neither did the apostle quiet his fears by confidence in anything that he had himself felt or done. Read the passage through and you will find no allusion to himself. If he is sure that none can condemn him, it is not because he has prayed, nor because he has repented, nor because he has been the apostle of the Gentiles, nor because he has suffered many stripes and endured much for Christ's sake. He gives no hint of having derived peace from any of these things, but in the humble spirit of a true believer in Jesus he builds his hope of safety upon the work of his Saviour. His reasons for rejoicing in noncondemnation all lie in the death and resurrection, the power and the plea of his blessed substitute. He looks right out of himself, for there he could see a thousand reasons *for* condemnation, to Jesus, through Whom condemnation is rendered impossible. And then in exulting confidence he lifts up the challenge, “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?” (Rom 8:33), and dares to demand of men and angels and devils, yea of the great Judge Himself, “Who is he that condemneth?” (Rom 8:34).

Now since it is not an uncommon thing for Christians in a weakly state of mind, exercised with doubts and harassed with cares, to feel the cold shadow of condemnation chilling their spirits, I would speak to such, hoping that the good Spirit may comfort their hearts.

Dear child of God, you must not live under fear of condemnation, for “there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1), and God would not have you fear that which can never come to you. If you be not a Christian, delay not till you have escaped from condemnation by laying hold on Christ Jesus. But if you have indeed believed in the Lord Jesus, you are not under condemnation, and you never can be either in this life or in that which is to come. Let me help you by refreshing your memory with those precious truths concerning Christ, which show that believers are clear before the Lord. May the Holy Spirit apply them to your souls and give you rest.

2. Why the Believer Cannot Be Condemned: Precious Truths Concerning Christ

A. *Christ hath died.*

And first, you, as a believer, cannot be condemned because *Christ hath died*. The believer has Christ for his substitute, and upon that substitute his sin has been laid. The Lord Jesus was made sin for His people. The Lord hath made to meet upon Him the iniquity of us all. He bare the sin of many. Now our Lord Jesus Christ by His death has suffered the penalty of our sin, and made recompense to divine justice. Observe, then, the comfort which this brings to us. If the Lord Jesus has been condemned for us, how can we be condemned? While justice survives in heaven and mercy reigns on earth, it is not possible that a soul condemned in Christ should also be condemned in itself. If the punishment has been meted out to its substitute, it is neither consistent with mercy nor justice that the penalty should a second time be executed.

The death of Christ is an all-sufficient ground of confidence for every man that believeth in Jesus; he may know of a surety that his sin is put away and his iniquity is covered. Fix your eye on the fact that you have a substitute who has borne divine wrath on your account, and you will know no fear of condemnation.

*“Jehovah lifted up his rod—
O CHRIST, it fell on thee!
Thou wast sore stricken of thy God;
There’s not one stroke for me.”*

Observe, dear brethren, who it was that died, for this will help you. Christ Jesus the Son of God died, the just for the unjust. He Who was your Saviour was no mere man. Those who deny the Godhead of Christ are consistent in rejecting the atonement. It is not possible to hold a proper substitutionary propitiation for sin unless you hold that Christ was God. If one man might suffer for another, yet one man’s sufferings could not avail for ten thousand times ten thousand men. What efficacy could there be in the death of one innocent person to put away the transgressions of a multitude? Nay, but because He Who carried our sins up to the tree was God over all, blessed forever; because He Who suffered His feet to be fastened to the wood was none other than that same Word Who was in the beginning with God, and Who also was God (Joh 1:1-2); because He Who bowed His head to death was none other than the Christ, Who is immortality and life—His dying had efficacy in it to take away the sins of all for whom He died. As I think of my Redeemer and remember that He is God Himself, I feel that if He took my nature and died, then indeed my sin is gone. I can rest on that. I am sure that if He Who is infinite and omnipotent offered a satisfaction for my sins, I need not inquire as to the sufficiency of the atonement—for who dares to suggest a limit to its power? What Jesus did and suffered must be equal to any emergency. Were my sins even greater than they are, His blood could make them whiter than snow. If God incarnate died in my stead, my iniquities are cleansed.

Again, remember Who it was that died, and take another view of Him. It was *Christ*, which being interpreted means “*the anointed*.” He Who came to save us did not come unsent or uncommissioned. He came by His Father’s will, saying, “Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God” (Psa 40:7-8). He came by the Father’s power, Him “hath God set forth to be a propitiation...of sins that are past” (Rom 3:25). He came with the Father’s anointing, saying, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me” (Luk 4:18). He was *the* Messiah, sent of God. The Christian need have no fear of condemnation when he sees Christ die for him, because God himself appointed Christ to die; and if God arranged the plan of substitution, and appointed the substitute, He cannot repudiate the vicarious⁶⁹ work. Even if we could not speak as we have done of the glorious person of our Lord, yet if the divine sovereignty and wisdom elected such an one as Christ to bear our sin, we may be well satisfied to take God’s choice, and rest content with that which contents the Lord.

Again, believer, sin cannot condemn you because Christ died. His sufferings I doubt not were vicarious long before He came to the Cross, but still the substance of the penalty due to sin was death, and it was when Jesus died

⁶⁹ **vicarious** – endured by one person substituting for another.

that He finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness. The Law could go no further than its own capital sentence, which is death: this was the dire punishment pronounced in the garden—"In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen 2:17).

Christ died physically, with all the concomitants⁷⁰ of ignominy⁷¹ and pain—and His inner death, which was the bitterest part of the sentence, was attended by the loss of His Father's countenance and a horror unutterable. He descended into the grave, and for three days and three nights He slept within the tomb really dead. Herein is our joy; our Lord has suffered the extreme penalty and given blood for blood, and life for life. He has paid all that was due, for He has paid His life; He has given Himself for us, and borne our sins in His own body on the tree, so that His death is the death of our sins. "It is Christ that died" (Rom 8:34).

I speak not upon these things with any flourishes of words; I give you but the bare doctrine. May the Spirit of God apply these truths to your souls, and you will see that no condemnation can come on those who are in Christ.

It is quite certain, beloved, that the death of Christ must have been effectual for the removal of those sins which were laid upon Him. It is not conceivable that Christ died in vain—I mean not conceivable without blasphemy, and I hope we could not descend to that. He was appointed of God to bear the sin of many, and though He was God Himself, yet He came into the world and took upon Himself the form of a servant and bore those sins, not merely in sorrow but in death itself, and it is not possible that He should be defeated or disappointed of His purpose. Not in one jot or tittle⁷² will the intent of Christ's death be frustrated. Jesus shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied (Isa 53:11)). That which He meant to do by dying shall be done, and He shall not pour His blood upon the ground in waste in any measure or sense. Then, if Jesus died for you, there stands this sure argument: that as He did not die in vain, you shall not perish. He has suffered and you shall not suffer. He has been condemned and you shall not be condemned. He has died for you, and now He gives you the promise, "Because I live, ye shall live also" (Joh 14:19).

B. *"Christ that is risen again."*

The apostle goes on to a second argument, which he strengthens with the word "rather." "It is Christ that died, yea *rather*, that is risen again" (Rom 8:34). I do not think we give sufficient weight to this "rather." The death of Christ is the rocky basis of all comfort, but we must not overlook the fact that the resurrection of Christ is considered by the apostle to yield richer comfort than His death—"yea rather, that is *risen* again" (Rom 8:34). How can we derive more comfort from Christ's resurrection than from His death, if from His death we gain a sufficient ground of consolation? I answer, because our Lord's resurrection denoted His total clearance from all the sin which was laid upon Him. A woman is overwhelmed with debt: how shall she be discharged from her liabilities? A friend, out of his great love to her, marries her. No sooner is the marriage ceremony performed than she is by that very act clear of debt, because her debts are her husband's, and in taking her he takes all her obligations. She may gather comfort from that thought, but she is much more at ease when her beloved goes to her creditors, pays all, and brings her the receipts. First she is comforted by the marriage, which legally relieves her from the liability, but much more is she at rest when her husband himself is rid of all the liability which he assumed.

Our Lord Jesus took our debts; in death He paid them; and in resurrection He blotted out the record. By His resurrection He took away the last vestige of charge against us, for the resurrection of Christ was the Father's declaration that He was satisfied with the Son's atonement. As our hymnster puts it—

*"The Lord is risen indeed,
Then justice asks no more;
Mercy and truth are now agreed,
Which stood opposed before."*

In His prison-house of the grave, the hostage and surety of our souls would have been confined this very hour, unless the satisfaction which He offered had been satisfactory to God; but being fully accepted He was set free from bonds, and all His people are thereby justified. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again" (Rom 8:34).

Mark further that the resurrection of Christ indicated our acceptance with God. When God raised Him from the dead, He thereby gave testimony that He had accepted Christ's work, but the acceptance of our representative is the acceptance of ourselves. When the French ambassador was sent away from the Court of Prussia, it meant that war was declared, and when the ambassador was again received, peace was reestablished. When Jesus was so accepted

⁷⁰ **concomitant** – conjoined with; accompanying.

⁷¹ **ignominy** – public disgrace; dishonor.

⁷² **tittle** – the tiniest bit.

of God that He rose again from the dead, everyone of us who believe in Him was accepted of God too, for what was done to Jesus was in effect done to all the members of His mystical body. With Him are we crucified; with Him are we buried; with Him we rise again; and in His acceptance we are accepted.

Did not His resurrection also indicate that He had gone right through with the entire penalty, and that His death was sufficient? Suppose for a moment that one thousand eight hundred and more years had passed away, and that still He slumbered in the tomb. In such a case we might have been enabled to believe that God had accepted Christ's substitutionary sacrifice, and would ultimately raise Him from the dead, but we should have had our fears.

But now we have before our eyes a sign and token, as consoling as the rainbow in the day of rain, for Jesus is risen—and it is clear that the Law can exact no more from Him. He lives now by a new life, and the Law has no claim against Him. He against Whom the claim was brought has died; His present life is not that against which the Law can bring a suit. So with us: the Law had claims on us once, but we are new creatures in Christ Jesus; we have participated in the resurrection life of Christ, and the Law cannot demand penalties from our new life. The incorruptible seed within us has not sinned, for it is born of God. The law cannot condemn us, for we have died to it in Christ, and are beyond its jurisdiction.

I leave with you this blessed consolation. Your surety has discharged the debt for you, and being justified in the Spirit, has gone forth from the tomb. Lay not a burden upon yourselves by your unbelief. Do not afflict your conscience with dead works, but turn to Christ's Cross and look for a revived consciousness of pardon through the blood washing.

C. Christ "who is even at the right hand of God."

I must pass on now to the third point upon which the apostle insists: "who is even at the right hand of God" (Rom 8:34).

Bear in mind still that what Jesus is, His people are, for they are one with Him. His condition and position are typical of their own. "Who is even at the right hand of God" (Rom 8:34). That means *love*, for the right hand is for the beloved. That means *acceptance*; Who shall sit at the right hand of God but one who is dear to God? That means *honour*; to which of the angels has He given to sit at His right hand? *Power* also is implied! No cherub or seraph can be said to be at the right hand of God. Christ, then, Who once suffered in the flesh is—in love, acceptance, honour, and power—at the right hand of God. See you the force, then, of the interrogation, "Who is he that condemneth?" (Rom 8:34). It may be made apparent in a twofold manner. "Who can condemn me while I have such a friend at court? While my representative sits near to God, how can I be condemned?"

But next, I am where He is, for it is written, "and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:6). Can you suppose it possible to condemn one who is already at the right hand of God? The right hand of God is a place so near, so eminent, that one cannot suppose an adversary bringing a charge against us there. Yet there the believer is in his representative, and who dare accuse him? It was laid at Haman's door as his worst crime that he sought to compass the death of queen Esther herself, so dear to the king's heart; and shall any foe condemn or destroy those who are dearer to God than ever Esther was to Ahasuerus, for they sit at his right hand, vitally and indissolubly⁷³ united to Jesus.

Suppose you were actually at the right hand of God, would you then have any fear of being condemned? Do you think the bright spirits before the throne have any dread of being condemned, though they were once sinners like yourself? "No," say you, "I should have perfect confidence if I were there." But you are there in your representative. If you think you are not I will ask you this question, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom 8:35). Is Christ divided? If you are a believer you are one with Him, and the members must be where the head is. Till they condemn the head they cannot condemn the members—is not that clear? If you are at the right hand of God in Christ Jesus, who is he that condemneth? Let them condemn those white-robed hosts who forever circle the throne of God, and cast their crowns at His feet; let them attempt that, I say, before they lay anything to the charge of the meanest⁷⁴ believer in Christ Jesus.

D. Christ "who maketh intercession for us"

The last word which the apostle gives us is this: "who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom 8:34).

This is another reason why fear of condemnation should never cross our minds if we have indeed trusted our souls with Christ, for if Jesus intercedes for us, He must make a point of interceding, that we may never be condemned. He would not direct His intercession to minor points and leave the major unheeded. "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am" (Joh 17:24), includes their being forgiven all their

⁷³ **indissolubly** – in a way that is unable to be changed; permanently.

⁷⁴ **meanest** – most base or common.

sins, for they could not come there if their sins were not forgiven. Rest assured that a pleading Saviour makes secure the acquittal of His people.

Reflect that our Lord's intercession must be prevalent. It is not supposable that Christ asks in vain. He is no humble petitioner at a distance who, with moan and sigh, asks for what he deserves not; but with the breast-plate on, sparkling with the jewels which bear His people's names, and bringing His own blood as an infinitely satisfactory atonement to the mercy-seat of God, He pleads with unquestioned authority.

If Abel's blood, crying from the ground, was heard in heaven and brought down vengeance, much more shall the blood of Christ, which speaketh within the veil, secure the pardon and salvation of His people. The plea of Jesus is indisputable and cannot be put aside. He pleads this—"I have suffered in that man's stead." Can the infinite justice of God deny that plea? "By Thy will, O God, I gave Myself a substitute for these My people. Wilt Thou not put away the sin of these for whom I stood?"

Is not this good pleading? There is God's covenant for it; there is God's promise for it, and God's honour involved in it—so that when Jesus pleads, it is not only the dignity of His person that has weight, and the love which God bears to His only begotten, which is equally weighty, but His claim is overwhelming, and His intercession omnipotent.

3. Conclusion

How safe is the Christian since Jesus ever liveth to make intercession for him! Have I committed myself into His dear hands? Then may I never so dishonour Him as to mistrust Him. Do I really trust Him as dying, as risen, as sitting at the Father's right hand, and as pleading for me? Can I permit myself to indulge a solitary suspicion? Then, my Father, forgive this great offence, and help thy servant by a greater confidence of faith to rejoice in Christ Jesus and say, "there is therefore now no condemnation" (Rom 8:1).

Go away, ye that love Christ, and are resting on Him, with the savour of this sweet doctrine on your hearts. But, oh, you that have not trusted Christ, there is present condemnation for you. Ye are condemned already, because ye have not believed on the Son of God. And there is future condemnation for you, for the day cometh, the dreadful day, when the ungodly shall be as stubble in the fire of Jehovah's wrath. The hour hasteneth when the Lord will lay justice to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, and sweep away the refuges of lies. Come, poor soul, come and trust the crucified, and you shall live, and with us you shall rejoice that none can condemn you. ❧

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GOD'S PROVIDENCE

"But the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

—Matthew 10:30

DURING this week my mind has been much directed to the subject of Providence, and you will not wonder when I relate a portion on one day's story. I was engaged to preach last Wednesday at Halifax, where there was a heavy snow storm. Preparations had been made for a congregation of 8,000 persons, and a huge wooden structure had been erected. I considered that owing to the severe weather, few persons could possibly assemble, and I looked forward to the dreary task of addressing an insignificant handful of people in a vast place. However, when I arrived, I found from 5,000 to 6,000 people gathered together to hear the Word; and a more substantial looking place it has not been my lot to see. It certainly was a huge uncomely building, but, nevertheless, it seemed well adapted to answer the purpose. We met together in the afternoon and worshipped God, and again in the evening—and we separated to our homes, or rather, we were about to separate, and all this while the kind providence of God was watching over us. Immediately in front of me there was a huge gallery, which looked an exceedingly massive structure, capable of holding 2,000 persons. This, in the afternoon, was crowded, and it seemed to stand as firm as a rock. Again in the evening there it stood, and neither moved nor shook.

But mark the provident hand of God: in the evening, when the people were about to retire, and when there was scarcely more than a hundred persons there, a huge beam gave way, and down came a portion of the flooring of the gallery with a fearful crash. Several persons were precipitated with the planks, but still the good hand of God watched over us, and only two persons were severely injured with broken legs, which it is trusted will be re-set without the necessity of amputation. Now, had this happened any earlier, not only must many more have been injured, but there are a thousand chances to one, as we say, that a panic must necessarily have ensued similar to that which we still remember, and deplore as having occurred in this place. Had such a thing occurred, and had I been the unhappy preacher on the occasion, I feel certain that I should never have been able to occupy the pulpit again. Such was the effect of the first calamity, that I marvel that I ever survived. No human tongue can possibly tell what I experienced. The Lord, however, graciously preserved us; the fewness of the people in the gallery prevented any such catastrophe, and thus a most fearful accident was averted.

But we have a more marvelous providence still to record. Overloaded by the immense weight of snow which fell upon it, and beaten by a heavy wind, the entire building fell with an enormous crash three hours after we had left it, splitting the huge timbers into shivers, and rendering very much of the material utterly useless for any future building. Now mark this—had the snow begun three hours earlier, the building must have fallen upon us, and how few of us would have escaped we cannot guess. But mark another thing. All day long it thawed so fast, that the snow as it fell seemed to leave a mass, not of white snow, but of snow and water together. This ran through the roof upon us, to our considerable annoyance, and I was almost ready to complain that we had hard dealing from God's providence. But if it had been a frost instead of a thaw, you can easily perceive that the place must have fallen several hours beforehand, and then your minister, and the greater part of his congregation, would probably have been in the other world. Some there may be who deny providence altogether. I cannot conceive that there were any partakers of the scene who could have done so. This I know, if I had been an unbeliever to this day in the doctrine of the supervision and wise care of God, I must have been a believer in it at this hour. Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together; He hath been very gracious unto us, and remembered us for good.

Now, when we look abroad into the world we see, as we think, such abundant proofs that there is a God, that we are apt to treat a man who denies the existence of a God with very little respect or patience. We believe Him to be willfully blind, for we see God's name so legible upon the very surface of creation, that we cannot have patience with him if he dares to deny the existence of a Creator. And in the matter of salvation: we have each of us seen in our own salvation such positive marks of the Lord's dealings with us, that we are apt to be somewhat censorious and harsh towards any who propound a doctrine which would teach salvation apart from God. And I think we shall be very apt this morning to think hardly of the man, who, having seen and heard of such a providence as that which I have just related, could fail to see God's hand. It seems to me that the hand of God in providence is as clear as in creation. And whilst I am sure that if saved at all I must be saved by God, I feel equally certain that every matter which concerns all of us in daily life, bears upon itself the evident trace of being the handiwork of Jehovah, our God.

We must, if we would be true believers in God and would avoid all atheism, give unto Him the kingship in the three kingdoms of creation, grace, and providence. It is in the last, however, that I think we are the most apt to forget Him; we may easily see God in creation if we be at all enlightened, and if saved, we cannot avoid confessing that salvation is of the Lord alone. The very way in which we are saved, and the effect of grace in our hearts, always compels us to feel that God is just. But providence is such a checkered thing, and you and I are so prone to misjudge God and to come to rash conclusions concerning His dealings with us, that perhaps this is the greatest stronghold of our natural atheism—a doubt of God's dealings with us in the arrangements of outward affairs. This morning I shall not be able to go deeply into the subject, but very heartily can I enter into it, after being so great a partaker of His wonder-working power.

From the text I shall draw one or two points. First of all, the text says, "the very hairs of our head are all numbered." From this I shall infer 1) the *minuteness of providence*. Again, inasmuch as it is said of believers that the hairs of their head are all numbered, I shall infer 2) *the kind consideration, the generous care, which God exercises over Christians*. And then, from the text, and from our Savior's reason for uttering these words, I shall draw 3) *a practical conclusion of what should be the spirit and temper of the men who believe this truth*—that the very hairs of their head are all numbered.

1. The Minuteness of God's Providence

First, then, our text very clearly teaches us *the minuteness of providence*. Every man can see providence in great things; it is very seldom that you find any person denying that when an avalanche falls from the summit of the

Alps, the hand, the terrible hand of God is there. There are very few men who do not feel that God is present in the whirlwind and in the storm. Most men will acknowledge that the earthquake, the hurricane, the devastation of war, and the ravages of pestilence, come from the hand of God.

We find most men very willing to confess that God is God of the hills, but they forget that He is also Lord of the valleys. They will grant that He deals with great masses, but not with individuals; with seas in the bulk, but not with drops. Most men forget, however, that the fact which they believe of providence being in great things involves a providence in the little, for it were an inconsistent belief that the mass were in God's hand, whilst the atom was left to chance; it is indeed a belief that contradicts itself—we must believe all chance or else all God. We must have all ordained and arranged, or else we must have everything left to the wild whirlwind of chance and accident. But I believe that it is in little things that we fail to see God; therefore, it is to the little things that I call your attention this morning.

I believe my text means literally what it says. "The very hairs of your head are all numbered." God's wisdom and knowledge are so great, that He even knows the number of the hairs upon our head. His providence descends to the minute particles of dust in the summer gale; He numbers the gnats in the sunshine, and the fishes in the sea. While He certainly doth control the massive orbs that shine in heaven, He doth not blush to deal with the drop that tricketh from the eye.

Now, I shall want you to notice, how *little circumstances of daily life*, when we come to put them all together, evidently betray their origin. I will take a Scripture history, and show how the little events must have been of God, as well as the great results. When Joseph was sent into Egypt by his brethren, in order to provide for them against a day of famine, we all agree with Joseph's declaration: it was God "that sent me hither" (Gen 45:8). But now, if we notice each of the little ways through which this great result was brought to pass, we shall see God in each of them. One day, Joseph's brethren are gone out with the sheep; Jacob wants to send to them. Why does he send Joseph? He was his darling son; he loved him better than all his brethren. Why does he send him away? He sends him, however. Then why should it have happened at that particular time, that Jacob should want to send at all? However, he did want to send, and he did send Joseph. A mere accident you will say, but quite necessary as the basement of the structure. Joseph goes; his brethren are in want of pasture, and therefore leave Shechem, where Joseph expected to find them, and journey on to Dothan. Why go to Dothan? Was not the whole land before them? However, Joseph goes there; he arrives at Dothan just when they are thinking of him and his dreams, and they put him into a pit. As they are about to eat bread, some Ishmaelites came by. Why did they come there at all? Why did they come at that particular time?

Why were they going to Egypt? Why might they not have been going any other way? Why was it that the Ishmaelites wanted to buy slaves? Why might they not have been trading in some other commodity? However, Joseph is sold; but he is not disposed of on the road to Egypt, he is taken to the land. Why is it that Potiphar is to buy him? Why is it that Potiphar has a wife, at all? Why is it again, that Potiphar's wife should be so full of lust? Why should Joseph get into prison? How is it that the baker and the butler should offend their master?

All chance, as the world has it, but every link necessary to make the chain. They do both offend their master; they are both put into prison. How is it that they both dream? How is it that Joseph interprets the dreams? How is it that the butler forgets him? Why, just because if he had recollected him, it would have spoiled it all. Why is it Pharaoh dreams? How can dreams be under the arrangement of God's providence? However, Pharaoh does dream; the butler then thinks of Joseph; Joseph is brought out of prison and taken before Pharaoh. But take away any of those simple circumstances, break any one of the links of the chain, and the whole of the design is scattered to the winds. You cannot get the machine to work; if any of the minute cogs of the wheels are taken away, everything is disarranged. I think it seems very clear to any man who will dissect not only that, but any other history he likes to fix upon, that there must be a God in the little accidents and dealings of daily life, as well as in the great results that tell upon the page of history, and are recounted in our songs. God is to be seen in little things.

We will now notice in the minutia of providence, how *punctual* providence always is. You will never wonder more at providence, than when you consider how well God keeps time with Himself. To return to our history, how is it that the Ishmaelites should come by just at the time? How many thousand chances there were that their journey might have been taken just before! There certainly was no special train to call at that station at that particular time, so that Joseph's brethren might arrange to go and call him. No such thing! And yet if there had been all this arrangement, it could not have happened better. You know Reuben intended to fetch Joseph out of the pit half an hour later, and "the child was not." God had these Ishmaelites ready: you do not know how He may have sped them on their journey, or delayed them, so as to bring them on the spot punctually at the identical moment.

To give another instance, there was a poor woman whose son had been raised from the dead by Elisha; she, however, had left her country at the time of famine, and had lost her estate. She wanted to get it back; God determined that she should have it. How was it to be done? The king sends for Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, and he talks to him. He tells him one instance about a woman who had had a child raised from the dead. How strange!—in comes the woman herself. My lord, this is the woman; she comes to obtain her suit. Her desire is granted, just because at the very moment the king's mind is interested concerning her. All chance, was it not? Nothing but chance? So fools say; but those who read Bibles, and those who have judgment, say there is something more than chance in such a coalition of circumstances. It could not be a mere coincidence, as men sometimes say; there must be God here, for it is harder to think that there is not God than that there is. And whilst a belief in God may be said by some to involve a great stretch of faith, the putting Him out of such things as this, would involve an infinitely greater amount of credulity.⁷⁵ No—there was God there.

There is another instance that I remember in the New Testament history. Paul goes into the Temple, and the Jews rush upon him in a moment to kill him. They drag him out of the Temple, and the doors are shut against him. They are just in the very act of killing him, and what is to become of poor Paul's life. Five minutes longer and Paul will be dead, when up comes the chief captain and delivers him. How was it that the chief captain knew of it? Very probably some young man of the crowd who knew Paul and loved him, ran to tell him. But why was it that the chief captain was at home? How was it that the ruler was able to come on a moment's emergency? How was it that he did come at all? It was only just a Hebrew, a man that was good for nothing, being killed. How was it that he came, and when he came the streets were full; there was a mob about Jerusalem? How did he come to the right street? How did he come at the exact nick of time? Say, "It is all chance"—I laugh at you; it is providence! If there be anything in the world that is plain to any man that thinks, it is plain that God "Overrules all mortal things, and manages our mean affairs."

But mark that the running of the youth, and his arrival at the precise time, and the coming of the chief governor at the precise time, just proved the punctuality of divine providence. If God has a design that a thing shall happen at twelve, if you have appointed it for eleven, it shall not happen till twelve; and if He means it to be delayed till one, it is in vain that you propose any earlier or any later. God's punctuality in providence is always sure, and very often apparent.

Nor is it only in the minutes of time that we get an idea of the minuteness of providence, but it is in the use of little things. A sparrow has turned the fate of an empire. You remember the old story of Mohammed flying from his pursuers. He enters a cave, and a sparrow chirps at the entrance, and flies away as the pursuers pass. "Oh," say they "there is no fear that Mohammed is there, otherwise the bird would have gone a long while ago"; and the imposter's life is saved by a sparrow. We think, perhaps, that God directs the motions of the leviathan, and guides him in the sea, when he makes the deep to be hoary. Will we please to recollect, that the guidance of a minnow in its tiny pool is as much in the hand of providence, as the motion of the great serpent in the depths.

You see the birds congregate in the autumn, ready for their flight across the purple sea. They fly hither and thither in strange confusion. The believer in providence holds that the wing of every bird has stamped upon it the place where it shall fly, and fly with never such vagaries of its own wild will, it cannot diverge so much as the millionth part of an inch from its predestinated track. It may whirl about, above, beneath—east, west, north, south—wherever it pleases; still, it is all according to the providential hand of God. And although we see it not, it may be, that if that swallow did not take the precise track which it does take, something a little greater might be affected thereby; and again, something a little greater still might be affected, until at last a great thing would be involved in a little. Blessed is that man who seeth God in trifles! It is there that it is the hardest to see Him; but he who believes that God is there, may go from the little providence up to the God of providence.

Rest assured, when the fish in the sea take their migration, they have a captain and a leader, as well as the stars; for He who marshals the stars in their courses, and guides the planets in their march, is the master of the fly, and wings the bat, and guides the minnow, and doth not despise the tiniest of His creatures. You say there is predestination in the path of the earth; you believe that in the shining of the sun there is the ordinance of God; there is as much His ordinance in the creeping of an insect or in the glimmering of a glow-worm in the darkness. In nothing is there chance, but in everything there is a God. All things live and move in Him, and have their being (Act 17:28); nor could they live or move otherwise, for God hath so ordained them.

I hear one say, "Well, sir, you seem to be a fatalist!" No, far from it. There is just this difference between fate and providence. Fate is blind; providence has eyes. Fate is blind, a thing that must be; it is just a bow shot from an

⁷⁵ **credulity** – belief; faith.

arrow, that must fly onward, but hath no target. Not so, providence; providence is full of eyes. There is a design in everything, and an end to be answered; all things are working together, and working together for good. They are not done because they must be done, but they are done because there is some reason for it. It is not only that the thing is, because it must be; but the thing is, because it is *right* it should be. God hath not arbitrarily marked out the world's history; He had an eye to the great architecture of perfection, when He marked all the aisles of history, and placed all the pillars of events in the building of time.

There is another thing that we have to recollect also, which will strike us perhaps more than the smallness of things. The minuteness of providence may be seen in the fact that even the thoughts of men are under God's hand. Now, thoughts are things which generally escape our attention when we speak of providence. But how much may depend upon a thought! Oftentimes a monarch has had a thought which has cost a nation many a bloody battle. Sometimes a good man has had a thought, which has been the means of rescuing multitudes from hell, and bearing thousands safely to heaven. Beyond a doubt, every imagination, every passing thought, every conception, that is only born to die, is under the hand of God. And in turning over the page of history, you will often be struck when you see how great a thing has been brought about by an idle word.

Depend upon it, then, that the will of man, the thought of man, the desire of man, that every purpose of man, is immediately under the hand of God. Take an instance: Jesus Christ is to be born at Bethlehem. His mother is living at Nazareth: He will be born there to a dead certainty. No, not so. Caesar takes a whim into his head. All the world shall be taxed, and he will have all of them go to their own city. What necessity for that? Stupid idea of Caesar's! If he had had a parliament, they would have voted against him. They would have said, "Why make all the people go to their own peculiar city to the census? Take the census where they live; that will be abundantly sufficient. "No," says he, "it is my will, and Caesar cannot be opposed." Some think Caesar mad. God knows what He means to do with Caesar. Mary, great with child, must take a laborious journey to Bethlehem; and there is her child born in a manger. We should not have had the prophecy fulfilled that Christ should be born at Bethlehem, and our very faith in the Messiah might have been shaken, if it had not been for that whim of Caesar's. So that even the will of man—the tyranny, the despotism of the tyrant—is in the hand of God, and He turneth it withersoever He pleaseth, to work His own will (Pro 21:1).

Gathering up all our heads into one short statement, it is our firm belief that He who wings an angel guides a sparrow. We believe that He who supports the dignity of His throne amidst the splendors of heaven, maintains it also in the depths of the dark sea. We believe that there is nothing above, beneath, around, which is not according to the determination of His own counsel and will (Eph 1:11); and while we are not fatalists, we do most truly and sternly hold the doctrine, that God hath decreed all things whatsoever that come to pass, and that He overruleth all these things for His own glory and good; so that with Martin Luther, we can say,

*"He everywhere hath sway, And all things serve His might;
His every act pure blessing is, His path unsullied light."*

2. The Kind Consideration of God

The second point is, *the kind consideration of God in taking care of His people*. In reading the text, I thought, "There is better care taken of me than I can take care of myself." You all take care of yourselves to some extent, but which of you ever took so much care of himself as to count the hairs of his head? But God will not only protect our limbs, but even the excrescence⁷⁶ of hair is to be seen after. And how much this excels all the care of our tenderest friends! Look at the mother, how careful she is. If her child has a little cough, she notices it: the slightest weakness is sure to be observed. She has watched all its motions anxiously, to see whether it walked right, whether all its limbs were sound, and whether it had the use of all its powers in perfection. But she has never thought of numbering the hairs of her child's head, and the absence of one or two of them would give her no great concern. But our God is more careful of us, even than a mother with her child—so careful that He numbers the hairs of our head. How safe are we, then, beneath the hand of God!

However, leaving the figure, let us again notice the kind, guardian care, which God exerts over His people in the way of providence. I have often been struck with the providence of God, in keeping His people alive before they were converted. How many are there here who would have been in hell at this hour, if some special providence had not kept them alive till the time of their conversion! I remember mentioning this in company, and almost every person in the room had some half-miracle to tell, concerning his own deliverance before conversion.

⁷⁶ **excrescence** – outgrowth.

One gentleman, I remember, was a sporting man, who afterwards became an eminent Christian. He told me that a little time before his conversion he was shooting, and his gun burst in four pieces, which stood upright in the earth as near as possible in the exact form of a square, having been driven nearly a foot into the ground, while he stood there unharmed and quite safe, having scarcely felt the shock. I was noticing in Hervey's works one day, a very pretty thought on this subject. He says, "Two persons who had been hunting together in the day, slept together the following night. One of them was renewing the pursuit in his dream, and, having run the whole circle of the chase, came at last to the fall of the stag; upon this he cries out with a determined ardor, *I'll kill him, I'll kill him*; and immediately feels for the knife which he carried in his pocket. His companion happening to awake, and observing what passed, leaped from the bed. Being secure from danger, and the moon shining in the room, he stood to view the event, when, to his inexpressible surprise, the infatuated sportsman gave several deadly stabs in the very place where a moment before the throat and the life of his friend lay." This I mention, as a proof, that nothing hinders us, even from being assassins of others, or murderers of ourselves, amidst the mad sallies of sleep, only the preventing care of our Heavenly Father.

How wonderful the providence of God with regard to Christian people, in *keeping them out of temptation*. I have often noticed this fact, and I believe you are able to confirm it, that there are times when if a temptation should come you would be overtaken by it; but the temptation does not come. And at other times, when the temptation comes, you have supernatural strength to resist it. Yes! the best Christian in the world will tell you, that such is still the strength of his lust, that there are moments when if the object were presented to him, he would certainly fall into the commission of a foul sin—but then the object is not there, or there is no opportunity of committing the sin. At another time, when we are called to go through a burning fiery furnace of temptation, we have no desire towards the peculiar sin, in fact we feel an aversion to it, or are even incapable of it. Strange it is, but many a man's character has been saved by providence. The best man that ever lived, little knows how much he owes for preservation to the providence as well as to the grace of God.

How marvelously, too, has providence *arranged all our places*. I cannot but recur to my own personal history, for, after all, we are obliged to speak more of what we know of ourselves as matters of fact than of others. I shall always regard the fact of my being here today as a remarkable instance of providence. I should not have occupied this hall probably, and been blessed of God in preaching to multitudes, if it had not been for what I considered an untoward accident.

I should have been at this time studying in college, instead of preaching here, but for a singular circumstance which happened. I had agreed to go to college: the tutor had come to see me, and I went to see him at the house of a mutual friend. I was shown by the servant into one drawing-room in the house; he was shown into another. He sat and waited for me two hours; I sat and waited for him two hours. He could wait no longer, and went away thinking I had not treated him well; I went away and thought that he had not treated me well. As I went away this text came into my mind, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not." So I wrote to say that I must positively decline, I was happy enough amongst my own country people, and got on very well in preaching, and I did not care to go to college. I have now had four years of labor. But, speaking after the manner of men, those who have been saved during that time would not have been saved, by my instrumentality at any rate, if it had not been for the remarkable providence turning the whole tenor of my thoughts, and putting things into a new track.

You have often had strange accidents like that. When you have resolved to do a thing, you could not do it any how; it was quite impossible. God turned you another way, and proved that providence is indeed the master of all human events.

And how good, too, has God been in providence to some of you, in *providing your daily bread*. It is remarkable how a little poverty makes a person believe in providence, especially if he is helped through it. If a person has to live from hand to mouth, when day by day the manna falls, he begins to think there is a providence then. The gentleman who sows his broad acres, reaps his wheat, and puts it into his barn; or takes his regular income, gets on so nicely that he can do without providence—he does not care a bit about it. The rents of his houses all come in, and his money in the Three per Cents⁷⁷ is quite safe—what does he want with providence? But the poor man who has to work at day labor, and sometimes runs very short, and just then happens to meet with somebody who gives him precisely what he wants, he exclaims, "Well, I know there is a providence—I cannot help believing it; these things could not have come by chance."

⁷⁷ **Three per Cents** – savings institutions in Britain of the late nineteenth century.

3. Application of God's Providence

And now, in conclusion, brethren and sisters, if these things be so, if the hairs of our head are all numbered, and if providence provides for His people all things necessary for this life and godliness, and arranges everything with infinite and unerring wisdom, what manner of persons ought we to be?

Boldness

In the first place, we ought to *be a bold race of people*. What have we to fear? Another man looks up, and if he sees a lightning-flash, he trembles at its mysterious power. We believe it has its predestined path. We may stand and contemplate it, although we would not presumptuously expose ourselves to it, yet can we confide in our God in the midst of the storm. We are out at sea; the waves are dashing against the ship; she reels to and fro. Other men shake, because they think this is all chance; we, however, see an order in the waves, and hear a music in the winds. It is for us to be peaceful and calm. To other men the tempest is a fearful thing; we believe that the tempest is in the hand of God. Why should we shake? Why should we quiver? In all convulsions of the world, in all temporal distress and danger, it is for us to stand calm and collected, looking boldly on. Our confidence should be very much the same, in comparison with the man who is not a believer in providence, as the confidence of some learned surgeon, who, when he is going through an operation, sees something very marvelous,⁷⁸ but yet never shudders at it—while the ignorant peasant, who has never seen anything so wonderful,⁷⁹ is alarmed and fearful, and even thinks that evil spirits are at work.

We are to say—let others say what they please—”I know God is here, and I am His child, and this is all working for my good; therefore will not I fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea (Psa 46:2).”

Especially may I address this remark to *timid people*. There are some of you who are frightened at every little thing. Oh! if you could but believe that God manages all, why, you would not be screaming because your husband is not home when there is a little thunder and lightning, or because there is a mouse in the parlor, or because there is a great tree blown down in the garden. There is no necessity you should believe that your brother-in-law, who has gone to Australia, was wracked, because there was a storm when he was at sea. There is no need for you to imagine that your son in the army was necessarily killed, because he happened to be before Lucknow.⁸⁰ Or if you think the thing necessary, still, as a believer in God's providence, you should just stand and say that God has done it, and it is yours to resign all things into His hands.

To the bereaved

And I may say to those of you also who have been *bereaved*. If you believe in providence you may grieve, but your grief must not be excessive. I remember at a funeral of a friend hearing a pretty parable which I have told before, and will tell again. There was much weeping on account of the loss of a loved one, and the minister put it thus. He said, “Suppose you are a gardener employed by another. It is not your garden, but you are called upon to tend it, and you have your wages paid you. You have taken great care with a certain number of roses; you have trained them up, and there they are, blooming in their beauty. You pride yourself upon them. You come one morning into the garden, and you find that the best rose has been taken away. You are angry: you go to your fellow-servants and charge them with having taken the rose. They will declare that they had nothing at all to do with it. And one says, ‘I saw the master walking here this morning; I think he took it.’ Is the gardener angry then? No, at once he says, ‘I am happy that my rose should have been so fair as to attract the attention of the master. It is his own: he hath taken it; let him do what seemeth him good.’”

It is even so with your friends. They wither not by chance; the grave is not filled by accident; men die according to God's will. Your child is gone, but the Master took it; your husband is gone; your wife is buried—the Master took them. Thank Him that He let you have the pleasure of caring for them and tending them while they were here, and thank Him that as He gave, He Himself has taken away. If others had done it, you would have had cause to be angry. But the Lord has done it. Can you, then, murmur? Will you not say—

*“Thee at all times will I bless; Having Thee I all possess;
How can I bereaved be, Since I cannot part with Thee.”*

⁷⁸ **marvelous** – incredible.

⁷⁹ **wonderful** – astonishing.

⁸⁰ **Lucknow** – city in northeast India, site of a revolt against the British East India Company in 1857, followed by an 18 month siege, where many British soldiers died.

Balance

And pardon me when I say, finally, that I think this doctrine, if fully believed, ought to *keep us always in an equable*⁸¹ *frame of mind*. One of the things we most want is, to have our equilibrium always kept up. Sometimes we are elated. If I ever find myself elated, I know what is coming. I know that I shall be depressed in a very few hours. If the balance goes too much up, it is sure to come down again. The happiest state of mind is to be always on the equilibrium. If good things come, thank God for them—but do not set your heart upon them. If good things go, thank God that He has taken them Himself—and still bless His name. Bear all. He who feels that everything cometh to pass according to God's will, hath a great main-stay to his soul. He need not be shaken to and fro by every wind that bloweth, for he is fast bound, so that he need not move. This is an anchor cast into the sea. While the other ships are drifting far away, he can ride calmly through.

Strive, dear friends, to believe this, and maintain as the consequence of it, that continual calm and peace which renders life so happy. Do not get to fearing ills that may come tomorrow; either they will not come, or else they will bring good with them. If you have evils today, do not multiply them by fearing those of tomorrow. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Mat 6:34). Oh, I would to God, that some of you who are full of carking⁸² care and anxiety, could be delivered from it by a belief in providence. And when you once get into that quiet frame, which this doctrine engenders, you will be prepared for those higher exercises of communion and fellowship with Christ, to which distracting care is ever a fearful detriment, if not an entire preventive.

To those who fear not God

But as for you who *fear not God*, remember, the stones of the field are in league against you. The heavens cry to the earth and the earth answereth to the heavens, for vengeance upon you on account of your sins. For you there is nothing good, every thing is in rebellion against you. Oh that God might bring you into peace with Him, and then you would be at rest with all beside. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Mat 6:33).

The Lord bless you in this, for Jesus' sake. Amen. ❧

*Unabridged and edited only for punctuation.
Delivered on April 11, 1858, at the Music Hall,
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Psalm 139

SUBJECT. *One of the most notable of the sacred hymns. It sings the omniscience and omnipresence of God, inferring from these the overthrow of the powers of wickedness, since He who sees and hears the abominable deeds and words of the rebellious will surely deal with them according to his justice....It flames out with such flashes of light as to turn night into day....This holy song casts a clear light even to the uttermost parts of the sea, and warns it against that practical atheism which ignores the presence of God, and so makes shipwreck of the soul.*

Verse 1

"O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me." He invokes in adoration Jehovah the all knowing God, and he proceeds to adore Him by proclaiming one of His peculiar attributes. If we would praise God aright, we must draw the matter of our praise from Himself—"O Jehovah, thou hast..." No pretended god knows aught of us; but the true God, Jehovah, understands us, and is most intimately acquainted with our persons, nature, and character. How well it is for us to know the God who knows us! The divine knowledge is extremely thorough and searching; it is as if He had searched us, as officers search a man for contraband goods, or as pillagers ransack a house for plunder.

⁸¹ **equable** – level; equally balanced.

⁸² **carking** – distressful.

Yet we must not let the figure run upon all fours, and lead us further than it is meant to do; the Lord knows all things naturally and as a matter of course, and not by any effort on His part. Searching ordinarily implies a measure of ignorance which is removed by observation; of course this is not the case with the Lord. But the meaning of the psalmist is that the Lord knows us as thoroughly, as if He had examined us minutely, and had pried into the most secret corners of our being.

This infallible knowledge has always existed—"Thou *hast* searched me"; and it continues unto this day, since God cannot forget that which He has once known. There never was a time in which we were unknown to God, and there never will be a moment in which we shall be beyond His observation.

Note how the psalmist makes his doctrine personal: he saith not, "O God, thou knowest all things;" but, "thou hast known *me*." It is ever our wisdom to lay truth home to ourselves. How wonderful the contrast between the observer and the observed! Jehovah and me! Yet this most intimate connection exists, and therein lies our hope. Let the reader sit still a while and try to realize the two poles of this statement, the Lord and poor puny man, and he will see much to admire and wonder at.

Verse 2

"*Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising.*" Me thou knowest, and all that comes of me. I am observed when I quietly sit down, and marked when I resolutely rise up. My most common and casual acts, my most needful and necessary movements, are noted by time, and Thou knowest the inward thoughts that regulate them. Whether I sink in lowly self-renunciation or ascend in pride, Thou seest the motions of my mind as well as those of my body. This is a fact to be remembered every moment: sitting down to consider, or rising up to act, we are still seen, known, and read by Jehovah our Lord.

"*Thou understandest my thought afar off.*" Before it is my own it is foreknown and comprehended by Thee. Though my thought be invisible to the sight, though as yet I be not myself cognizant of the shape it is assuming, yet Thou hast it under Thy consideration—and Thou perceivest its nature, its source, its drift, its result. Never dost Thou misjudge or wrongly interpret me: my inmost thought is perfectly understood by Thine impartial mind. Though Thou shouldest give but a glance at my heart, and see me as one sees a passing meteor moving afar, yet Thou wouldst by that glimpse sum up all the meanings of my soul, so transparent is everything to Thy piercing glance.

Verse 3

"*Thou compassest my path and my lying down.*" My path and my pallet, my running and my resting, are alike within the circle of Thine observation. Thou dost surround me even as the air continually surrounds all creatures that live. I am shut up within the wall of Thy being; I am encircled within the bounds of Thy knowledge. Waking or sleeping I am still observed of Thee. I may leave Thy path, but Thou never leave mine. I may sleep and forget Thee, but Thou dost never slumber, nor fall into oblivion concerning Thy creature.

The original [Hebrew word] signifies not only surrounding, but winnowing and sifting. The Lord judges our active life and our quiet life; He discriminates our action and our repose, and marks that in them which is good and also that which is evil. There is chaff in all our wheat, and the Lord divides them with unerring precision.

"*And art acquainted with all my ways.*" Thou art familiar with all I do; nothing is concealed from Thee, nor surprising to Thee, nor misunderstood by Thee. Our paths may be habitual or accidental, open or secret, but with them all the Most Holy One is well acquainted. This should fill us with awe, so that we sin not; with courage, so that we fear not; with delight, so that we mourn not.

Verse 4

"*For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.*" The unformed word, which lies within the tongue like a seed in the soil, is certainly and completely known to the Great Searcher of hearts. A negative expression is used to make the positive statement all the stronger: not a word is unknown is a forcible way of saying that *every* word is well known. Divine knowledge is perfect, since not a single word is unknown, nay, not even an unspoken word, and each one is "altogether" or wholly known. What hope of concealment can remain when the speech with which too many conceal their thoughts is itself transparent before the Lord? O Jehovah, how great art Thou! If Thine eye hath such power, what must be the united force of Thine whole nature!

Verse 5

"*Thou hast beset me behind and before.*" As though we were caught in an ambush, or besieged by an army that has wholly beleaguered the city walls, we are surrounded by the Lord. God has set us where we be, and beset us wherever we be. Behind us there is God recording our sins, or in grace blotting out the remembrance of them; and

before us there is God foreknowing all our deeds, and providing for all our wants.⁸³ We cannot turn back and so escape Him, for He is behind; we cannot go forward and outmarch Him, for He is before. He not only beholds us, but He besets us.

And lest there should seem any chance of escape, or lest we should imagine that the surrounding Presence is yet a distant one, it is added—“*And laid thine hand upon me.*” The prisoner marches along surrounded by a guard, and gripped by an officer. God is very near; we are wholly in His power; from that power there is no escape. It is not said that God *will* thus beset us and arrest us, but it is done: “Thou *hast* beset me.” Shall we not alter the figure, and say that our heavenly Father has folded His arms around us, and caressed us with His hand. It is even so with those who are by faith the children of the Most High.

Verse 6

“*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me.*” I cannot grasp it. I can hardly endure to think of it. The theme overwhelms me. I am amazed and astounded at it. Such knowledge not only surpasses my comprehension, but even my imagination! It is high; I cannot attain unto it. Mount as I may, this truth is too lofty for my mind. It seems to be always above me, even when I soar into the loftiest regions of spiritual thought. Is it not so with every attribute of God? Can we attain to any idea of His power, His wisdom, His holiness? Our mind has no line with which to measure the Infinite.

Do we therefore question? Say, rather, that we therefore believe and adore. We are not surprised that the Most Glorious God should in His knowledge be high above all the knowledge to which we can attain: it must of necessity be so, since we are such poor limited beings. And when we stand a tiptoe we cannot reach to the lowest step of the throne of the Eternal.

Verse 7

Here omnipresence is the theme—a truth to which omniscience naturally leads up. “*Whither shall I go from thy spirit?*” Not that the psalmist wished to go from God, or to avoid the power of the divine life; but he asks this question to set forth the fact that no one can escape from the all-pervading being and observation of the Great Invisible Spirit. Observe how the writer makes the matter personal to himself: “*Whither shall I go?*” It were well if we all thus applied truth to our own cases. It were wise for each one to say, “The spirit of the Lord is ever around me: Jehovah is omnipresent to me.”

“*Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?*” If, full of dread, I hastened to escape from that nearness of God which had become my terror, which way could I turn? “*Whither?*” “*Whither?*” He repeats his cry. No answer comes back to him. The reply to his first “*Whither?*” is its echo—a second “*Whither?*”! From the sight of God he cannot be hidden, but that is not all: from the immediate, actual, constant presence of God he cannot be withdrawn. We must be, whether we will it or not, as near to God as our soul is to our body. This makes it dreadful work to sin; for we offend the Almighty to His face, and commit acts of treason at the very foot of His throne. Go from Him, or flee from Him we cannot: neither by patient travel nor by hasty flight can we withdraw from the all-surrounding Deity. His mind is in our mind; Himself within ourselves. His spirit is over our spirit; our presence is ever in His presence.

Verse 8

“*If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there.*” Filling the loftiest region with His yet loftier presence, Jehovah is in the heavenly place, at home, upon His throne. The ascent, if it were possible, would be unavailing for purposes of escape; it would in fact be a flying into the center of the fire to avoid the heat. There would he be immediately confronted by the terrible personality of God.

Note the abrupt words: “*Thou, there.*” “*If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.*” Descending into the lowest imaginable depths among the dead, there should we find the Lord. “*Thou!*” says the psalmist, as if he felt that God was the one great Existence in all places. Whatever Hades may be, or whoever may be there, one thing is certain, “*Thou, O Jehovah, art there.*”

Two regions, the one of glory and the other of darkness, are set in contrast, and this one fact is asserted of both—“*Thou art there.*” Whether we rise up or lie down, take our wing or make our bed, we shall find God near us. A “*behold*” is added to the second clause, since it seems more a wonder to meet with God in hell than in heaven, in Hades than in Paradise. Of course the presence of God produces very different effects in these places, but He is unquestionably in each; the bliss of one, the terror of the other. What an awful thought, that some men seem resolved to take up their night’s abode in hell, a night which shall know no morning.

⁸³ wants – lacks.

Verse 9

“If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea.” If I could fly with all swiftness, and find a habitation where the mariner has not yet ploughed the deep, yet I could not reach the boundaries of the divine presence. Light flies with inconceivable rapidity, and it flashes far afield beyond all human ken. It illuminates the great and wide sea, and sets its waves gleaming afar; but its speed would utterly fail if employed in flying from the Lord. Were we to speed on the wings of the morning breeze, and break into oceans unknown to chart and map, yet there we should find the Lord already present. He who saves to the uttermost would be with us in the uttermost parts of the sea.

Verse 10

“Even there shall thy hand lead me.” We could only fly from God by His own power. The Lord would be leading, covering, preserving, sustaining us even when we were fugitives from Him.

“And thy right hand shall hold me.” In the uttermost parts of the sea, my arrest would be as certain as at home; God’s right hand would there seize and detain the runaway. Should we be commanded on the most distant errand, we may assuredly depend upon the upholding right hand of God as with us in all mercy, wisdom, and power. The exploring missionary in his lonely wanderings is led; in his solitary feebleness he is held. Both the hands of God are with His own servants to sustain them, and against rebels to overthrow them; and in this respect it matters not to what realms they resort, the active energy of God is around them still.

Verse 11

“If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me.” Dense darkness may oppress me, but it cannot shut me out from Thee, or Thee from me. Thou seest as well without the light as with it, since Thou art not dependent upon light that is Thine own creature for the full exercise of Thy perceptions. Moreover, Thou art present with me whatever may be the hour; and being present You discover all that I think, or feel, or do. Men are still so foolish as to prefer night and darkness for their evil deeds; but so impossible is it for anything to be hidden from the Lord that they might just as well transgress in broad daylight.

A good man will not wish to be hidden by the darkness; a wise man will not expect any such thing. If we were so foolish as to make sure of concealment because the place was shrouded in midnight, we might well be alarmed out of our security by the fact that, as far as God is concerned, we always dwell in the light. For even the night itself glows with a revealing force: *“even the night shall be light about me.”* Let us think of this if ever we are tempted to take license from the dark: it is light about us. If the darkness be light, how great is that light in which we dwell!

Note well how David keeps his song in the first person; let us mind that we do the same as we cry with Hagar, “Thou God seest me” (Gen 16:13).

Verse 12

Yea, of a surety, beyond all denial: *“The darkness hideth not from thee.”* It veils nothing; it is not the medium of concealment in any degree what ever. It hides from men, but not from God.

“But the night shineth as the day.” It is but another form of day: it shines, revealing all. It “shineth as the day”—quite as clearly and distinctly manifesting all that is done.

“The darkness and the light are both alike to thee.” This sentence seems to sum up all that went before, and most emphatically puts the negative upon the faintest idea of hiding under the cover of night. Men cling to this notion because it is easier and less expensive to hide under darkness than to journey to remote places; and therefore the foolish thought is here beaten to pieces by statements that in their varied forms effectually batter it.

Yet the ungodly are still duped by their grovelling notions of God, and enquire, “How doth God know?” They must fancy that He is as limited in His powers of observation as they are, and yet if they would but consider for a moment they would conclude that he who could not see in the dark could not be God, and he who is not present everywhere could not be the Almighty Creator. Assuredly God is in all places, at all times, and nothing can by any possibility be kept away from His all observing, all comprehending mind. The Great Spirit comprehends within Himself all time and space, and yet He is infinitely greater than these, or aught else that He has made.

Verse 13

“For thou hast possessed my reins.” Thou art the owner of my inmost parts and passions—not the indweller and observer only, but the acknowledged Lord and possessor of my most secret self. The word “reins” signifies the kidneys, which by the Hebrews were supposed to be the seat of the desires and longings; but perhaps it indicates here the most hidden and vital portion of the man. This God doth not only inspect and visit, but it is His own; He is as much at home there as a landlord on his own estate, or a proprietor in his own house.

"Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb." There I lay hidden—covered by Thee. Before I could know Thee, or aught else, Thou hadst a care for me, and didst hide me away as a treasure till Thou shouldest see fit to bring me to the light. Thus the psalmist describes the intimacy that God had with him. In his most secret part, his reins, and in his most secret condition, yet unborn, he was under the control and guardianship of God!

Verse 14

"I will praise thee"—a good resolve, and one which he was even now carrying out. Those who *are* praising God are the very men who *will* praise Him. Those who wish to praise have subjects for adoration ready to hand. We too seldom remember our creation, and all the skill and kindness bestowed upon our frame; but the sweet singer of Israel was better instructed, and therefore he prepares for the chief musician a song concerning our nativity and all the fashioning that precedes it. We cannot begin too soon to bless our Maker, who began so soon to bless us: even in the act of creation He created reasons for our praising His name.

"For I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Who can gaze even upon a model of our anatomy without wonder and awe? Who could dissect a portion of the human frame without marvelling at its delicacy, and trembling at its frailty? The psalmist had scarcely peered within the veil that hides the nerves, sinews, and blood vessels from common inspection; the science of anatomy was quite unknown to him; and yet he had seen enough to arouse his admiration of the work and his reverence for the Worker.

"Marvellous are thy works." These parts of my frame are all Thy works; and though they be home works, close under my own eye, yet are they wonderful to the last degree! They are works within my own self, yet are they beyond my understanding, and appear to me as so many miracles of skill and power. We need not go to the ends of the earth for marvels, nor even across our own threshold; they abound in our own bodies.

"And that my soul knoweth right well." He was no agnostic—he *knew*; he was no doubter—his *soul* knew; he was no dupe—his soul knew *right well*. Those know indeed and of a truth who first know the Lord, and then know all things in Him. He was made to know the marvellous nature of God's work with assurance and accuracy, for he had found by experience that the Lord is a master worker, performing inimitable wonders when accomplishing His kind designs. If we are marvellously wrought upon even before we are born, what shall we say of the Lord's dealings with us after we quit His secret workshop, and He directs our pathway through the pilgrimage of life? What shall we not say of that *new birth* which is even more mysterious than the first, and exhibits even more the love and wisdom of the Lord?

Verse 15

"My substance was not hid from thee." The substantial part of my being was before Thine all seeing eye; the bones which make my frame were put together by Thine hand. The essential materials of my being before they were arranged were all within the range of Thine eye. I was hidden from all human knowledge, but not from Thee; Thou hast ever been intimately acquainted with me.

"When I was made in secret." Most chastely and beautifully is here described the formation of our being before the time of our birth. A great artist will often labour alone in his studio, and not suffer his work to be seen until it is finished; even so did the Lord fashion us where no eye beheld us, and the veil was not lifted till every member was complete. Much of the formation of our inner man still proceeds in secret; hence the more of solitude the better for us. The true church also is being fashioned in secret, so that none may cry, "Lo, here!" or "Lo, there!" (Luk 17:21), as if that which is visible could ever be identical with the invisibly growing body of Christ.

"And curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth." "Embroidered with great skill" is an accurate poetical description of the creation of veins, sinews, muscles, nerves, etc. What tapestry can equal the human fabric? This work is wrought as much in private as if it had been accomplished in the grave, or in the darkness of the abyss. The expressions are poetical, beautifully veiling, though not absolutely concealing, the real meaning. God's intimate knowledge of us from our beginning, and even before it, is here most charmingly set forth. Cannot He who made us thus wondrously when we were not, still carry on His work of power till He has perfected us—though we feel unable to aid in the process, and are lying in great sorrow and self loathing, as though cast into the lowest parts of the earth?

Verse 16

"Thine eyes did see my substance," yet being imperfect. While as yet the vessel was upon the wheel, the Potter saw it all. The Lord knows not only our shape, but our substance; this is substantial knowledge indeed. The Lord's observation of us is intent and intentional: "Thine eyes *did* see." Moreover, the divine mind discerns all things as clearly and certainly as men perceive by actual eyesight. His is not hearsay acquaintance, but the knowledge which comes of sight.

“And in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.” An architect draws his plans, and makes out his specifications; even so did the great Maker of our frame write down all our members in the book of His purposes. That we have eyes, and ears, and hands, and feet, is all due to the wise and gracious purpose of heaven; it was so ordered in the secret decree by which all things are as they are. God’s purposes concern our limbs and faculties. Their form, and shape, and everything about them were appointed of God long before they had any existence. God saw us when we could not be seen, and He wrote about us when there was nothing of us to write about. When as yet there were none of our members in existence, all those members were before the eye of God in the sketchbook of His foreknowledge and predestination.

This verse is an exceedingly difficult one to translate, but we do not think that any of the proposed amendments are better than the rendering afforded us by the Authorized Version. The large number of words in italics⁸⁴ will warn the English reader that the sense is hard to come at, and difficult to express, and that it would be unwise to found any doctrine upon the English words; happily there is no temptation to do so.

The great truth expressed in these lines has by many been referred to the formation of the mystical body of our Lord Jesus. Of course, what is true of man, as man, is emphatically true of Him who is the representative man. The great Lord knows who belong to Christ; His eye perceives the chosen members who shall yet be made one with the living person of the mystical Christ. Those of the elect who are as yet unborn, or unrenewed, are nevertheless written in the Lord’s book. As the form of Eve grew up in silence and secrecy under the fashioning hand of the Maker, so at this hour is the Bride being fashioned for the Lord Jesus. Or, to change the figure, a body is being prepared in which the life and glory of the indwelling Lord shall for ever be displayed. The Lord knoweth them that are His: He has a specially familiar acquaintance with the members of the body of Christ; He sees their substance, unperfect though they be.

Verse 17

“How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God!” He is not alarmed at the fact that God knows all about him; on the contrary, he is comforted, and even feels himself to be enriched, as with a casket of precious jewels. That God should think upon him is the believer’s treasure and pleasure. He cries, “How costly, how valued are Thy thoughts, how dear to me is Thy perpetual attention!” He thinks upon God’s thoughts with delight; the more of them the better is he pleased. It is a joy worth worlds that the Lord should think upon us who are so poor and needy; it is a joy which fills our whole nature to think upon God—returning love for love, thought for thought, after our poor fashion.

“How great is the sum of them!” When we remember that God thought upon us from old eternity, continues to think upon us every moment, and will think of us when time shall be no more, we may well exclaim, “How great is the sum!” Thoughts such as are natural to the Creator, the Preserver, the Redeemer, the Father, the Friend, are evermore flowing from the heart of the Lord. Thoughts of our pardon, renewal, upholding, supplying, educating, perfecting, and a thousand more kinds perpetually well up in the mind of the Most High. It should fill us with adoring wonder and reverent surprise that the infinite mind of God should turn so many thoughts towards us, who are so insignificant and so unworthy!

What a contrast is all this to the notion of those who deny the existence of a personal, conscious God! Imagine a world without a thinking, personal God! Conceive of a grim providence of machinery!—a fatherhood of law! Such philosophy is hard and cold. As well might a man pillow his head upon a razor edge as seek rest in such a fancy. But a God always thinking of us makes a happy world, a rich life, a heavenly hereafter.

Verse 18

“If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand.” This figure shows the thoughts of God to be altogether innumerable; for nothing can surpass in number the grains of sand that belt the main ocean and all the minor seas. The task of counting God’s thoughts of love would be a never-ending one. If we should attempt the reckoning, we must necessarily fail, for the infinite falls not within the line of our feeble intellect. Even could we count the sands on the seashore, we should not then be able to number God’s thoughts, for they are “more in number than the sand.” This is not the hyperbole of poetry, but the solid fact of inspired statement; God thinks upon us infinitely. There is a limit to the act of creation, but not to the might of divine love.

⁸⁴ **words in italics** – in the King James Version, all words that do not appear in the original Hebrew or Greek are set in italics, so the reader knows they were not part of the original inspired words of God, but were inserted by the translators to fill in the meaning. Quoted verses in this booklet have these italics removed; italics used here reflect the author’s emphasis. Here is the original printing in the KJV: “Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all *my* members were written, *which* in continuance were fashioned, when *as yet there was* none of them” (139:16).

“When I awake, I am still with thee.” Thy thoughts of love are so many that my mind never gets away from them; they surround me at all hours. I go to my bed, and God is my last thought; and when I wake I find my mind still hovering about His palace gates. God is ever with me, and I am ever with Him. This is life indeed. If during sleep my mind wanders away into dreams, yet it only wanders upon holy ground, and the moment I wake my heart is back with its Lord. The psalmist does not say, “When I awake, I return to thee,” but, “I am *still with thee*”; as if his meditations were continuous, and his communion unbroken. Soon we shall lie down to sleep for the last time; God grant that when the trumpet of the archangel shall waken us we may find ourselves still with Him.

Verse 19

“Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God.” There can be no doubt upon that head, for thou hast seen all their transgressions, which indeed have been done in Thy presence. And Thou hast long enough endured their provocations, which have been so openly manifest before Thee. Crimes committed before the face of the Judge are not likely to go unpunished. If the eye of God is grieved with the presence of evil, it is but natural to expect that He will remove the offending object. God who sees all evil will slay all evil. With earthly sovereigns sin may go unpunished for lack of evidence, or the law may be left without execution from lack of vigour in the judge; but this cannot happen in the case of God, the living God. He beareth not the sword in vain (Rom 13:4). Such is His love of holiness and hatred of wrong, that He will carry on war to the death with those whose hearts and lives are wicked. God will not always suffer His lovely creation to be defaced and defiled by the presence of wickedness; if anything is sure, this is sure: that He will ease Him of His adversaries.

“Depart from me therefore, ye bloody men.” Men who delight in cruelty and war are not fit companions for those who walk with God. David chases the men of blood from his court, for he is weary of those of whom God is weary. He seems to say—If God will not let you live with Him, I will not have you live with me. You would destroy others, and therefore I want you not in my society. You will be destroyed yourselves; I desire you not in my service. Depart from me, for you depart from God. As we delight to have the holy God always near us, so would we eagerly desire to have wicked men removed as far as possible from us.

We tremble in the society of the ungodly lest their doom should fall upon them suddenly, and we should see them lie dead at our feet. We do not wish to have our place of intercourse turned into a gallows of execution, therefore let the condemned be removed out of our company.

Verse 20

“For they speak against thee wickedly.” Why should I bear their company when their talk sickens me? They vent their treasons and blasphemies as often as they please, doing so without the slightest excuse or provocation. Let them therefore be gone, where they may find a more congenial associate than I can be. When men speak against God, they will be sure to speak against us, if they find it serve their turn; hence godless men are not the stuff out of which true friends can ever be made. God gave these men their tongues, and they turn them against their Benefactor, wickedly, from sheer malice, and with great perverseness.

“And thine enemies take thy name in vain.” This is their sport: to insult Jehovah’s glorious name is their amusement. To blaspheme the name of the Lord is a gratuitous wickedness in which there can be no pleasure, and from which there can be no profit. This is a sure mark of the “enemies” of the Lord, that they have the impudence to assail His honour, and treat His glory with irreverence. How can God do other than slay them? How can we do other than withdraw from every sort of association with them?

What a wonder of sin it is that men should rail against so good a Being as the Lord our God! The impudence of those who talk wickedly is a singular fact, and it is the more singular when we reflect that the Lord against whom they speak is all around them, and lays to heart every dishonour that they render to His holy name. We ought not to wonder that men slander and deride us, for they do the same with the Most High God.

Verse 21

“Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee?” He was a good hater, for he hated only those who hated good. Of this hatred he is not ashamed, but he sets it forth as a virtue to which he would have the Lord bear testimony. To love all men with benevolence is our duty; but to love any wicked man with complacency would be a crime. To hate a man for his own sake, or for any evil done to us, would be wrong; but to hate a man because he is the foe of all goodness and the enemy of all righteousness, is nothing more nor less than an obligation. The more we love God the more indignant shall we grow with those who refuse Him their affection. “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ let him be Anathema Maranatha” (1Co 16:22). Truly, “jealousy is cruel as the grave” (Song 8:6). The loyal subject must not be friendly to the traitor.

“And am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee?” He appeals to heaven that he took no pleasure in those who rebelled against the Lord; but, on the contrary, he was made to mourn by a sight of their ill behaviour. Since God is everywhere, He knows our feelings towards the profane and ungodly, and He knows that so far from approving such characters, the very sight of them is grievous to our eyes.

Verse 22

“I hate them with perfect hatred.” He does not leave it a matter of question; he does not occupy a neutral position. His hatred to bad, vicious, blasphemous men is intense, complete, energetic. He is as whole-hearted in his hate of wickedness as in his love of goodness.

“I count them mine enemies.” He makes a personal matter of it. They may have done him no ill, but if they are doing despite to God, to His laws, and to the great principles of truth and righteousness, David proclaims war against them. Wickedness passes men into favour with unrighteous spirits, but it excludes them from the communion of the just. We pull up the drawbridge and man the walls when a man of Belial⁸⁵ goes by our castle. His character is a *casus belli*;⁸⁶ we cannot do otherwise than contend with those who contend with God.

Verse 23

“Search me, O God, and know my heart.” David is no accomplice with traitors. He has disowned them in set form, and now he appeals to God that he does not harbour a trace of fellowship with them. He will have God Himself search him, and search him thoroughly, till every point of his being is known, and read, and understood—for he is sure that even by such an investigation there will be found in him no complicity with wicked men. He challenges the fullest investigation, the innermost search; he had need be a true man who can put himself deliberately into such a crucible. Yet we may each one desire such searching; for it would be a terrible calamity to us for sin to remain in our hearts unknown and undiscovered.

“Try me, and know my thoughts.” Exercise any and every test upon me. By fire and by water let me be examined. Read not alone the desires of my heart, but the fugitive thoughts of my head. Know with all penetrating knowledge all that is or has been in the chambers of my mind. What a mercy that there is one Being who can know us to perfection! He is intimately at home with us. He is graciously inclined towards us, and is willing to bend His omniscience to serve the end of our sanctification. Let us pray as David did, and let us be as honest as he. We cannot hide our sin. Salvation lies the other way, in a plain discovery of evil, and an effectual severance from it.

Verse 24

“And see if there be any wicked way in me.” See whether there be in my heart, or in my life, any evil habit unknown to myself. If there be such an evil way, take me from it, take it from me. No matter how dear the wrong may have become, nor how deeply prejudiced I may have been in its favour, be pleased to deliver me therefrom altogether, effectually, and at once, that I may tolerate nothing that is contrary to Thy mind. As I hate the wicked in their way, so would I hate every wicked way in myself.

“And lead me in the way everlasting.” If Thou hast introduced me already to the good old way, be pleased to keep me in it, and conduct me further and further along it. It is a way that Thou hast set up of old; it is based upon everlasting principles; and it is the way in which immortal spirits will gladly run forever and ever. There will be no end to it world without end. It lasts forever, and they who are in it last forever. Conduct me into it, O Lord, and conduct me throughout the whole length of it. By Thy providence, by Thy word, by Thy grace, and by Thy Spirit, lead me evermore.

Available in print as a booklet from Chapel Library.

PSALM 139

*From Spurgeon's **The Treasury of David**, his masterful commentary on the Psalms.*

⁸⁵ **Belial** – Hebrew word meaning “worthless,” applied to men considered worthless.

⁸⁶ *casus belli* – an event which proves a war.

SUBJECT. *One of the most notable of the sacred hymns. It sings the omniscience and omnipresence of God, inferring from these the overthrow of the powers of wickedness, since He who sees and hears the abominable deeds and words of the rebellious will surely deal with them according to his justice....It flames out with such flashes of light as to turn night into day....This holy song casts a clear light even to the uttermost parts of the sea, and warns it against that practical atheism which ignores the presence of God, and so makes shipwreck of the soul.*

Verse 1

“O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me.” He invokes in adoration Jehovah the all knowing God, and he proceeds to adore Him by proclaiming one of His peculiar attributes. If we would praise God aright, we must draw the matter of our praise from Himself—*“O Jehovah, thou hast...”* No pretended god knows aught of us; but the true God, Jehovah, understands us, and is most intimately acquainted with our persons, nature, and character. How well it is for us to know the God who knows us! The divine knowledge is extremely thorough and searching; it is as if He had searched us, as officers search a man for contraband goods, or as pillagers ransack a house for plunder.

Yet we must not let the figure run upon all fours, and lead us further than it is meant to do; the Lord knows all things naturally and as a matter of course, and not by any effort on His part. Searching ordinarily implies a measure of ignorance which is removed by observation; of course this is not the case with the Lord. But the meaning of the psalmist is that the Lord knows us as thoroughly, as if He had examined us minutely, and had pried into the most secret corners of our being.

This infallible knowledge has always existed—*“Thou hast searched me”*; and it continues unto this day, since God cannot forget that which He has once known. There never was a time in which we were unknown to God, and there never will be a moment in which we shall be beyond His observation.

Note how the psalmist makes his doctrine personal: he saith not, *“O God, thou knowest all things;”* but, *“thou hast known me.”* It is ever our wisdom to lay truth home to ourselves. How wonderful the contrast between the observer and the observed! Jehovah and me! Yet this most intimate connection exists, and therein lies our hope. Let the reader sit still a while and try to realize the two poles of this statement, the Lord and poor puny man, and he will see much to admire and wonder at.

Verse 2

“Thou knowest my downsit and mine uprising.” Me thou knowest, and all that comes of me. I am observed when I quietly sit down, and marked when I resolutely rise up. My most common and casual acts, my most needful and necessary movements, are noted by time, and Thou knowest the inward thoughts that regulate them. Whether I sink in lowly self-renunciation or ascend in pride, Thou seest the motions of my mind as well as those of my body. This is a fact to be remembered every moment: sitting down to consider, or rising up to act, we are still seen, known, and read by Jehovah our Lord.

“Thou understandest my thought afar off.” Before it is my own it is foreknown and comprehended by Thee. Though my thought be invisible to the sight, though as yet I be not myself cognizant of the shape it is assuming, yet Thou hast it under Thy consideration—and Thou perceivest its nature, its source, its drift, its result. Never dost Thou misjudge or wrongly interpret me: my inmost thought is perfectly understood by Thine impartial mind. Though Thou shouldst give but a glance at my heart, and see me as one sees a passing meteor moving afar, yet Thou wouldst by that glimpse sum up all the meanings of my soul, so transparent is everything to Thy piercing glance.

Verse 3

“Thou compassest my path and my lying down.” My path and my pallet, my running and my resting, are alike within the circle of Thine observation. Thou dost surround me even as the air continually surrounds all creatures that live. I am shut up within the wall of Thy being; I am encircled within the bounds of Thy knowledge. Waking or sleeping I am still observed of Thee. I may leave Thy path, but Thou never leave mine. I may sleep and forget Thee, but Thou dost never slumber, nor fall into oblivion concerning Thy creature.

The original [Hebrew word] signifies not only surrounding, but winnowing and sifting. The Lord judges our active life and our quiet life; He discriminates our action and our repose, and marks that in them which is good and also that which is evil. There is chaff in all our wheat, and the Lord divides them with unerring precision.

“And art acquainted with all my ways.” Thou art familiar with all I do; nothing is concealed from Thee, nor surprising to Thee, nor misunderstood by Thee. Our paths may be habitual or accidental, open or secret, but with them all the Most Holy One is well acquainted. This should fill us with awe, so that we sin not; with courage, so that we fear not; with delight, so that we mourn not.

Verse 4

“For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.” The unformed word, which lies within the tongue like a seed in the soil, is certainly and completely known to the Great Searcher of hearts. A negative expression is used to make the positive statement all the stronger: not a word is unknown is a forcible way of saying that *every* word is well known. Divine knowledge is perfect, since not a single word is unknown, nay, not even an unspoken word, and each one is “altogether” or wholly known. What hope of concealment can remain when the speech with which too many conceal their thoughts is itself transparent before the Lord? O Jehovah, how great art Thou! If Thine eye hath such power, what must be the united force of Thine whole nature!

Verse 5

“Thou hast beset me behind and before.” As though we were caught in an ambush, or besieged by an army that has wholly beleaguered the city walls, we are surrounded by the Lord. God has set us where we be, and beset us wherever we be. Behind us there is God recording our sins, or in grace blotting out the remembrance of them; and before us there is God foreknowing all our deeds, and providing for all our wants.⁸⁷ We cannot turn back and so escape Him, for He is behind; we cannot go forward and outmarch Him, for He is before. He not only beholds us, but He besets us.

And lest there should seem any chance of escape, or lest we should imagine that the surrounding Presence is yet a distant one, it is added—*“And laid thine hand upon me.”* The prisoner marches along surrounded by a guard, and gripped by an officer. God is very near; we are wholly in His power; from that power there is no escape. It is not said that God *will* thus beset us and arrest us, but it is done: *“Thou hast beset me.”* Shall we not alter the figure, and say that our heavenly Father has folded His arms around us, and caressed us with His hand. It is even so with those who are by faith the children of the Most High.

Verse 6

“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me.” I cannot grasp it. I can hardly endure to think of it. The theme overwhelms me. I am amazed and astounded at it. Such knowledge not only surpasses my comprehension, but even my imagination! It is high; I cannot attain unto it. Mount as I may, this truth is too lofty for my mind. It seems to be always above me, even when I soar into the loftiest regions of spiritual thought. Is it not so with every attribute of God? Can we attain to any idea of His power, His wisdom, His holiness? Our mind has no line with which to measure the Infinite.

Do we therefore question? Say, rather, that we therefore believe and adore. We are not surprised that the Most Glorious God should in His knowledge be high above all the knowledge to which we can attain: it must of necessity be so, since we are such poor limited beings. And when we stand a tiptoe we cannot reach to the lowest step of the throne of the Eternal.

Verse 7

Here omnipresence is the theme—a truth to which omniscience naturally leads up. *“Whither shall I go from thy spirit?”* Not that the psalmist wished to go from God, or to avoid the power of the divine life; but he asks this question to set forth the fact that no one can escape from the all-pervading being and observation of the Great Invisible Spirit. Observe how the writer makes the matter personal to himself: *“Whither shall I go?”* It were well if we all thus applied truth to our own cases. It were wise for each one to say, *“The spirit of the Lord is ever around me: Jehovah is omnipresent to me.”*

“Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?” If, full of dread, I hastened to escape from that nearness of God which had become my terror, which way could I turn? *“Whither?” “Whither?”* He repeats his cry. No answer comes back to him. The reply to his first *“Whither?”* is its echo—a second *“Whither?”*! From the sight of God he cannot be hidden, but that is not all: from the immediate, actual, constant presence of God he cannot be withdrawn.

⁸⁷ wants – lacks.

We must be, whether we will it or not, as near to God as our soul is to our body. This makes it dreadful work to sin; for we offend the Almighty to His face, and commit acts of treason at the very foot of His throne. Go from Him, or flee from Him we cannot: neither by patient travel nor by hasty flight can we withdraw from the all-surrounding Deity. His mind is in our mind; Himself within ourselves. His spirit is over our spirit; our presence is ever in His presence.

Verse 8

“If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there.” Filling the loftiest region with His yet loftier presence, Jehovah is in the heavenly place, at home, upon His throne. The ascent, if it were possible, would be unavailing for purposes of escape; it would in fact be a flying into the center of the fire to avoid the heat. There would he be immediately confronted by the terrible personality of God.

Note the abrupt words: *“Thou, there.”* *“If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.”* Descending into the lowest imaginable depths among the dead, there should we find the Lord. *“Thou!”* says the psalmist, as if he felt that God was the one great Existence in all places. Whatever Hades may be, or whoever may be there, one thing is certain, *“Thou, O Jehovah, art there.”*

Two regions, the one of glory and the other of darkness, are set in contrast, and this one fact is asserted of both—*“Thou art there.”* Whether we rise up or lie down, take our wing or make our bed, we shall find God near us. A *“behold”* is added to the second clause, since it seems more a wonder to meet with God in hell than in heaven, in Hades than in Paradise. Of course the presence of God produces very different effects in these places, but He is unquestionably in each; the bliss of one, the terror of the other. What an awful thought, that some men seem resolved to take up their night’s abode in hell, a night which shall know no morning.

Verse 9

“If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea.” If I could fly with all swiftness, and find a habitation where the mariner has not yet ploughed the deep, yet I could not reach the boundaries of the divine presence. Light flies with inconceivable rapidity, and it flashes far afield beyond all human ken. It illuminates the great and wide sea, and sets its waves gleaming afar; but its speed would utterly fail if employed in flying from the Lord. Were we to speed on the wings of the morning breeze, and break into oceans unknown to chart and map, yet there we should find the Lord already present. He who saves to the uttermost would be with us in the uttermost parts of the sea.

Verse 10

“Even there shall thy hand lead me.” We could only fly from God by His own power. The Lord would be leading, covering, preserving, sustaining us even when we were fugitives from Him.

“And thy right hand shall hold me.” In the uttermost parts of the sea, my arrest would be as certain as at home; God’s right hand would there seize and detain the runaway. Should we be commanded on the most distant errand, we may assuredly depend upon the upholding right hand of God as with us in all mercy, wisdom, and power. The exploring missionary in his lonely wanderings is led; in his solitary feebleness he is held. Both the hands of God are with His own servants to sustain them, and against rebels to overthrow them; and in this respect it matters not to what realms they resort, the active energy of God is around them still.

Verse 11

“If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me.” Dense darkness may oppress me, but it cannot shut me out from Thee, or Thee from me. Thou seest as well without the light as with it, since Thou art not dependent upon light that is Thine own creature for the full exercise of Thy perceptions. Moreover, Thou art present with me whatever may be the hour; and being present You discover all that I think, or feel, or do. Men are still so foolish as to prefer night and darkness for their evil deeds; but so impossible is it for anything to be hidden from the Lord that they might just as well transgress in broad daylight.

A good man will not wish to be hidden by the darkness; a wise man will not expect any such thing. If we were so foolish as to make sure of concealment because the place was shrouded in midnight, we might well be alarmed out of our security by the fact that, as far as God is concerned, we always dwell in the light. For even the night itself glows with a revealing force: *“even the night shall be light about me.”* Let us think of this if ever we are tempted to take license from the dark: it is light about us. If the darkness be light, how great is that light in which we dwell!

Note well how David keeps his song in the first person; let us mind that we do the same as we cry with Hagar, “Thou God seest me” (Gen 16:13).

Verse 12

Yea, of a surety, beyond all denial: “*The darkness hideth not from thee.*” It veils nothing; it is not the medium of concealment in any degree what ever. It hides from men, but not from God.

“*But the night shineth as the day.*” It is but another form of day: it shines, revealing all. It “shineth as the day”—quite as clearly and distinctly manifesting all that is done.

“*The darkness and the light are both alike to thee.*” This sentence seems to sum up all that went before, and most emphatically puts the negative upon the faintest idea of hiding under the cover of night. Men cling to this notion because it is easier and less expensive to hide under darkness than to journey to remote places; and therefore the foolish thought is here beaten to pieces by statements that in their varied forms effectually batter it.

Yet the ungodly are still duped by their grovelling notions of God, and enquire, “How doth God know?” They must fancy that He is as limited in His powers of observation as they are, and yet if they would but consider for a moment they would conclude that he who could not see in the dark could not be God, and he who is not present everywhere could not be the Almighty Creator. Assuredly God is in all places, at all times, and nothing can by any possibility be kept away from His all observing, all comprehending mind. The Great Spirit comprehends within Himself all time and space, and yet He is infinitely greater than these, or aught else that He has made.

Verse 13

“*For thou hast possessed my reins.*” Thou art the owner of my inmost parts and passions—not the indweller and observer only, but the acknowledged Lord and possessor of my most secret self. The word “reins” signifies the kidneys, which by the Hebrews were supposed to be the seat of the desires and longings; but perhaps it indicates here the most hidden and vital portion of the man. This God doth not only inspect and visit, but it is His own; He is as much at home there as a landlord on his own estate, or a proprietor in his own house.

“*Thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb.*” There I lay hidden—covered by Thee. Before I could know Thee, or aught else, Thou hadst a care for me, and didst hide me away as a treasure till Thou shouldest see fit to bring me to the light. Thus the psalmist describes the intimacy that God had with him. In his most secret part, his reins, and in his most secret condition, yet unborn, he was under the control and guardianship of God!

Verse 14

“*I will praise thee*”—a good resolve, and one which he was even now carrying out. Those who *are* praising God are the very men who *will* praise Him. Those who wish to praise have subjects for adoration ready to hand. We too seldom remember our creation, and all the skill and kindness bestowed upon our frame; but the sweet singer of Israel was better instructed, and therefore he prepares for the chief musician a song concerning our nativity and all the fashioning that precedes it. We cannot begin too soon to bless our Maker, who began so soon to bless us: even in the act of creation He created reasons for our praising His name.

“*For I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*” Who can gaze even upon a model of our anatomy without wonder and awe? Who could dissect a portion of the human frame without marvelling at its delicacy, and trembling at its frailty? The psalmist had scarcely peered within the veil that hides the nerves, sinews, and blood vessels from common inspection; the science of anatomy was quite unknown to him; and yet he had seen enough to arouse his admiration of the work and his reverence for the Worker.

“*Marvellous are thy works.*” These parts of my frame are all Thy works; and though they be home works, close under my own eye, yet are they wonderful to the last degree! They are works within my own self, yet are they beyond my understanding, and appear to me as so many miracles of skill and power. We need not go to the ends of the earth for marvels, nor even across our own threshold; they abound in our own bodies.

“*And that my soul knoweth right well.*” He was no agnostic—he *knew*; he was no doubter—his *soul* knew; he was no dupe—his soul knew *right well*. Those know indeed and of a truth who first know the Lord, and then know all things in Him. He was made to know the marvellous nature of God’s work with assurance and accuracy, for he had found by experience that the Lord is a master worker, performing inimitable wonders when accomplishing His kind designs. If we are marvellously wrought upon even before we are born, what shall we say of the Lord’s dealings with us after we quit His secret workshop, and He directs our pathway through the pilgrimage of life? What

shall we not say of that *new birth* which is even more mysterious than the first, and exhibits even more the love and wisdom of the Lord?

Verse 15

“My substance was not hid from thee.” The substantial part of my being was before Thine all seeing eye; the bones which make my frame were put together by Thine hand. The essential materials of my being before they were arranged were all within the range of Thine eye. I was hidden from all human knowledge, but not from Thee; Thou hast ever been intimately acquainted with me.

“When I was made in secret.” Most chastely and beautifully is here described the formation of our being before the time of our birth. A great artist will often labour alone in his studio, and not suffer his work to be seen until it is finished; even so did the Lord fashion us where no eye beheld us, and the veil was not lifted till every member was complete. Much of the formation of our inner man still proceeds in secret; hence the more of solitude the better for us. The true church also is being fashioned in secret, so that none may cry, “Lo, here!” or “Lo, there!” (Luk 17:21), as if that which is visible could ever be identical with the invisibly growing body of Christ.

“And curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.” “Embroidered with great skill” is an accurate poetical description of the creation of veins, sinews, muscles, nerves, etc. What tapestry can equal the human fabric? This work is wrought as much in private as if it had been accomplished in the grave, or in the darkness of the abyss. The expressions are poetical, beautifully veiling, though not absolutely concealing, the real meaning. God’s intimate knowledge of us from our beginning, and even before it, is here most charmingly set forth. Cannot He who made us thus wondrously when we were not, still carry on His work of power till He has perfected us—though we feel unable to aid in the process, and are lying in great sorrow and self loathing, as though cast into the lowest parts of the earth?

Verse 16

“Thine eyes did see my substance,” yet being imperfect. While as yet the vessel was upon the wheel, the Potter saw it all. The Lord knows not only our shape, but our substance; this is substantial knowledge indeed. The Lord’s observation of us is intent and intentional: “Thine eyes *did* see.” Moreover, the divine mind discerns all things as clearly and certainly as men perceive by actual eyesight. His is not hearsay acquaintance, but the knowledge which comes of sight.

“And in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.” An architect draws his plans, and makes out his specifications; even so did the great Maker of our frame write down all our members in the book of His purposes. That we have eyes, and ears, and hands, and feet, is all due to the wise and gracious purpose of heaven; it was so ordered in the secret decree by which all things are as they are. God’s purposes concern our limbs and faculties. Their form, and shape, and everything about them were appointed of God long before they had any existence. God saw us when we could not be seen, and He wrote about us when there was nothing of us to write about. When as yet there were none of our members in existence, all those members were before the eye of God in the sketchbook of His foreknowledge and predestination.

This verse is an exceedingly difficult one to translate, but we do not think that any of the proposed amendments are better than the rendering afforded us by the Authorized Version. The large number of words in italics⁸⁸ will warn the English reader that the sense is hard to come at, and difficult to express, and that it would be unwise to found any doctrine upon the English words; happily there is no temptation to do so.

The great truth expressed in these lines has by many been referred to the formation of the mystical body of our Lord Jesus. Of course, what is true of man, as man, is emphatically true of Him who is the representative man. The great Lord knows who belong to Christ; His eye perceives the chosen members who shall yet be made one with the living person of the mystical Christ. Those of the elect who are as yet unborn, or unrenewed, are nevertheless written in the Lord’s book. As the form of Eve grew up in silence and secrecy under the fashioning hand of the Maker, so at this hour is the Bride being fashioned for the Lord Jesus. Or, to change the figure, a body is being prepared in which the life and glory of the indwelling Lord shall for ever be displayed. The Lord knoweth them that are His: He

⁸⁸ **words in italics** – in the King James Version, all words that do not appear in the original Hebrew or Greek are set in italics, so the reader knows they were not part of the original inspired words of God, but were inserted by the translators to fill in the meaning. Quoted verses in this booklet have these italics removed; italics used here reflect the author’s emphasis. Here is the original printing in the KJV: “Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all *my* members were written, *which* in continuance were fashioned, when *as yet there was* none of them” (139:16).

has a specially familiar acquaintance with the members of the body of Christ; He sees their substance, imperfect though they be.

Verse 17

“How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God!” He is not alarmed at the fact that God knows all about him; on the contrary, he is comforted, and even feels himself to be enriched, as with a casket of precious jewels. That God should think upon him is the believer’s treasure and pleasure. He cries, “How costly, how valued are Thy thoughts, how dear to me is Thy perpetual attention!” He thinks upon God’s thoughts with delight; the more of them the better is he pleased. It is a joy worth worlds that the Lord should think upon us who are so poor and needy; it is a joy which fills our whole nature to think upon God—returning love for love, thought for thought, after our poor fashion.

“How great is the sum of them!” When we remember that God thought upon us from old eternity, continues to think upon us every moment, and will think of us when time shall be no more, we may well exclaim, “How great is the sum!” Thoughts such as are natural to the Creator, the Preserver, the Redeemer, the Father, the Friend, are evermore flowing from the heart of the Lord. Thoughts of our pardon, renewal, upholding, supplying, educating, perfecting, and a thousand more kinds perpetually well up in the mind of the Most High. It should fill us with adoring wonder and reverent surprise that the infinite mind of God should turn so many thoughts towards us, who are so insignificant and so unworthy!

What a contrast is all this to the notion of those who deny the existence of a personal, conscious God! Imagine a world without a thinking, personal God! Conceive of a grim providence of machinery!—a fatherhood of law! Such philosophy is hard and cold. As well might a man pillow his head upon a razor edge as seek rest in such a fancy. But a God always thinking of us makes a happy world, a rich life, a heavenly hereafter.

Verse 18

“If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand.” This figure shows the thoughts of God to be altogether innumerable; for nothing can surpass in number the grains of sand that belt the main ocean and all the minor seas. The task of counting God’s thoughts of love would be a never-ending one. If we should attempt the reckoning, we must necessarily fail, for the infinite falls not within the line of our feeble intellect. Even could we count the sands on the seashore, we should not then be able to number God’s thoughts, for they are “more in number than the sand.” This is not the hyperbole of poetry, but the solid fact of inspired statement; God thinks upon us infinitely. There is a limit to the act of creation, but not to the might of divine love.

“When I awake, I am still with thee.” Thy thoughts of love are so many that my mind never gets away from them; they surround me at all hours. I go to my bed, and God is my last thought; and when I wake I find my mind still hovering about His palace gates. God is ever with me, and I am ever with Him. This is life indeed. If during sleep my mind wanders away into dreams, yet it only wanders upon holy ground, and the moment I wake my heart is back with its Lord. The psalmist does not say, “When I awake, I return to thee,” but, “I am *still with thee*”; as if his meditations were continuous, and his communion unbroken. Soon we shall lie down to sleep for the last time; God grant that when the trumpet of the archangel shall waken us we may find ourselves still with Him.

Verse 19

“Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God.” There can be no doubt upon that head, for thou hast seen all their transgressions, which indeed have been done in Thy presence. And Thou hast long enough endured their provocations, which have been so openly manifest before Thee. Crimes committed before the face of the Judge are not likely to go unpunished. If the eye of God is grieved with the presence of evil, it is but natural to expect that He will remove the offending object. God who sees all evil will slay all evil. With earthly sovereigns sin may go unpunished for lack of evidence, or the law may be left without execution from lack of vigour in the judge; but this cannot happen in the case of God, the living God. He beareth not the sword in vain (Rom 13:4). Such is His love of holiness and hatred of wrong, that He will carry on war to the death with those whose hearts and lives are wicked. God will not always suffer His lovely creation to be defaced and defiled by the presence of wickedness; if anything is sure, this is sure: that He will ease Him of His adversaries.

“Depart from me therefore, ye bloody men.” Men who delight in cruelty and war are not fit companions for those who walk with God. David chases the men of blood from his court, for he is weary of those of whom God is weary. He seems to say—If God will not let you live with Him, I will not have you live with me. You would de-

stroy others, and therefore I want you not in my society. You will be destroyed yourselves; I desire you not in my service. Depart from me, for you depart from God. As we delight to have the holy God always near us, so would we eagerly desire to have wicked men removed as far as possible from us.

We tremble in the society of the ungodly lest their doom should fall upon them suddenly, and we should see them lie dead at our feet. We do not wish to have our place of intercourse turned into a gallows of execution, therefore let the condemned be removed out of our company.

Verse 20

“For they speak against thee wickedly.” Why should I bear their company when their talk sickens me? They vent their treasons and blasphemies as often as they please, doing so without the slightest excuse or provocation. Let them therefore be gone, where they may find a more congenial associate than I can be. When men speak against God, they will be sure to speak against us, if they find it serve their turn; hence godless men are not the stuff out of which true friends can ever be made. God gave these men their tongues, and they turn them against their Benefactor, wickedly, from sheer malice, and with great perverseness.

“And thine enemies take thy name in vain.” This is their sport: to insult Jehovah’s glorious name is their amusement. To blaspheme the name of the Lord is a gratuitous wickedness in which there can be no pleasure, and from which there can be no profit. This is a sure mark of the “enemies” of the Lord, that they have the impudence to assail His honour, and treat His glory with irreverence. How can God do other than slay them? How can we do other than withdraw from every sort of association with them?

What a wonder of sin it is that men should rail against so good a Being as the Lord our God! The impudence of those who talk wickedly is a singular fact, and it is the more singular when we reflect that the Lord against whom they speak is all around them, and lays to heart every dishonour that they render to His holy name. We ought not to wonder that men slander and deride us, for they do the same with the Most High God.

Verse 21

“Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee?” He was a good hater, for he hated only those who hated good. Of this hatred he is not ashamed, but he sets it forth as a virtue to which he would have the Lord bear testimony. To love all men with benevolence is our duty; but to love any wicked man with complacency would be a crime. To hate a man for his own sake, or for any evil done to us, would be wrong; but to hate a man because he is the foe of all goodness and the enemy of all righteousness, is nothing more nor less than an obligation. The more we love God the more indignant shall we grow with those who refuse Him their affection. “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ let him be Anathema Maranatha” (1Co 16:22). Truly, “jealousy is cruel as the grave” (Song 8:6). The loyal subject must not be friendly to the traitor.

“And am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee?” He appeals to heaven that he took no pleasure in those who rebelled against the Lord; but, on the contrary, he was made to mourn by a sight of their ill behaviour. Since God is everywhere, He knows our feelings towards the profane and ungodly, and He knows that so far from approving such characters, the very sight of them is grievous to our eyes.

Verse 22

“I hate them with perfect hatred.” He does not leave it a matter of question; he does not occupy a neutral position. His hatred to bad, vicious, blasphemous men is intense, complete, energetic. He is as whole-hearted in his hate of wickedness as in his love of goodness.

“I count them mine enemies.” He makes a personal matter of it. They may have done him no ill, but if they are doing despite to God, to His laws, and to the great principles of truth and righteousness, David proclaims war against them. Wickedness passes men into favour with unrighteous spirits, but it excludes them from the communion of the just. We pull up the drawbridge and man the walls when a man of Belial⁸⁹ goes by our castle. His character is a *casus belli*;⁹⁰ we cannot do otherwise than contend with those who contend with God.

⁸⁹ **Belial** – Hebrew word meaning “worthless,” applied to men considered worthless.

⁹⁰ *casus belli* – an event which proves a war.

Verse 23

“Search me, O God, and know my heart.” David is no accomplice with traitors. He has disowned them in set form, and now he appeals to God that he does not harbour a trace of fellowship with them. He will have God Himself search him, and search him thoroughly, till every point of his being is known, and read, and understood—for he is sure that even by such an investigation there will be found in him no complicity with wicked men. He challenges the fullest investigation, the innermost search; he had need be a true man who can put himself deliberately into such a crucible. Yet we may each one desire such searching; for it would be a terrible calamity to us for sin to remain in our hearts unknown and undiscovered.

“Try me, and know my thoughts.” Exercise any and every test upon me. By fire and by water let me be examined. Read not alone the desires of my heart, but the fugitive thoughts of my head. Know with all penetrating knowledge all that is or has been in the chambers of my mind. What a mercy that there is one Being who can know us to perfection! He is intimately at home with us. He is graciously inclined towards us, and is willing to bend His omniscience to serve the end of our sanctification. Let us pray as David did, and let us be as honest as he. We cannot hide our sin. Salvation lies the other way, in a plain discovery of evil, and an effectual severance from it.

Verse 24

“And see if there be any wicked way in me.” See whether there be in my heart, or in my life, any evil habit unknown to myself. If there be such an evil way, take me from it, take it from me. No matter how dear the wrong may have become, nor how deeply prejudiced I may have been in its favour, be pleased to deliver me therefrom altogether, effectually, and at once, that I may tolerate nothing that is contrary to Thy mind. As I hate the wicked in their way, so would I hate every wicked way in myself.

“And lead me in the way everlasting.” If Thou hast introduced me already to the good old way, be pleased to keep me in it, and conduct me further and further along it. It is a way that Thou hast set up of old; it is based upon everlasting principles; and it is the way in which immortal spirits will gladly run forever and ever. There will be no end to it world without end. It lasts forever, and they who are in it last forever. Conduct me into it, O Lord, and conduct me throughout the whole length of it. By Thy providence, by Thy word, by Thy grace, and by Thy Spirit, lead me evermore. ❧

Available in print as a booklet from Chapel Library.

APPENDICES

SHORT SPURGEON BIOGRAPHY

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892) was born in Kelvedon, Essex, England, June 19, 1834. Because his father and grandfather were pastors, Spurgeon was reared with the knowledge of the Gospel, yet he was not converted until a snowy January morning in 1850. In August of the same year, Spurgeon preached his first sermon to a small gathering of farmers.

A year later, a village church called him as its pastor. In 1854, when he was nineteen, he was installed as shepherd over the flock of the New Park Street Chapel, Southwark, London, which later became the Metropolitan Tabernacle. Beginning in January 1855, Spurgeon's sermons were published weekly, a practice which did not cease until 1916, twenty-four years after his death. During his pastorate in London, Spurgeon ministered to a congregation of nearly 6,000 people each Sunday, published his sermons weekly, and wrote a monthly magazine. He also founded a college for pastors, two orphanages, a home for the elderly, a colportage society, and several mission stations.

Although pain wracked his body in his later years and opponents attacked his ministry, Spurgeon continued to preach the Gospel until his death in January 1892. The keys to Spurgeon's success were a life of prayer and a simple yet profound faith in the grace and love of his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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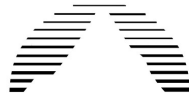
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